

Inscape

2016

Inscape



Art & Literary Magazine

2016



inscape
art & literary magazine



IN-SCAPE (N.)

The essential, distinctive, and
revolutionary quality of a thing:
“Here is the inscape, the epiphany,
the moment of truth.”

-Madison Smartt Bell



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Reva Murphy
Fireworks
Black and White Photograph
First Place Award

POETRY

Arlo Barnette

Lago de Águila

A lake ripples under cold weather:
Slow wasps ride leaves, lost in wet texture,
And creaking fingers find each other
To make steeples against the wind.

Howls become whistles through wood and nails:
God hides his eyes and waits for breakfast,
While lonely lovers dig deeper
Into quiet burrows,
Darker still.

Ringin' Morning's Ear

Bruised blood floods hands
A grooved spine threatening
to scratch through,
or heave away this hot drug

Or quench tingling sleep
Where my skin stands me
with whole, hidden pride.
Calm,
still twitching from it

From notes following down;
From rain finding the root.



Dawn Sargent
Flooded Cave Run Lake
Digital
Second Place Award

Avram McCarty
Bathroom Light

Out of slumber—midnight sarcophagus
Wrapping my bones in linen and lavender
A cape or a coffin—only time will reveal the fold
And with time, the creases will surely be ironed out
Because what good is a wrinkled tomb ...
Back to the plight of the midnight incessant
Blessed with a drunken gait and a twilight purged polyuria
To piss away everything and bleed dry the empty morning
On the urge that his hopes and dreams tether the tubes of attachment
Fluid dynamics—I vaguely recall of my time in Physics ...
I think everything follows a concentration gradient
And that people, much like molecules will begin to fill the lesser space
Or maybe that's just science's method of explaining hipsterdom
Or telling us that it's sometimes too crowded on the other side
Or maybe it's just a damn inevitability
Or maybe it's not even a real thing
Attempting to enter the land of Horus
The Egyptian god of light and their respective fixtures—modern addendum
Gives sight to the frailty of a light this late at night in spite of my plight
Broken things are obnoxious when everything else around you is new
Broken things are for sure a damn inevitability
Must I add, that it is the bathroom light which fails to work
It's like God is playing this cruel trick
Or testing the fortitude of my splanchnic nerve
Because the other bathroom is down the hall
And my patience has been far removed from there
So must I attest that even in the darkest of days
Where you have not even the light to piss
That there is always a faint glimmer of hope
Because within my PJ pockets, a radioactive decay
Isotopes of the latest IOS, built in LED flashlight to boot
I can experience a renal relief amidst an Amish backdrop
And even take a little picture—flash on—to prove I was intuitive enough

To solve my problems with technological advancements
Far beyond the scope of any Orwell Novel
Far removed from the imagination of psychoanalysts
Exploiting one of the most primitive things of all: human connection
My light may be broken, and yes it may be hard for me to see
I think, I would have rather flubbed up my aim or walked the hall
The most broken thing in today's world is not light fixtures
The most broken thing in today's world is people
Broken by the dopamine frenzy of the post-modern age
I place my light fixture back on the wall, pound it back in
I contemplate on whether glue will hold my troubles a little longer
I think that it will, but I am far too tired to venture out tonight
And maybe it won't even get fixed tomorrow or the next day
Because before I fix that, I want to fix myself ...



Lauren Eastep

Tetra

**Ink and Digital Illustration
Third Place Award**

Caillin Wile

Harvest

harvest has left earth in a shiver
that it will carry until spring.
evening gowns rustle and fuss
onto tree branches, restless,
newly fattened animals
search for a place to sleep;

some mornings i find you singing
on our frosted porch, your hair
burning like the leaves.
some mornings it starts like this:
every breath you breathe- my name,
every vein and muscle of me
craving your tendons, your bones,
your eyes like honey settled in snow;

i like to feel the dirt and water of you,
the wet-leaved mountain of your body
slumbering;
i like to hold the smoke of you inside my lungs
until i cough.

Caillin Wile

Kitten

small kitten, milk-belly sad-
in your heart you hold a universe shattering,
beneath your paper skin
a trillion specks of hardened sand
fight to make the first cut, and the deepest,

milk-bellied murderer,
your eyes are slanted like sunbeams
against his light;

you are too weak
to open yourself to him one more time:
a nail, a nail, not a hammer, kitten,
it's like the sadness that comes with a full stomach,
like the sadness inside a cardboard box,
it's like you sprawled angry on the bathroom floor,
that's the kind of sad, kitten, that you will
hold between your pointed teeth
until someone asks you if you are hungry,
until someone asks you to spit the pain into a napkin
and to feast.

Chanda Scobee

The sun sees a body, but the moon sees a soul

The soul is a moon,
Grey and ashen with thought,
Callused by craters
From too many vigilant nights.
She is a murky silhouette
Under the sheets of a bed,
Eclipsing the skin and bones
And ponderous eyelids,
But she is the inspirations,
the commemorations,
the universe of a mind
of an insomniac
with a heart adorned of stars
and a world within her veins.

The body is a sun,
Red and ravishing with enticement,
Violated by flames
From too many feisty fingertips.
She is a frame of flesh
Under sheets of a bed,
Invading the essence of a self
Of fancies and whims and impulses
That morning cannot bear,
But she is the edges and bindings
Of the daybreak,
The peeling of leaden eyelids
With a mind in the clouds
And a heaven in her mouth.



Maria Lind Blevins
Serenity
Digital Photograph
Honorable Mention Award

Damon Huff

The Morning After

You were gone when the sun rose,
But it was still brilliantly orange,
And beautifully hung in the sky.

The creamsicle mornings are still sweet,
And my coffee still has too much cream.
4 cream; 2 sugar.

To think; if the moon had stayed,
The world would be cold.
I wouldn't be in this chair.

I like this chair.
The wood fits my form
And we've had many a good chat.

If the sky remained dark,
My eyes would yet be closed,
I couldn't see this sunrise.

You're not beside me,
But my day has begun as ever,
And my coffee is still sweet.

4 cream; 2 sugar.



Samantha S. Smallwood
The Boy
Mixed Media
Honorable Mention Award

Dylan Doker
Deathbed Suit

Clear blue skies make me think about the past.
About cold text lines
And empty bottles.
About bowtie reassurances
And starched smiles
Tacked on with putty.
Hour by hour
You wiggle into your dark deathbed suit
Surrounded by full rays of sunshine.
You will be the one to cast your own shadow.

And yet,
My worry grows like wildflowers
Of stark downward glances,
Billowing “I’m fines,”
And red rejections
With prickling thorns that wrap around your feet.

The endless purple night seems farther away
Than the mirrored shores of coastal beaches.
But its presence is a compost in your soil.
You will be buried with your feet to the ground
And your head in the clouds.

The stems of your youth will sprout leaves in time.
As your body grows old with whitened flesh
And exposed bone.
Vines will strap your tendons together
Algae will clasp your pours.
And moss will dust your eyes.

You will grow great this day
And the fruits of springtime will mask your decay.

James Prenatt
Hungry Lovers

It's like Thanksgiving dinner without the gravy.
But you're starving, so you eat it anyway.

You take the cock in your mouth
and choke on it like dry stuffing

until you can't take it anymore because
you only have so much to give

before you run out of time
to make so many lovers happy,

trying not to let sex feel like a good song
you can't play again.

James Prenatt

Lacheism

I found you at a strange time in my life,
the kind where you think you have it all figured out.
I came off cool and smooth,
Patrick Swayze sly, rebel without a cause,
the kind of guy who calls your shy body into the
water underneath movie quality sunlight.

Call it an illusion. Call it a Phantom of the Opera mask.
I call it the kind of love you want to lose just
so you can say you survived, get out of the fire
covered in ash and say through choked breath:
baby, we made it.

Or maybe it's just confidence
gained from so much past sorrow.
And I don't mean the kind of sorrow
you get through by learning how to smile
and accepting things as they are.
I mean the kind of sorrow
that hurts to swallow
so you down it with whiskey
just to make it sting.

Only you won't let me choke on it anymore.
Instead you put your palms on the curve of my hips
and say, *give it to me, claim me.*
So I give you a taste of my pain,
cream colored, smooth to swallow.

James Prenatt

Thing

Had a girl who told me not to write about her,
As if form and grace of word would help quell
the self-loathing in our hearts.

She moaned like a wailing guitar
and asked for space in the bed.
She wouldn't let me hold her hand.
Fought the intimacy
with a bob and a weave
before delivering the knockout punch.
Made it better when she finally let me stroke her skin.

Nights we can't sleep
we wake and ask each other about our dreams.

Some thing
brought us together,
though we tried our best
not to let each other in.

Had a girl I called Thing
who didn't know what to call me.
So I say it degrading-sweet:
You're ugly.
So am I.

She knew the heartbeat-stop.
the Real Pain,
kind that comes back, goes away
makes you want to leave.



Julie Willian
Me
Digital Photograph

The Sickness we have we don't feel in our bones,
it's a dark black in a blank white soul.
So I bring the pain to the surface of its skin,
let that sting-thud linger, come back, come in.

Had a girl who had a boy
Who had a guy who understood:
it's not about whether or not The Sickness comes back,
it's understanding it always will.

Had a thing who knew what it's like to feel nothing,
who wanted to be thrown away:
a circle drawn on a white page.

Jerica Lowe
Mulatto Cookies

Stuck always in the middle,
Balanced wide eyed, cliff in sight
on a lopsided teeter totter,
Poised to fall, but confused
on which direction to lean.

Skin so dark, jealous of blushing
yet infected by freckles, reddened
by the sun but never allowed to burn.

Thick kinky hair snarls at brushes,
holding bristles hostage in its untamed
mess of pleated curls, surrendering
when faced with a pick,
not strong enough to stand
on its own.



Erica Kress
Facing Your Fears
Silver Gelatin Print

Ghetto, dangerous—words whispered
when just out of sight
nigger – soft ‘n’, hard ‘r’
spelunking in the dregs of fear
too polite, soft spoken, ever
with an easy smile—traitor
Foolish oreo. Betrayer of your
roots.

“Mommy, what is Mulatto?”
My dark hand is lost
among her pale fingers.
“A tasty cookie,” she replies
with a wide beaming smile
that matches perfectly with mine.

Jerica Lowe
My Reflection

What does my reflection do?
When we’re not staring at each other through glass.
Does she lurk just out of frame?
Or gossip behind my back?
We swap secrets with fingers,
Patterns left on the opposite side
And only seen with heated breath.
I nicked myself shaving.
A long slice that ends with 3 drops of blood.
Is her leg slightly different?
Did the mirror lead my razor astray?
Do I interrupt her fine dinner parties?
Dressed in black satin,
She throws everything to the ground
To shrug on a stained t-shirt and a ball cap.
I imagine she sighs and yells,
“Please don’t tap on the glass.”
I bet she eats donuts for revenge.



Casey Miller
Silenced
Digital Photograph

John R. Secor
Mea culpa

I apologize
Denise Levertov
for walking out
in the middle
of your reading
in nineteen seventy-six

it wasn't you
I had a girl problem
nascent love
had me twisted in knots
my obsession
with total presence
absolute absence

the other becomes oneself
there wasn't room for you
at my inn Ms Levertov
funny that's in the past
poetry is now my obsession

girls must wait



Kinsey Ramey
Colocasia
Black and White Photograph

Josef Krebs*Untitled 2*

Conquests illuminate weaknesses
As pastels set off primaries
We are all relative to primates and colors
Tripping strapped to the desk
Eclipsed by ourselves
Hidden beneath the surface
Unknown unborn
Irrational suppositions on existence
Keep us occupied
While we wait for the real moments
Of transcendence and transformation
Into something worthwhile
Opinioned to be
The next
Evolution
Incarnate

Julienne Cornett*Falling into Freedom*

Placed on a pedestal slim and tall.
Sitting in church pews long fire red hair tied with a ribbon sliding down
the back of the preacher's
Daughter.
Legs crossed lacey cotton skimming her knee caps.
Pecan pies on the oven rack mittened hands perfect lip lines spitting soft
curse words flicks of ladylike
Wrists in frustration at a burning scent.
A young girl, a prim plaid skirt trying to protect her virtue from Bill's
favorite son.
Simple sweater buttons all done up. Buttons half undone.
Pale legs meeting daylight under pious bleachers.

Sipping, glass placed gently down after one. Sealed budding petals nothing
whispered out of turn.
Thoughts blowing in the sea winds. One big gulp.
Another before the baby wakes.
Easing into restraints as the trees ease into autumn.
Fallen women escaping tyranny escaping fate as chickens fly their coops with
broken wings.
A wrinkled lady sits at the dinner table surrounded by her ivory clad
grandchildren pointing her weak
Gaze out the bay window across the street
At her age old lover.
Single mother of three kisses the big man with a pen behind his ear in the
office coat closet.
The local doc's preferred call girl eats caviar with a silver spoon trying not to
spill on her forgotten dress.
A rabid college girl with blue pills on her night stand and a lover naked under
her sheets.
Fallen meets freedom with open arms and surprises the sun with a cloak of
darkness and diamond
Jewels to adorn her moons.

Julienne Cornett
Virginia's Heritage

Dusty diamonds covering a stone cold furnace sitting on a blue chipped stool
Because it's close to the heating vent.
Down the basement steps, rickety boards clinging to her toes.
Rows of canned beans ripened with age meeting dust bunnies and
granddaddy long legs.
A Christmas tree off to the side covered in the year's excrements.
Coal stacks built up like cities.
Sky scraping wooden ceilings
Lungs filled with familiar musk.
Raised on coal plowed land watching grandma wring the chicken's neck.
Taking care of,
Loving a defeminized momma.

Warding off cancer with cool hands and the Lord's Prayer,
Washing daddy's favorite mug with an ear in the wind of blowing pines.
Catching the sound of gravel turned asphalt by bare truck tires.
Dashing to a fidgety door, joy rushing a solemn soul.
Up the hill discerning well worn grooves with bare feet.
Big Pop slips a quarter in her pocket and
Disappears on one leg.
Run round' back looking for the best mud pie dish.
Plop down to eat a covert meal on a tire swing fashioned with sweat,
limbs,
And hungry bones.
Lying awake in a friendless bed listening to the machines breath.
Feeling the soft cotton of discarded patches
Discreet comfort created with love from nimble fingers.
Closes her eyes, letting her family secret disappear, forming sheep and
faraway places
Wrapping dreams she'd open like gifts with the sunshine.

Julienne Cornett

White Dress

I spent too many years trading faces, playing dress-up with my heart.
Having halfhearted dreams of puckered lips with no landing strip
Of a boy angel in boxer briefs.
I no longer want to find whispered skin quieted by shushing goose
bumps.
When summer days turn melancholy I'll take off my white dress
And deposit it on the ground to be devoured by dirty coke bottles,
cigarette butts, and swarming gnats.
I'll meet you where the colors swim by in vibrant blurs, where blushing
cheeks meet passion filled eyes.
We'll escape in a cloud of ecstasy blanketed by swift moonlight.
Hour by hour we'll build trees of entangled limbs and let our love grow
to cover the earth with fruit that
Tastes like sin.



Brooke Farmer
Apprentice
Graphite Pencil

Melissa Dawn Conn

Willow Trees

Meet me beneath the willow trees
Braid the leaves
Wade in the pond
Ankle deep
Walk even deeper
Weep beneath the willow trees
Braid a rope
Or two or three
Stay with me and please
Please
...
Please don't leave me

Michael Hutchinson

Untitled

Your eyes are the colors of cocoons
just before emergence:
dusty tan and spackled grey
with flecks of spindly white.

Your wings will be a magician's hands,
each beat a performance,
each beat a distraction
from the true metamorphosis.

You've changed beyond what I can see,
fear permeates curiosity.
You've turned into a wall of doors.
It makes me want you all the more.

Michael Hutchinson
Composition

Swirling through your consciousness
are nebulas of cosmic dust.
Star-bits sparkle in the flecks of your eyes
and every word you speak rides a comet.

The void that occupies the spaces between
the nova flashes of insight absorbs information
and compresses it in grey matter.
I need it like a black hole in my head.

It's the stars that burst and give back.
Concentric nuclear fissions splice,
revive the ideas that try to survive
the vacuum of average human thought.

We are mostly void and partially stars,
withstanding the consecutive supernovas
of the ideas that never see true sunlight,
fizzling brilliantly into self-destruction.

I wish to fish your Milky-Way, to touch
your finer particles before they are recycled.
I wish to witness the meteor showers that
blaze my skies when you whisper, "I am."



Kristin Howell
6 Days and Counting
Black and White Photograph



Shian Jordan
Patiently Waiting
Black and White Photograph

Michael Jarvi

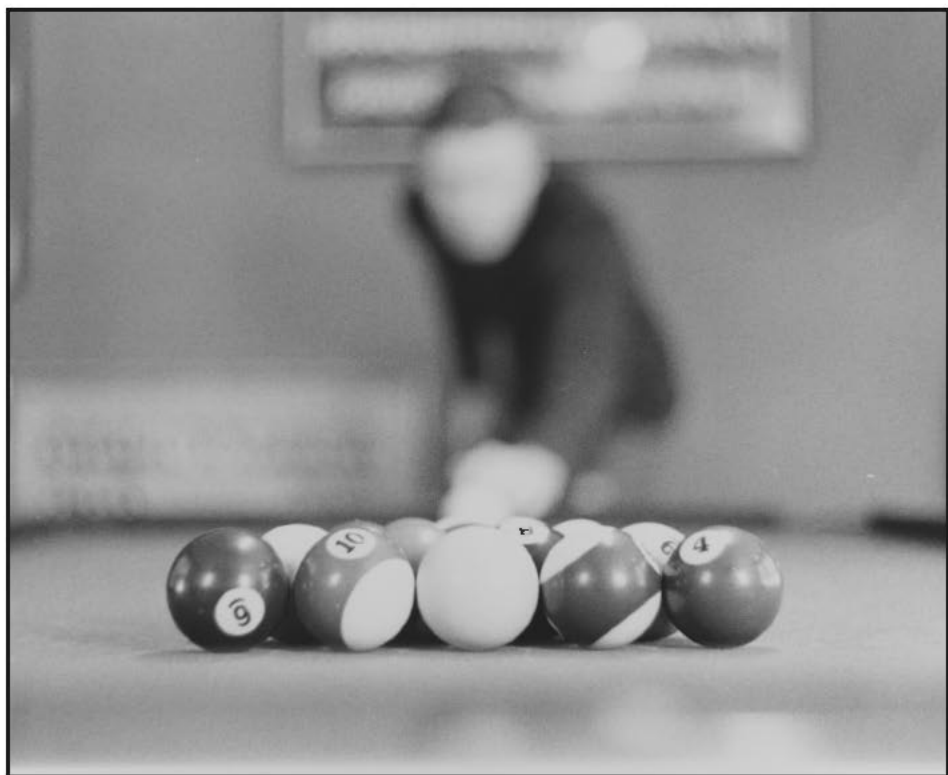
MacKenzie

MacKenzie is a deck of antique playing cards—
the backs adorned with
orange breasted
robins perched on blue rose
stems—tucked into a white thong
two sizes too small,
the crotch dusted with cinnamon
and the Jack of Hearts wild.

Savannah

Savannah is an ivory desert.

I wake between bouts of thirsty sleep
and search the white sands
for water and wealth,
pausing only to wonder
if I stand in territory uncharted
or if these are the same milky dunes
I've always roamed.



Cierra Landrum
Break
Silver Gelatin Print

Misty Skaggs *Blossoming*

There are peach trees blossoming.
Floaty sprigs of pink, obscured
by the still bare trees
in a thick clump of woods
where an old homestead
used to be.
The blossoms are soft.
A fuzzy reminder
of future dreams
fallen on hard times.
finally big enough to bear

the trees have been forgotten
to sprout forth fat fruit
fallen
to the forest floor.
A feast for the squirrels
and coons
and possums.
Low-hanging branches
plucked clean by deer
instead of great-

great-great-grandchildren.
No peach preserves.
No jelly sweet smell
in the air
in a cozy, country, kitchen.
No kitchen.
but there are still peach trees
blossoming.



Julieann Helton
Dutiful
Digital Photograph

Misty Skaggs
Sting

Sometimes, I dream about bees.

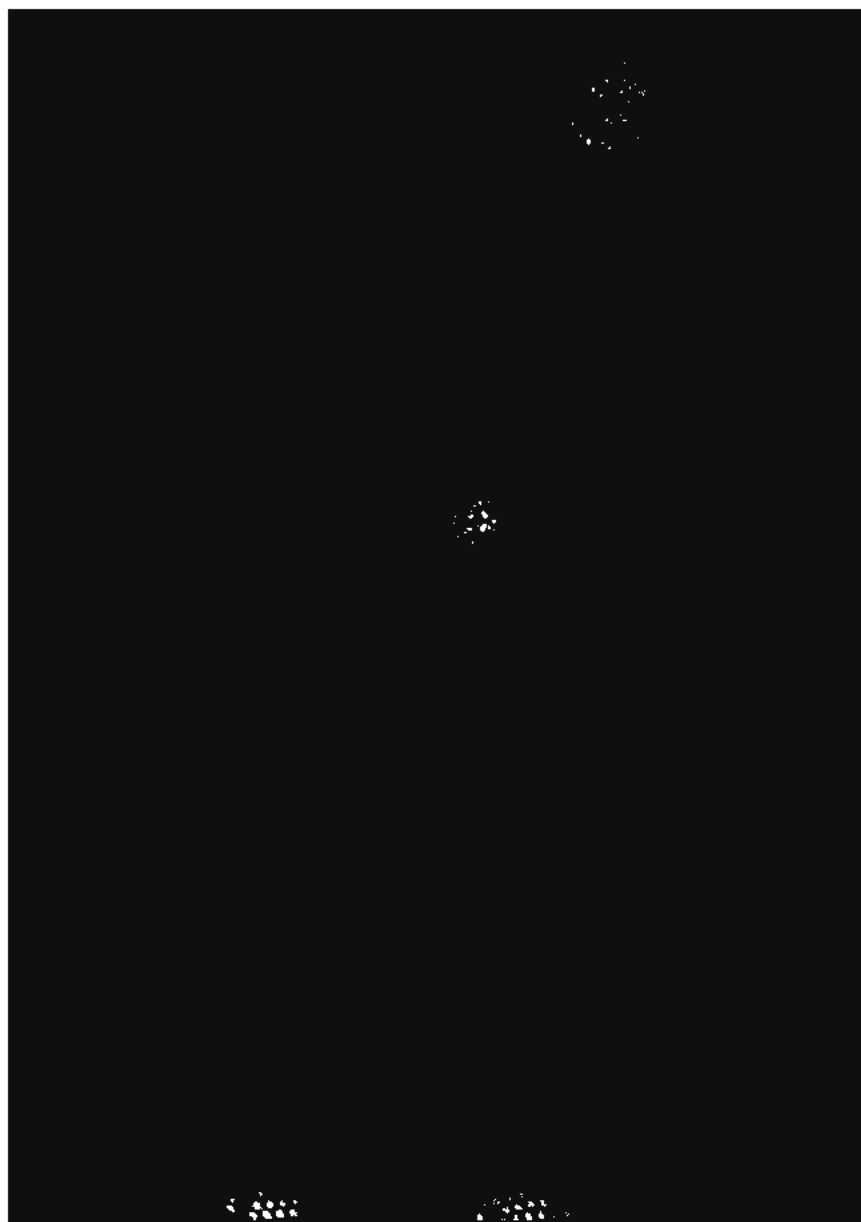
But it's not scary,
the harmonious buzz
of a whole hive
enveloping me.

It's not a nightmare,
the honey sweet sting
and the beat of wings
as the drones drown out
the world,
as I'm swallowed up
by a swarm
and a swirl of smoke.

In the dream I feel charmed
and charming,
hypnotized
and still.

In the dream

the whole world
has turned to wax.



Daniel Edie
Drowning
Silver Gelatin Print

Rebecca S. Lindsay
Extremadura Food Chain*

Along the marshy edge the lapwing wades,
competes with redshank for tender grubs,
insects, tasty worms. The sinking sun ignites
the tawny grass, glints gold off the surface
of the pond, silhouettes the holm oaks
against the dusky range.

Before the rushes, the picket heron
looses the lightning stab, swallows
the hapless fish headfirst, whole.
The greenshank stalks the shallows,
chases small fry. They flee.

On a limb, the hoopoe bird flexes
its pencil crest, converses with the
collared dove. No competition there.
The first relishes grubs; the latter grain.
Cows crop, oblivious, sole predators of grass.

On some covert signal,
the spoonbills erupt from the surface,
form a squadron, two dozen strong,
chatter strategy, then dive.
drive the striders in,
feast in frenzied massacre.

And through the reeds on the far shore,
his ears and nose acute isosceles,
his eyes ebony, focused, intent,
peers the face of a fox.

* Region in Western Spain



Christopher Burton
Grasshopper
Black and White Photograph

Rebecca S. Lindsay

Land's End: San Francisco, 1880

"Then we came down to the sea, and it was done."

— Steinbeck, *The Red Pony*

And so we come to Land's End,
that place of precipitous cliff and
thrashing surf, where the fog
rolls in concealing the sunset
or out revealing the sea;
where the falcon hovers
in the headwind blowing
down the neck of the bay,
hovers and stoops, swoops
down on reckless prey.

Here the road becomes finite,
no longer stretches over
the next hill, around the next
beckoning bend.
The wheels no longer turn,
the horses stand slack in
their traces, waiting for the
driver to decide what next.

Here we fulfill our assumed
destiny, achieved at the expense
of so many other destinies.
Here the dream ends.

Or else, we turn and gaze
back the way we came
at the gushing rivers,
the plague-infested trails,
the treacherous mountain passes,
the searing desert sands,
and ask the question,
What do we do with the journey?



Christopher Burton
Bridge
Black and White Photograph



Paige McCreary
Sanctuary
Digital Illustration

Ron Lucas

***AN EASTER EPISTLE: SANS FLOWERS OR MIRACLES,
BUT NOT BASIC SANITATION SERVICES***

When my daughter
Was a teen,
She named her
Pet mice
Algernon and Charlie,
After the book.
Algernon didn't last
Long, but
Charlie hung in there
A while.
She was gone
With friends
When
Charlie finally went,
On a
Good Friday.
I am not ashamed
To say I
Wept.
We were poor and lived
In a flophouse.
We had no backyard,
And I had no
Flowers.
I threw him in the
Dumpster
In the parking lot
Out back.
When I took the empties
Out
Easter Sunday,
Nothing had arisen, but
A stench.



Hanna Mills
Untitled
Digital

Sarah Nelson

Fear is a Learned Scholar

Fear is a learned scholar.
He knows every term, every germ.
How to make worms squirm
and ferns burn.
How to make stomachs churn
and fill minds with concern.

Fear is a magician.
He knows every hat trick
To make your teeth click
and your eyes twitch
and your heart flick
with the insistent
tick
tick
tick
that fills your ears with a
swish
swish
swish
until you feel your breath hitch
and your hands flinch.

Fear is a doctor.
He pokes and prods
and then he nods

because he knows just how to diagnose
the disease eating your mind and gnawing your toes.
He just laughs though
because he might have the antidote
but he keeps it hidden in his white coat.

Sarah Nelson

Path of the Moth

Beating at the window
are the wings of a moth.
I grab a cup and trap it,
then cover it with a cloth.

I peek inside and
tilt the cup at an angle.

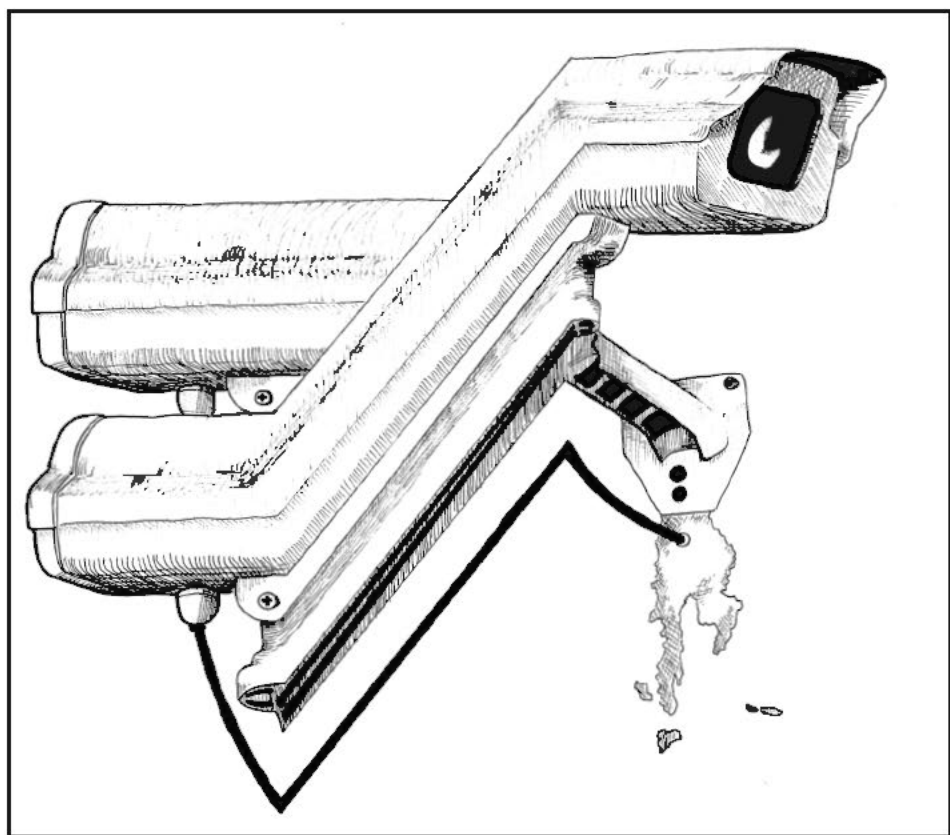
Glimpse the ghostly wings,
and feel my world tangle.

Does this moth know
that when it searched for light,
I easily captured it,
stopping it from flight?

Something so good
led it astray.
But the moth trusted easily,
it never swayed.

Did it ever wonder
if the light was a trap?
That maybe this path
might be holding it back?

I removed the cloth
and opened the door.
Watched the moth flutter
toward the light once more.



Sean Porter
Safety
Ink

Sean L Corbin

Radiate

Make a point to make the buttons sensitive
to many makes of fabric but only
a singularity of tongue. An ideal Tongue.

A total Tongue that speaks all tongues
and tunes the stations for the frequencies of thought.

Let the dials demonstrate how fluid flows the circle.

When licking, lacerate the leeward curves
of licked and licking constellations.

When humming, hover over the carpet fibers
homing in on harmonies.

Earn the earth's eruption.

Spread across the stratosphere in songs
from multitudes of mouths.

Unity in universal underlying undertones.

Everything extended into every worded wave.

Tia Alexander
Babylon

I remember slowly drizzling peach honey from the jar onto bronze skin
warmed by sitting in the afternoon sun.

I remember weightless linen shifts, thin and breezy floating in the cool stream,
flashing fish scales, glinting and glimmering, gliding swiftly across gray pebbles
as we rinsed errant drops of sticky sweetness from the hems.

Now you are laying flat on the boulder by the stream, surrounded by a
thousand wildflowers of purple and blue,

lizard lazing eyelids heavy, limbs heavy, air heavy with the scent of the
honeysuckle

and I am being tickled by sharp, bending blades of grass, fragrant warm breeze
dancing from across your chest to caress my cheek,

I am brushing soft dandelion fluff across bare ankle softly giggling through full
relaxed lips.

We are caught in the net of a million little brilliant rays of sun and breaths of
newborn clouds wispy and lazy.

I hate the eventual call of the moon, the sun's pendulum swinging low to meet
the horizon.

I hope to never see the stars, to lay forever by your side in the forever sun of the
forever summer.

We will be as ivory



Lamborghini Robinson

Lost

Silver Gelatin Print

I remember starlit nights, the twinkle of a million weightless diamonds
glancing and reflecting off your slightly damp skin,

jasmine and gardenia floating in through the open window,

sheer curtains rustling languidly in the breeze.

I remember kisses of moonbeams,

fearless, swirling, dancing fingers
tracing the swell and curve of it across the planes of your back,

memorizing the topography of gentle swells and dips, bridges and soft valleys.

Now you are sighing,

soft sweet breath blowing so gently,

arching, inviting and I am accepting,

melting against you, as the candle wax melts away from the flame,
the smell of beeswax and amber a blanket over us.

I hate to succumb to sleep, to close my eyes, to lose sight of you
for even a second.

I hope to stay in this space between awake and dreaming, your weight, heavy
against me, heavy as a million words said, meant, felt.

We will be as ebony.



Adam Ramey
Composition I
Black and White Photograph



Heather Holbrook
Chimera Series #2
Ceramic



Josie Singleton
Wonder Pop
Acrylic Paint

FICTION

Alia Michaud

Tight Fist Generosity

There's a gaggle of disreputable teenage girls staring with giggles cupped in their hands, a dubious smell wafting up from the patron to his right, and a distinct clutter of unwashed bodies surrounding him that amass into the awful day he's been having.

He can't even thank God, or god, or the gods that it's nearly over because at the end of the line is his wife who hasn't been quite as wonderful since having the baby. The press of a headache begins to build when he thinks of the nagging that awaits him, and he considers just riding the rail all night if only for some peace.

The subway lurches and sways. A hefty woman in the aisle tumbles with purse and pole in her meaty palms, and the frumpy stranger next to him bumps his shoulder so hard his briefcase clatters to the floor and slides away.

He cannot stress enough how wonderful his day has been.

"Sorry, mate," the kid mutters, not really looking at him and not particularly apologetic.

Benjamin grunts back through his gritted teeth and reaches for his briefcase, trying to keep one foot planted in front of his seat in case anyone gets any ideas. Specifically, that whale of a woman. She's been eyeing him since she boarded, and he's not the least bit interested in entertaining *any* ideas she may have about him or his seat. It's bad enough he's got a whale of a wife waiting at home to nag him into an early grave; he won't take it from a stranger, too.

He snatches the bag back by its leather handle and settles easily into his chair, squished between an unbearably pregnant woman—and her hell-beast of a toddler—and a boy in a frayed green hoodie who has fisted in his pale palm a bundle of cheap leather bracelets bound by an aged rubber band. In the dim light, they are plain things with

little appeal, just scraps woven together into circlets of cowhide and punctuated by dark-metal clasps. Benjamin can't imagine they're worth much and is proven right when he catches a glimpse of their tags, strings and little strips of paper branded by blue ink. Four dollars. Twenty or so bracelets of obviously faux leather for four a piece? It's pocket change and it's not going to carry this kid far for very long.

He shudders at the thought of living on eighty bucks.

One of the girls across the aisle lets out a squeal, and her friends all hush her with embarrassed glares and a firm thump by the back of a hand to her arm. She glances back Benjamin's way and flushes pink.

His own face flickers hotly at being watched, and he preens, straightening his suit and tie, flustered. The girls don't seem to mind. He tries not to grin.

Beside him, the ragged boy in the green sweater lifts his head to the scene unfolding and his face falls into an easy smile that sends the girl's tittering again. They whip their heads around, looking between the boy and each other with growing enthusiasm, whispering furiously and holding onto each other's arms tightly. It suddenly becomes embarrassingly clear that the flock has not, in fact, been looking at him at all, but rather at the impoverished man with the thumbholes in his sleeves. *How utterly ridiculous.*

He finds his ire with Green Hoodie rising when the boy lifts his hand in a wave of encouragement. He ruffles his distastefully disheveled hair—like a fan of royal feathers—with a coy grin, and the girls ... they can't help themselves; they just eat it up.

A peacock, then. Pitiful.

When Green Hoodie slumps in his seat and begins tapping the bracelets against his thigh, Benjamin remembers the expense and suddenly feels sorry for the boy. He can't hate him for encouraging attention, no matter how immodest and ridiculous it is, if it's all the boy will ever get out of life. People drink up their happiness where they can. A drop won't make the boy drunk. He wouldn't begrudge Green Hoodie that.

Feeling particularly benevolent in his exhaustion and understanding, Benjamin digs into his pocket and extracts his wallet, just to see what bills he has floating in his fold. Certainly enough to relieve the boy of his humiliating livelihood and then some. When he manages to pull out a crisp hundred dollar bill, he turns to Green Hoodie, gestures nobly at the wad of withered leather, and announces, “I’ll take them all.”

“Hmm?” Green Hoodie hums, hardly managing to tear his eyes away from where the girls have halted their rallying to watch the pair. He glances up at Benjamin and back down at his own person. “You’ll take what now?”

“The bracelets,” Benjamin clarifies, realizing that the boy’s head is probably fogged with lust. He remembers a time when he, too, was infatuated, though he was hardly so obviously sleazy. He tries to be understanding, but they seem to be on two completely different levels of morality. “I’d like to buy all of your bracelets.”

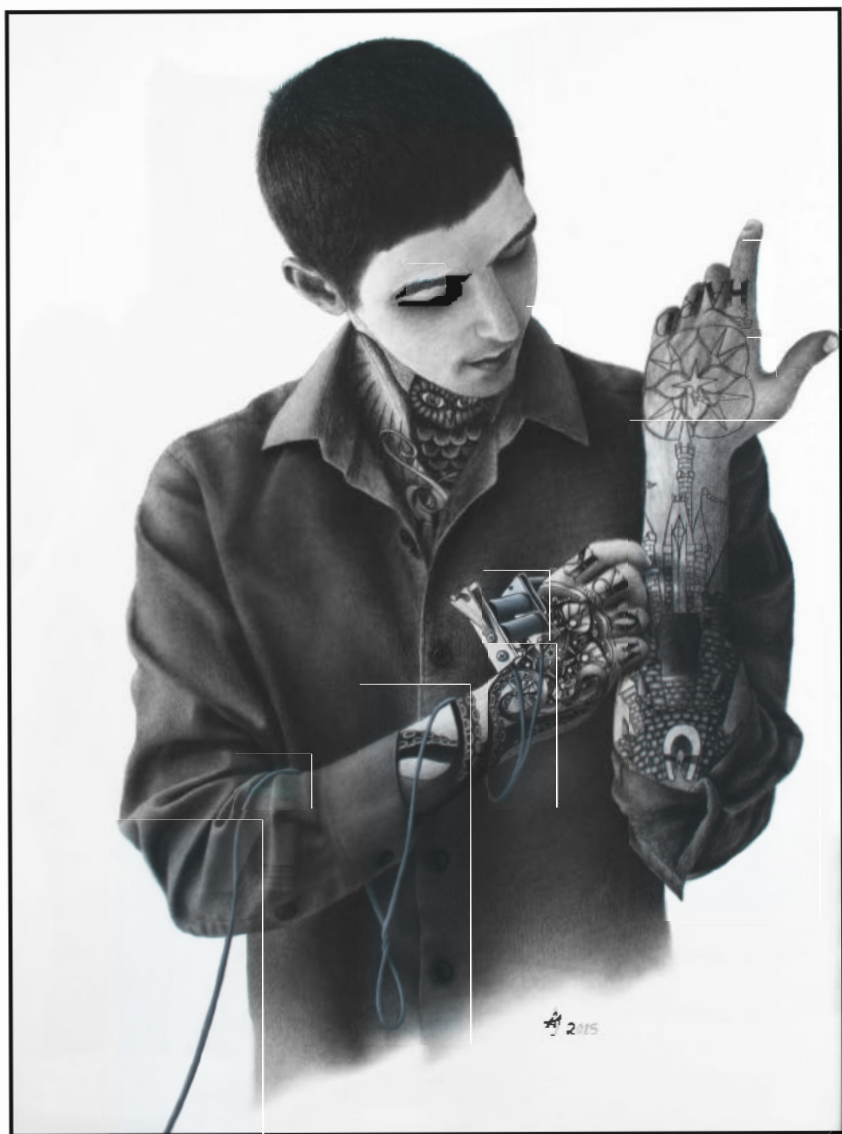
“My bracelets . . .” he starts, squinting down at the fisted trinkets. After a beat, his eyes widen a bit with astounded realization and he murmurs, more to himself than to Benjamin, “*Oh*. You think . . . Yeah. Yeah, good. Right then. They’re four each and I’ve got only twenty—”

Benjamin corrects indignantly, “I’m not concerned with the cost. *This*, I think, should be sufficient?” He holds up the bill between two fingers, extends an open hand, and makes certain he does not glance at the girls. From his peripheral, he notices their sloping brows and perplexed expressions but thinks nothing of it.

Green Hoodie purses his lips when he catches sight of the money and looks as if he’ll burst with laughter at the prospect. He seems to decide that dignity is in order, trades his enthusiasm for grave determination, and nods furiously. “That’ll—oh yeah, that’ll do *just fine*, I think. Thanks, mate.”

He extends the bundle of bracelets and exchanges it for the money.

When Benjamin holds the leather bouquet in his fist, he starts to feel a bit ridiculous. He’s stuck with scraps he’ll never use, but, he



Alex Bauer
I Am My Canvas
Charcoal Drawing

reminds himself, at least he helped the British boy a bit. He did a good thing and any person who cared to look would see the truth in it.

Suddenly, unlike his first inclination to stay on the subway and ride to the end of the line, he desperately wishes to get off the car full of strangers and be done with it.

“Hey, so,” the scruffy kid drawls, folding the bill and tucking it into the pocket of his fraying green hoodie. He leans closer and eyes the bracelets Benjamin clutches in his fist. “What’cha gonna do with all those bracelets?”

His lips curl inward, his eyes flick up, and it’s almost a challenge he’s submitting. It’s almost *judgement* for Benjamin’s charitable heart and if that doesn’t teach him to be less generous, nothing will. He feels his palms start to sweat, and his face is turning red. He quickly looks away. How dare this ruffian—after all he’s done, how *dare* this boy shame him?

“I can’t imagine it’s any of your business now, is it?” Benjamin bites, pulling back his shoulders pointedly and straightening his spine. He slides his thumbs under the clasps of his briefcase and jerks the lid up, revealing the now-disheveled stack of reports that are scattered and twisted after their ride down the aisle. Mindlessly, his teeth grind while he jams the fistful of leather haplessly in the case and slams it shut with a snappish *click*.

Green Hoodie eyes him before seemingly deciding that it’s not worth his time with a menial shrug. He slumps in his seat. His head tilts towards the gaggle of girls still glancing at them over bare shoulders.

Benjamin wants to tell them that it’ll be a fruitless pursuit. The loser next to him will never be more than hazy subway rides and homemade price tags.

The next moment, while he and Green Hoodie are preoccupied with not acknowledging each other, one of the girls slips across the aisle and squeezes in next to the frumpy boy and his other neighbor, a snoozing elderly man. He hardly even flinches at her jostling, just tilts closer to the severe woman next to him.

The girl smiles at the boy, angles her body this way and that, and then slouches so that she's eye-level with Green Hoodie. "Hi, Percy."

Excellent. They know each other.

Green Hoodie smiles benignly back and mutters a brief, "Hello, love."

Her eyes flicker over to Benjamin briefly, which causes her smile to waver, but she presses on to the tune of her friends' furious whispers. "We—my friends and I—we're *really* big fans. We got tickets and VIP passes and everything."

Benjamin blinks once, and then again, trying to understand what he's hearing. Because it sounds as if—well, it sounds preposterous.

"Ours is the next stop," she adds. Her eyes flick to her friends, and they make encouraging gestures at her. She nods resolutely. "If you wanted ... well, we're walking to the stadium if you maybe wanted to join us?"

Her eyebrows tilt up hopefully and Percy—Green Hoodie—*whoever*—seems to take a moment to consider it, studying the group just behind the girl lazily. Then his mouth splits into a genuine smile, and he shrugs, "Why the hell not?"

Benjamin is too dumbfounded to speak, his eyes wide and his jaw clamped, and it doesn't take long for the subway to pull into the station. The doors crack open with steamy yawns and suddenly the boy stands up with his fingertips skimming the girl's lower back, not exactly touching but present enough. He turns and nudges Benjamin's shoulder with a conspiratorial grin.

"Hey, mate, enjoy the bracelets," he throws out condescendingly and winks. "You're ever in London, let me know. We've got some great shops I *know* you'll enjoy."

Then he's gone, girls trailing along in his wake now looking less lascivious and more starstruck than anything, and Benjamin's crisp hundred dollar bill tucked away in his inconspicuous green hoodie.

And all Benjamin has is a subway, a significantly lighter wallet, and a fistful of leather bracelets to keep him company on the ride.

Michael Jarvi

Boys

I know a girl who sleeps on a bed full of boys. Many times I have seen her grab a fresh faced young man by the collar and lead him to her bedroom, where she allows him to wash her feet and comb her hair. Once she is finished with him, she smothers him with pillows and blankets until he sinks into the mattress. Every month, when the full moon comes to pass, she cuts the boys free from their memory foam prison and watches the pageantry begin from her queen sized throne.

First comes the speaking portion. The boys must be decisive and intentional with their words. Precision is vital. Confidence is requisite. Speak quickly and firmly. To hesitate is to die. A wasted word is a wasted life. Do not apologize and do not explain yourself. Those who cannot use their tongues correctly will lose the privilege of ownership.

Next is the beauty portion. “Strip,” she commands, her voice like a whip cracked against virgin skin, and the boys leave their clothes folded at their feet. They fall in line, and she inspects each one from head to toe. Feet should be shoulder width apart. Backs straight. Hands at the sides. Heads level, eyes forward. She likes a nice, full ass with contour. Thick arms make for good shower sex. Glasses and stubble work wonders. A toned body is adequate, but she prefers some meat on the bones. More to love. More to bite. More to fuck.

During the intermission, she calls in witnesses for interviews and assessment. Some accept the invitation of their own accord, and some require a more persuasive approach to recruitment. The mothers of the contestants mustn't be overbearing, nor the fathers stuck in their ways. The siblings should be independent but loyal. The contestants should have female acquaintances with whom they've learned to interact with the fairer sex, as well as male brethren with whom to commune and grow as men.

Lastly, the boys run the gauntlet. They open doors and pull chairs out from under tables. Guillotines and pitfalls reward failure. They cut rose stems—diagonally, not horizontally—and assemble heart shaped chocolate puzzles. Beware of stray sawblades and tripmines. The last



Dustin J. Saunders
"B" Crew
Black and White Photograph

two contestants dance with one another in the ballroom. The one who leads is the one who lives. She awaits the finalist with a pair of untied shoes at the end of the course. Should he succeed in knotting her laces, she grabs him by the throat and looks into his brown eyes; boys with blue eyes do not finish the gauntlet. She kisses him hard, and while his lips are locked with hers and his hands are tied around her waist, she drives a silver blade through his temple: dead boys are the only ones who do not disappoint.

Michael Jarvi *Chelsea*

Chelsea is a pier.

Navy waves roll into the bleach white cement lined with pink coral. The sidewalks are paved with eggshells. Pearl nooses hang at the edge of the pier.

Vendors sell cashmere cotton candy and pretzels tied of ribbon, and the gift shop is stocked with purses sewn of lips. The pier's paramedics paint their bandages gold and stitch wounds with scarlet lace.

It's always May on the pier. Mothers are celebrated and the grass shines green like emeralds. During blackberry winter, soot and snow fall like static on television, and scarves are tied to the lampposts for anyone who may need them.

As iron sharpens iron, tooth sharpens tooth. The people of the pier file their incisors to fine points by kissing, using their tongues as grindstones and their lips as razor strops. As such, nobody goes hungry on the pier. With their freshly honed canines, they bite into one another like loaves of bread and drink from their veins like bendy straws in grape juice.

The sun turns red as it sinks into the ocean, and the residents of the pier raise leather flags to welcome the night.

The queen of the pier sits on a throne of piano keys, with hounds resting at her feet. She eats candy hearts and drinks rum, stray drops

leaving crimson stains on her white gown. The royal hall is lined with men painted bronze, each perched on a stone and resting his chin on curled knuckles, frozen in thought. In her boredom, the queen wakes them from their philosophical stupor and commands them to fight to the death. The victor receives a kiss from the queen, returns to his stone, and awaits the next competition.

Flowers grow from the beds on the pier. Lovers sleep on tulips, and bachelors on roses. The impoverished rest their heads on patches of clovers and dandelions. As for the queen, she slumbers on a mattress of hydrangeas.

Sailors dressed in white and blue stripes visit the pier to relax and resupply. The queen seeks out the most strapping young man from each ship that drops anchor in her waters; sometimes she has the sailors summoned to the royal hall for evaluation, and other times she herself ventures out in disguise to the inns and taverns and cabarets to find him. She then leads him to her chambers, where she can thank him for his service personally. Should she find him worthy of the highest honor, she asks him to join her guard and take up permanent residence in the pier's barracks, only a short walk from her palace.

The pier's prison is a library; each book lays in a cell with a set of chains attached. The punishment always fits the crime. Those with misdemeanors and petty charges read poems and short stories, while felons read anthologies of ancient literature and literary classics translated into foreign languages. Statutory rapists must read *Lolita*, and arsonists *Fahrenheit 451*. The Bible is reserved for those who commit crimes of the utmost severity: manslaughter and irreverence towards the queen. Once those on death row have finished Revelation and read John's final "Amen," they are sent to the pearl nooses, where the queen listens to their last words and assures them that their bodies will be returned to their families.

After forty days of imprisonment, I am prepared to atone for my sins. I looked upon the queen with lust, and I will gladly pay with my life. I only hope that my death is slow and that the queen savors my struggle for breath as I asphyxiate.



Adam Davis
Flask
Woodfired Stoneware

Michael Jarvi

Katy

Katy lives in a house in a Virginia pine forest.

There are Bibles scattered throughout the house. The one on the kitchen counter smells like lemons; the one in the sunroom is sage green like the hollow wooden floor; the one on the bedroom nightstand is covered in vines and purple flowers to match the wallpaper, and a five and a half inch knife bookmarks Song of Solomon.

A poison tipped umbrella leans against the slushie machine next to the coatrack. The closets are filled with red flannel—sleeves rolled to the elbow—and bootcut denim. Dresses hang in place of curtains, and the blades on the ceiling fans have been replaced with razors. There are dental instruments and a shot glass full of teeth behind the washroom mirror.

Katy cleans the house in the spring, and the vacuum inhales all the things she's swept under the rug over the past year: brass knuckles, wet sand, permafrost, thongs, tassels, dead ravens, and sleeping alleycats.

In the mornings, Katy treks into the woods and sings for the deer with tuning fork antlers and star shaped patches of white fur on their hides. At night, she writes letters on her paper sheets with a pen that bleeds green velvet. The scribble stains her skin in her restless sleep and leaves words scrawled in reverse across her ankles, wrists, and shoulders. She balls up the sheets on laundry day and watches them roll through the wet grass down the hill behind the house before replacing them with fresh, blank pages.

I've been collecting her dirty linens for as long as I can remember, and I'll soon have enough to swathe the entire forest in her handwriting.

Rebecca S. Lindsay
Evaluation Day

For Lucky

He still had the same white hair that stood straight up like a shock of wheat, the same thick-lensed glasses with solid black frames, the same nose that turned up abruptly on the end as if he had once run full tilt into a light pole. Only one thing had changed. In the past, I had looked up at him; now I was looking down.

We called him the Bear because he could be provoked to growl and, on occasion, roar. He played violin for the symphony and gave lessons on the side to supplement his income. What I remember most, though, was that he played the mandolin.

I had parked my car and was on my way into a department store to buy shirts when I ran into him and his wife coming out.

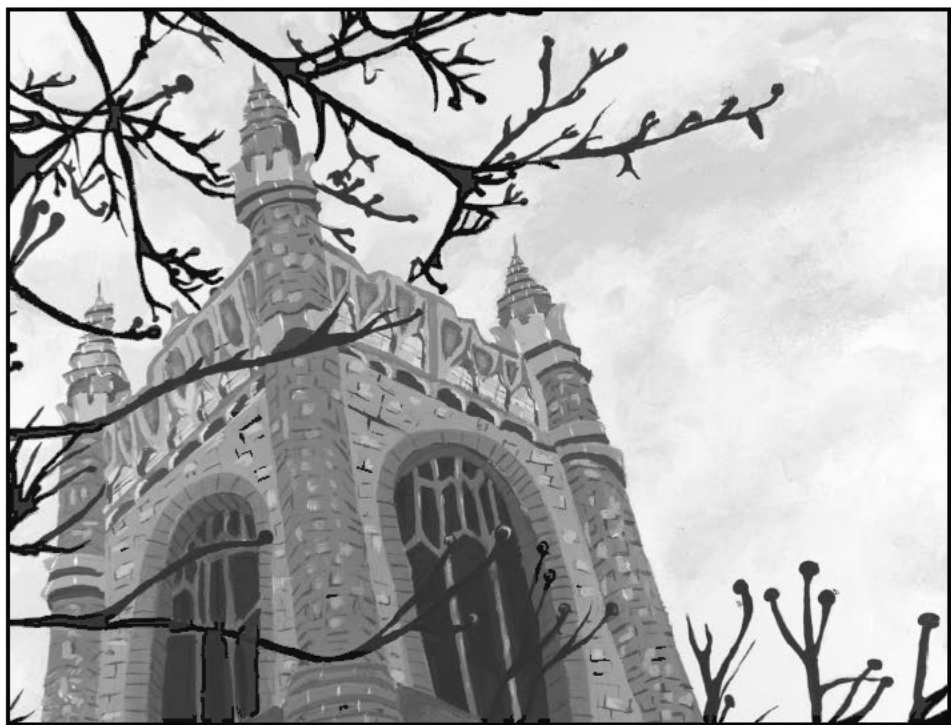
“Hello, Raymond,” he said, extending his hand. “How are you?”

“I’m good,” I said, shaking his hand. “How about yourself?”

Without answering, he turned to his wife. Stout with a squarish face framed by steel gray hair, she leaned both hands on a cane. Shopping bags dangled from one wrist.

“Look, Martha, it’s Raymond,” he said.

Seeing Mr. and Mrs. Glushenko brought back memories of the many Monday nights I’d spent in their living room growing up. With my mother’s choice of a piano teacher came not only a weekly lesson, but also a Monday evening theory class that met in the home of the two people now standing before me. Squeezed into a space the dimensions of a good-sized chicken house, along with an overstuffed chair, sofa, lamps, and two baby grands, a dozen more-or-less aspiring musicians of elementary school age squirmed on kitchen chairs, stools, and piano benches while Mrs. Glushenko attempted to teach us to identify quarter notes and half notes, to understand time signatures and to distinguish between the sound of major and minor keys. For major, we warbled



Josie Neff
Clouds
Acrylic Paint

“Happy Birthday,” and for minor we imitated trudging by pounding our hands on our knees while we sang,

“Walking through the jungle in a foreign land,
You can see your footsteps in the sand.”

Somewhere hidden in the bait of fun and games, however, was a barb. Periodically, we were expected to perform, on demand and from memory, whatever piece of music we were currently learning. For those of us who were less diligent about practicing, this was a constant terror. We appreciated any disruption that might spare us the exposure of our lack of preparation. Occasionally, Lilac, the couple’s gray cat would oblige by taking a stroll up and down the keyboards of the baby grands. But the top-dollar show-stopper was the night Bobby Jenkins made a web with his gum.

In a fit of creativity, or more probably out of boredom, Bobby removed the wad he was chewing from his mouth and squashed it between his thumb and forefinger like a bean beetle. It was cheap gum; so when he pulled his two digits apart, the substance hung in gooey strings between them. Realizing he had a problem, the young miscreant attempted to remove the gum with his free hand only to have it adhere to those fingers. He continued in this manner alternating between squishing and pulling until Mrs. Glushenko spotted his creation.

“Good God,” she exclaimed. “What is that?”

Bobby held up his hands several inches apart. Threads of gum stretched between them in fine array. A spider couldn’t have been prouder.

Mrs. Glushenko was stumped. Poorly played scales and ragged eighth notes she could fix, but not chewing gum disasters.

My mother, who was parked on a couch in the kitchen, had to come to the rescue with ice cubes, paper towels and plenty of dish detergent. By the time Bobby’s hands were scrubbed cleaner than they had been since birth, all thought of solo performance had been

forgotten, and I was saved from embarrassment once again. The following week, my mother stitched a purple heart in needlepoint, fixed it with a safety pin, and presented it to Mrs. Glushenko.

“What are you up to these days? Finished college I suppose?” the Bear continued.

“Yes, I graduated last spring. Got a degree in music.”

“Piano?”

“Not exactly,” I hedged, wondering how he and his wife would react to the news that their efforts had not produced a keyboard star. “More in voice. I sang in the chorus in high school,” I said, as if that explained everything.

You never knew where you stood with the Bear, except when it came to his inner sanctum. His den was a magical place crammed with a dragon’s trove he had collected over the years: fine Ukrainian Easter eggs, fragile, blown and painted by hand with birds, flowers and geometric designs; musical instruments in various stages of disrepair waiting for restoration or Judgment Day, whichever came first; oil paintings stacked against the walls; and his own set of twin baby grands. Just the menagerie of treasures whose health and wellbeing depended upon an absence of children.

When we arrived at the Glushenkos’ house on Monday nights, we always entered by the front door, never by the back which led into his lair. While we were busy in the living room, he sat at his desk just inside the door from the kitchen and guarded the entrance like Cerberus at the gates of Hades. It would have been fine had he left well enough alone, but some nights, while we were waiting for class to start, he picked up the mandolin and began to play “Lara’s Theme.”

“Somewhere, My Love, there will be songs to sing
Although the snow covers the hope of spring ...”



Josie Sloan
Portrait 2
Digital Illustration

Ordinary children, children who respond to balls and bikes and tussling, would have listened from afar and gone on with life. But we were not ordinary children. We had been born with an extra system of nerves running from our ears to our hearts. The tremulous strains from the strings wove their way into the core of our being. We could not resist. We were drawn like iron filings to a magnet.

We piled up around the door, bracing ourselves against the frame, child upon child pressing to get closer. Eventually, our grip broke, gravity took over, and one of us fell forward into the forbidden room. Instantly, the music stopped, and the Bear roared, "Get back in the kitchen!"

We scrambled to safety.

"And what are you doing now that you've graduated?" the Bear asked.

"I'm working ... in a restaurant, waiting tables. But I am doing some music. I sing with the choir at St. Giles Church, bass section leader. I get paid."

I wished I could show him a resume listing awards I'd won in piano competitions, symphony concerts where I'd been the featured soloist, tours I was about to depart on. I felt I had so little to show as the result of all those Monday night classes. The specter of Evaluation Day rose up before me with the accumulation of feelings of inadequacy it had produced over the years.

Evaluation Day came in the fall after we had somewhat mastered new material. It was necessary to play on Evaluation Day in order to perform later in the year at the annual piano festival held at a local university. On that one day, we were permitted to enter by the back door, wait in the Bear's study for our turn and warm up our piece on one of his pianos. He kept a vigil to see that we did not wander into prohibited territory, put a foot through a canvas, reduce an already damaged instrument to rubble, or crack any of the eggs.

I was never sure why, but I always looked forward to the event, even when I outgrew the elementary class and joined the older students. Perhaps it was because Evaluation Day was a dress-up occasion, or because we could enter the den of the Bear. Perhaps it was the punch.

There was always punch, a frothy sweet liquid with a tang created from rainbow sherbet drowned in 2-liters of ginger ale. And there were cookies, the bakery kind, iced with a sugar coating. Had a psychologist wished, he could have used Evaluation Day to do a career study of the effects of a sugar high on piano performance.

In the living room, the judges—a trio of local piano teachers—listened to student after student, rated their performances and wrote helpful comments. I always hoped to get a nun as one of my judges. For some reason, the sisters gave me favorable ratings. Maybe I *did* play well, or maybe they felt sorry for me—a poor Presbyterian denied the discipline of a parochial education—and gave me the benefit of the doubt.

Before I could play for the judges, however, I had to get past the Bear. Fortified with liberal doses of punch and cookies, I sat at one of the pianos and ran through my piece. Some years “ran” could be replaced by “stumbled,” “waltzed,” or “fumbled,” the appropriate verb being a function of the difficulty of the piece and the amount of time I’d spent working on it.

The Bear always listened to the first rendition, usually becoming more and more agitated until I’d finished. Then he’d let loose with, “Raymond, see if you can find the right notes in that piece.” Or, “Can’t you play that thing at an even tempo?”

By the time I entered the living room and played for whatever judges were my lot, I felt the real critic had already spoken. Maybe it didn’t matter—he wasn’t my teacher—but I always felt I could never live up to his expectations.

“I’m glad to hear that you are putting your music to use,” the Bear said.

“I enjoy singing, and the choir job supplements my income,” I said, still steering the conversation away from the absence of piano in my life. What he said next, though, caught me by surprise.

“I feel I owe you an apology.”

“Oh? What for?”

Perhaps I was a little hard on you when you were young.”

“How so?”

“You were big for your age, taller than the other students. I often expected you to play the piano like an older student.”

Looking for a way to let him off the hook, I said, “I had that problem a lot growing up.”

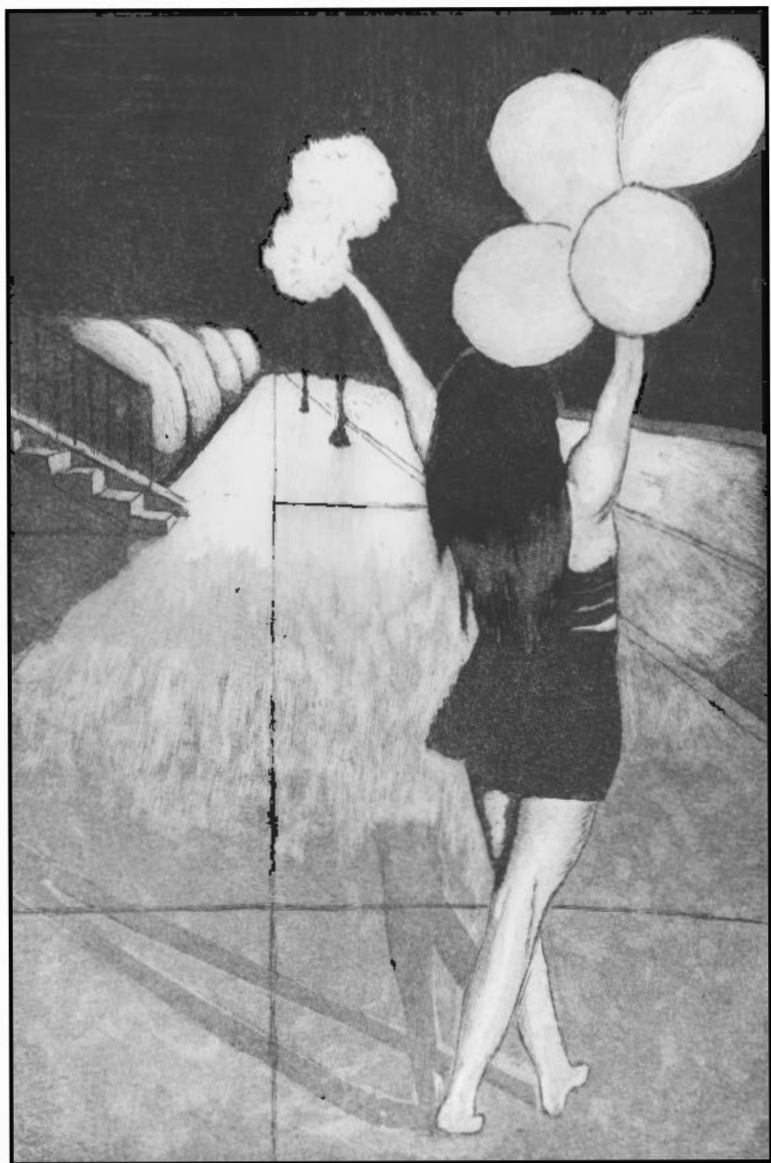
“You were always so musical,” Mrs. Glushenko added. “Even when you played wrong notes, you were a joy to listen to.”

We chatted some more, remembering those former days, playing the game, “Do you remember So-and-so?” No one mentioned Bobby Jenkins. Then it was time to go.

“Keep in touch,” the Bear said.

“Yes, do,” Mrs. Glushenko echoed. “We’d like to hear about what you’re doing.”

I promised I would and shook hands with both of them. Then, I turned and walked into the store feeling that I had at last passed.



Mike Sealand
Bliss
Intaglio Print

Sarah Nelson
Mary-Grace's Solo

Julie was sitting in the Cullman County Elementary School auditorium when she saw Emma Jean Findley saunter into the room. Emma Jean took a program from the usher and scanned the rows of seats with a hand over her eyes, as if sunlight shone in them. Julie slid down in her seat and let her hair swing forward, hoping not to be noticed by her old high school friend, but Emma Jean spotted her and waved, then clunked up the aisle and sat down on Julie's left.

"I am so glad you're here," Emma Jean said, rooting around in her pink hand bag before plopping it on the ground. "I just couldn't bear this alone if Trent ends up coming. I told him about the play, you know, just to be nice. I thought he might want to see his own daughter for once." Emma Jean unwrapped a piece of gum and popped it into her mouth, a gross habit Julie never understood. The sweet scent of cotton candy made her stomach churn.

"Right," Julie nodded, pretending to be interested. She had known Emma Jean and her ex-husband, Trent, since high school and was forced to keep in touch by means of a small town. It was hard to keep a private life in a place like Good Hope, Alabama. Everybody knew Emma Jean and Trent wouldn't last. They argued too much and apologized too little. But Emma Jean was the type of person who never really knew how to think for herself, and Trent was too prideful to give up Good Hope's town beauty.

"Even if he does show up," Emma Jean continued, "I won't be surprised if he's drunk. That's what he's always doing now, I guess. Gina said she saw him at Wal-Mart with a whole buggy full of Miller Lite. He can't pitch in on Bonnie's Christmas presents but he can buy beer?"

Julie inspected Emma Jean's hair while she talked. Her brown curls were all going in the same direction, stiff and unnatural. Julie's sister had taught her how to do it the right way when she was fourteen, showing her how to alternate the pattern of the curls. Julie had always done things the right way. She learned how to apply mascara and what kind of clothes best fit her slim body type, but Emma Jean had always beaten

her somehow. She didn't even seem to try, but guys still chased her and girls still wanted to be her best friend.

Julie picked up the program in her lap. Her daughter's elementary school put on a Christmas play every year, usually the tackiest one they could find. This year it was Christmas in the Caribbean, which sounded like a disaster to Julie. Palm trees strung with Christmas lights stared up at her from the cover.

Noticing Julie, Emma Jean picked up her program as well. "How clever!" she said, glancing at the cover and chomping away at her gum.

Julie flipped to the page that listed who was in the angel choir, searching for her daughter's name and hoping not find Bonnie's beside it. She didn't like them spending time together and sighed when she saw their names side by side: Mary-Grace Turner and Bonnie Findley. Julie tried to convince herself that this could actually be a good thing. It would give Mary-Grace a chance to outshine Bonnie. Mary-Grace was the one who had gotten a solo, after all. Julie double checked to make sure her cell phone was in her purse so she could record it for husband.

While she waited, she surveyed what she could see of the stage, the part not covered by the closed curtain. A Christmas tree stood on the right side, wrapped in blue and yellow leis. On the other side was Santa's sleigh sitting crooked on a pile of sand. A large striped umbrella stood over it and a giant blow-up beach ball sat in the place where Santa's toy sack should have been. Julie scoffed at the art department's lack of originality. She knew she could have come up with something better, but few other people knew about her art talents. No one seemed to care about what you could do unless it was singing or dancing. Since Julie was not skilled at any of these, she worked on her paintings alone and became known as the quiet girl who stayed home on Saturday nights.

She felt a hand on her shoulder just then and turned to see Trent sitting down on her other side.

"Hey, Julie," he said. Then he nodded curtly and said "Emma Jean" with a smug look on his face. Julie had the feeling he was only there to prove Emma Jean wrong, to see her annoyed. He didn't bother dressing up but sported the navy-blue coat he was always wearing. He seemed

sober though. Julie didn't smell any booze on his breath, and his eyes looked clear and focused.

"Hello Trent," Julie said, keeping her voice friendly but not making eye contact. Emma Jean had suddenly become quiet, focusing intently on the paper in her hand. People were starting to arrive now, shaking snow from their hats and scarves. Julie watched them shuffle into their seats, grateful that the lighting was dim since she was sure the tension between Emma Jean and Trent was making her blush. She wished someone would say something but didn't want to be the first to speak. Finally Emma Jean broke the silence, eyes still on the program she was pretending to read.

"Did you have trouble finding your way here? I know you've never been here before." She was talking to Trent.

"How do you know? You don't know what I do. Unless you're keeping tabs on me now, in which case that'd be weird."

"I just asked you a question, no need to get snippy."

"It wasn't a question, it was an accusation. I'm not an idiot."

Before Emma Jean could reply, Mrs. Gardner, the music teacher, started playing "Santa Claus is Coming to Town" on the piano, and the stage lights came on. Julie let out a breath, thankful for the distraction.

The audience clapped as the curtains were pulled apart, revealing Santa in a Hawaiian shirt and Mrs. Claus in a grass skirt. Julie could hardly stop herself from rolling her eyes. The angel choir was already on stage, standing on a set of bleachers decorated to look like palms trees. Each child was wearing an all-white outfit, a halo, and sunglasses. Julie saw Mary-Grace wave at her from the front row and smiled back. She wiggled her fingers a little at her daughter, not wanting to draw attention to herself.

Emma Jean nudged her arm. "Look, there's my baby!" she said loudly, pointing at Bonnie, who was standing beside Mary-Grace. Bonnie beamed, glowing like a real angel. Julie knew better though. She knew Bonnie was putting on a pretense for her parents and the audience, knew that she hadn't been so sweet the day she had broken Mary-Grace's iPad and then whined that she didn't do it. Or the day she

let their collie outside during a downpour and then let him back to ruin their couch with mud. Mary-Grace was much better than Bonnie, and Julie couldn't wait for everyone to see that.

While elves in green shorts and flip flops filed onto the stage, the angel choir started to sing. Emma Jean waved at Bonnie again, smiling and scrunching up her nose. "Oh, she sings so good," she said.

Julie saw something move in her peripheral vision and turned to see Trent twitching his foot impatiently. Julie could tell he was becoming annoyed with Emma Jean and prayed she would settle down a bit so Trent wouldn't cause a scene. At the end of the song though, Emma Jean clapped loudly and gave Bonnie a thumbs up.

Trent sighed and leaned forward a little to look at her. "Would you put your damn hand down, she can see you." He sat back and whispered loud enough for Emma Jean to hear, "It's not like you're hard to miss."

"What's that mean?" Emma Jean shot back. Julie kept her eyes on the stage and saw Bonnie frown as she watched her parents from the choir bleachers.

"It means that sweater is so bright that you could probably lead Santa's sleigh instead of Rudolph," Trent said.

Emma Jean looked at Julie, jaw dropped. Julie swallowed and then shrugged. She didn't know what to say, just wanted them to stop talking. When Emma Jean slumped back and crossed her arms, Julie hoped that they would stay quiet until Mary-Grace's solo was over. Julie had been delighted that her daughter had gotten the part over Bonnie and had helped her practice the chorus of Jimmy Buffett's "Christmas in the Caribbean" for the past two weeks. She opened the camera on her cell phone, ready to record it for her husband.

"Ian couldn't make it tonight?" Emma Jean said to her.

"No, he had to work a late shift," Julie whispered back. She quickly focused her attention back on the stage, but Emma Jean started talking again.

"That's okay, he's a hard-working man, isn't he? Takes a real man to be a nurse. Takes dedication. Not just any guy could do it."

“Mm-hmm,” Julie said. “Christmas in the Caribbean” started to play so she aimed her camera at Mary-Grace and Bonnie and hit record.

“How’s work going for you? What are you again, an art fixer?” Emma Jean continued.

“Something like that,” Julie said quickly. She bit her lip nervously as the chorus arrived and her daughter began to sing:

“We don’t live in a hurry, send away for mistletoe. It’s Christmas in the Caribbean, we got everything but snow.”

“What the hell is an art fixer?” Trent said. “She’s an art restorer. Some friend you are, you don’t even know her profession. I knew that and we’re not even close.”

Julie sighed in frustration. This was Mary-Grace’s chance to be better than Bonnie, the girl who was always praised for being sweet when she was nothing but trouble in reality. Julie wanted to get this on camera and knew she had to say something or else she wouldn’t be able to pick up any of Mary-Grace’s solo.

“Could you guys keep it down for a second? Just until I record Mary-Grace?” she asked. She must have said it too quietly though because they kept fighting.

“I know what her job is! I just didn’t know what it was called!”

“Yeah, because you’re ditzzy as-”

“Please, guys,” Julie interjected. “I really just want to hear this.” Other people in the rows around them started to stare and clear their throats. Still, Emma Jean and Trent kept up their bickering.

“I am not ditzzy! How was I supposed to know it was called an art restrainer?”

“Restrainer? You are really embarrassing yourself-”

In the middle of Trent’s sentence, a deep rumble of a voice came from behind them.

“Excuse me.” It was Colby, a big man who went to Julie’s church and always had a cowboy hat on. It shaded his eyes so that they could only see his nose and mouth. “This lady has been asking you to be quiet. I

would also like it if you stopped talking. My son is playing Rudolph and I don't want to miss him leading Santa's sleigh."

There was a calm frustration in his voice that made Emma Jean and Trent snap their mouths shut. Julie sighed. She managed to get the last few lines of Mary-Grace's solo before the whole choir began singing again. She kept her camera recording though, wanting to get more of the play for her husband, and hoping Mary-Grace would outperform Bonnie while they were both singing together. She focused in on the two girls. Mary-Grace was smiling at her mom and Bonnie was watching her parents carefully. Once she realized they were finally paying attention to her instead of bickering, she stood up straighter and started to sing a little louder.

Julie pursed her lips and waited to see if Mary-Grace would do anything, but her daughter just kept singing, oblivious to the fact that Bonnie was stealing the show. She wondered if she should do something. Wanting her daughter to be the best and encouraging her to battle with another little girl were two different things. Julie didn't want her daughter to go through school like she had, never getting the chance to prove herself because she was overshadowed by someone else. But Julie's life didn't turn out so bad, after all. She had a career in the arts, a husband who moved from Michigan to Alabama for her, and a sweet, intelligent daughter. Her jealousy of Emma Jean didn't have a hold on her anymore, right? Did Mary-Grace really need to outshine Bonnie?

When the next song started, Julie watched Bonnie carefully. Noticing her gaze, Bonnie started belting louder than before, a devilish gleam in her dark brown eyes, the same color as her mother's. Julie made a decision.

She caught Mary-Grace's eye and raised her hand a little, motioning for her to sing louder. After a few seconds, Mary-Grace understood and raised her voice. Julie nodded her approval.

"Oh look, they're the best out of the whole group," Emma Jean whispered to Julie. Even with Colby's shadow looming over top of them, Emma Jean just couldn't seem to help herself. Trent still didn't say anything. Julie knew that his ego wouldn't let him provoke a man twice his size.

Mary-Grace and Bonnie kept singing louder than the other kids, each keeping their eyes on their parents. It didn't take long for Bonnie to try to outperform Mary-Grace again, and she started singing even louder. Mary-Grace glanced her way and did the same, her voice more shrill than before. Soon they were both standing on their tip toes and stretching their necks, practically shouting the lyrics to "Little Saint Nick."

"Oh dear," Emma Jean said. Julie could see, like Emma Jean, that this was going to get out of hand and put her phone down. She tried to motion for Mary-Grace to stop but her daughter was too focused on being better than Bonnie, who was still beaming at her parents, acting as though this was how she performed naturally.

Trent scoffed and Julie could feel his shoulders bouncing next to her, could hear his quiet laughter. *This isn't what's supposed to happen*, Julie thought.

On stage, Mary-Grace and Bonnie continued to battle it out, the other kids backing away and giving them strange looks. Mary-Grace suddenly reached over and grabbed Bonnie's halo, ripping it off of her head. Bonnie's sunglasses went flying across stage with the force, and she shrieked in either shock or pain. She tackled Mary-Grace, knocking her backward into the rest of the choir, making each kid fall like a line of dominoes. The microphones squeaked and the music was cut. Mrs. Gardner ran toward the kids as someone backstage began closing the curtains. Thumps and angry shouts could still be heard even after the stage went dark.



Waylan Coffey
Childhood Woes
Digital Photograph

Symone Franklin

Welcome to the Asylum - Day 274

I squeeze my eyes shut to keep the room from spinning. Maybe if I keep my eyes shut long enough, I'll die, or fall asleep and never wake up. The high-pitched whine starts up again and grows louder in my ears, then a sound of someone biting and crunching on chunks of metal. I open my eyes and find myself in the same bloody room I was in before. The guy in the suit lying against the far wall has been dead for a while. Ronny, the patient who thinks he owns the place, strangled him three weeks ago. The guy struggled for a few minutes until Ronny planted his foot into his chest and made him choke on his own blood. I was able to duck inside the examination cabinet before Ronny saw me. There are still blood stains running from his mouth down his chest.

I scratch at my red wrists, the skin peeling off beneath my nails and by the sharp edges of the white bracelet. "Willie Park," it says. That's what they all call me. But I don't know who I am anymore. From what little I do remember about myself, I'm pretty sure that wasn't my name. But there's no sense in trying to remember what isn't there. I'm lucky that I still have enough sense left in me to not try fooling myself into thinking this is okay.

Some of those others that don't have sense are the ones going around looking for trouble. That's all they do, really. Ronny is one of the most frequent ones I see. I've seen a few others, but I've heard more of their growls as they chase their next victim. Around here, it's either kill, get killed, or go insane. There's no point in trying to run. I mean, running and trying to find a place to hide is possible. But trying to make it out of here is useless. Especially after all the shit the doctors have done, I'm lucky to still be walking straight.

The best option is to go insane. Find a room filled with poison in hopes that when insanity does win, the poison will be mistaken for food. Or find a dark corner and pray to whatever you believe in that death will come before they can put anything else in my subconscious. I tried to hold on to as much of myself as I could. But from the first time the doctors got their hands on me, it's hard to keep a grip on what's real.

By my stage of the game, they're able to access everything my mind possesses. Once I got to this point, completely exposed, I've joined the downhill spiral the rest of them are in.

They use us to test their experiments. We're their guinea pigs, nothing but test subjects. They told us it's science.

"This'll fix your dark things," a doctor told me tapping his temple.

Everyone in here was crazy to begin with. Either diagnosed with their own type of exotic mental illness, or stupid enough to come wandering in here expecting to find something useful of us. Generally, once we were deemed too mentally unstable for society, we got dumped here to be forgotten. We were all people, with hopes and goals. But every failed experiment, which I haven't seen a successful one yet, destroyed everyone's chance at being accepted as normal again. It's not science, it's sadistic torture.

Ronny, for example, was a fullback for the Dallas Cowboy's. He'd been given a full ride scholarship to play there. His future was pretty much set up for him, but he started using steroids and meth along with some of the other players. But he got caught using the steroids and was ineligible to play. He dropped out of college and started doing meth more than ever. Eventually his brain was fried and he was put in the hospital under psychological observation. That's where they say a doctor found him, Dr. Stoke I think. He took him from the hospital, claiming to be Ronny's uncle. Since Ronny was so out of it, he had no way of confirming or denying it, and had no family to speak of. That's the kind of story I hear a lot around here. Doing drugs, prison escapee, or mentally unstable from the beginning. Then they're discovered by the doctors.

At one point, the doctors were getting paid by the government to do these experiments on us. They were claiming that we volunteered ourselves to aid in their discoveries. They said they were on the cusp of making monumental medical breakthroughs. Somehow, they avoided having to provide much proof or identification to the government. After a few years of receiving nothing but failure reports from a sketchy organization, the government stopped funding them. By that point,

though, the doctors had found as much satisfaction in our pain as they would've in the money they were expecting. Since their project wasn't very solid, the word never got out of what they were trying to do, so they were still able to pull a few more hopeless lunatics from hospitals and mental wards until they were shut down. But the crazy likes of us were still able to get tangled into their grasp. They promised a cure from the insanity, that's how they got us to go with them so easily. I, however, still had a bit of common sense, so after I refused they knocked me out and I woke up here, completely unaware of what happened to me.

I used to hide near the front entrance, where I'd see them carrying in new bodies, or seemingly normal people wandering in here. That's what reminded me of how I got here, after the treatment blurred the lines separating reality and the hallucinations. Once the doctors got me here, they strapped me down on an ice cold table and injected me with some kind of sleep syrup. The first time was hell. The syrup targets everything that's shoved to the back of the mind. From then on, my thoughts were never mine again. The after effect of the first time was extreme paranoia, but after a few more times the limbo settled in, and I'd been changed into another demented psycho. At my stage of the game, the doctors have seen everything I've rejected to the back of my mind. That's where the initial fear came from, the instinct to hide. But the horrors of this place have made it worse in due time.

I've managed to find this room, though, where no one bugs me. Where I can go insane alone. Just me and my dead friend. Sometimes I wonder if there really is a way out. But what happens next? Everyone, at least at some point, wants to make it out and forget this hellhole. But how would people react to this blood-stained, gashed up lunatic who's been sitting in piss and blood for who knows how long?

A growl from behind my door tears my hands from their lock around my ears. Shrieks of terror fly down the hall. I peek through the crack in the door and see the one I call One-Leg-Joe being chased by one of those others. I gave him that name the first time I saw him. He runs lopsided ever since an experiment that ended in his leg being broken. The guy chasing him isn't Ronny, but he's one of them. He catches up to Joe and pins him against the wall by his throat.

Idiot, I think. *At least you're finally getting out of here.* I almost feel sorry for him, as he's never been all that good at hiding. I've pulled him into a room with me once or twice to save his ass, but he's always been able to find his way into trouble again.

"No escape ..." the guy growls.

One-Leg-Joe begins to wail, kicking and thrashing. I see the guy's grip get tighter on Joe, causing distinct bruises to form from underneath his hand. I can see the blood in Joe's veins begin to pool in his neck. Then the guy raises his other hand towards the center of Joe's torso.

I sink back into my corner and squeeze my head between my knees. The high-pitched noise returns and thankfully drowns out the screams. I squeeze harder and try to hold onto myself, hopefully not for too much longer.



Jessie Smith
Skeleton Cat
Silver Gelatin Print

NONFICTION

Chanda Scobee

A letter to my friend, who couldn't face today.

If I could, I would tell you this

If you wanted someone to be there with you, I would come. I would sit with you in the shadows, in the darkness of your mind and try to show you the light in mine. I would walk with you through the memories, emotions, the ghost of your mother, the absence of your sister, and everything else that plagues when you let your mind wander for too long. I would listen and be silent and be present and be what you needed. I would follow you wherever you go, whether it's back home or to a place you've never been, whether you want to dwell in yesterday or swim in tomorrow, I would clear the path for you and hold your hand while we walked through it together.

We could laugh about yesterday's that will never again come to pass, we could hold onto tomorrow's to see what's to come, and we could be there, be here, in this moment. We could go and do and see and be whatever and wherever you wanted, if only you would stay.

If you wanted someone to tell you to stay- to not give up, to hold on, to keep your head up- I would say it over and over and over again until my voice was as hoarse as the wind, like a whisper kissing softly at your spine. Stay. Stay. Stay. My lips would be like a broken record, repeating the same four letters in a rhythmic pattern like the beating of the heart inside your chest. Stay. Stay. Stay. I would tell you to repeat the words after me. Stay. Stay. Stay. Feel them vibrate down your throat, into your spine, behind your rib cage. Stay. Stay. Stay. Those words are connected to your heart. Do not let them go. Do not stop singing that song.

If you wanted someone to give you a reason to hold on, I would paint you a picture of a sun and hang it on your window, so that even on the greyest, rainiest days, the sun would still shine for you. I would paint purple clouds on your ceiling so that they wouldn't need a silver lining because they would already be in your favorite color. I would paint the grass on tiles of your bedroom so that you would be reminded that

everything grows, you are in progress, you are green, and to be green is to be full of life. I would paint sunflowers and daisies and dandelions on your wall and I would name them each after someone who loves you, so that you would never forget those who grow for you and grow with you. Their presence would be like roots, holding you tight to the ground even though you're praying for wings to lift you higher. They would keep you held down, keep you safe, keep you company. They would not let you go. Do not let them go.

If you were scared of what was to come and you just wanted to know what tomorrow would be like, I would tell you to close your eyes. I would describe the nightfall in saturated colors of shadows, in violets and blues, like bruises on pale skin. I would tell you that the moon is like a sideways smile, gleaming back at you as you sleep. I would tell you that the darkness is falling and fading away, and that in the morning, hues of pink, crimson, tangerine, and lemon would splatter across the sky like flames from the fire inside your chest.

I would tell you that the sun came back, always comes back, and that she shines just for you, for this day, for today, for right now. I would tell you that in a few hours the violet would come back and she would fade into blue hues of you. Blue like the ocean, blue like the land that we live on, blue like the veins underneath your skin, still bleeding, still breathing, and I would say that all of this is for you, so that you can live today, have today, and hold today. Just hold today.

If you were here or I was there or yesterday hadn't happened or if today had come sooner, I would say to you: Stay. Stay because there is so much to see and do and love and be. Stay because there is more- there is more to learn and read and write and say. Stay because there are people who haven't met you yet, but are destined to love you. They will call you by names that you have yet to answer to, they will follow you for years and maybe for your lifetime, and they will become a part of who you will be tomorrow and a year from now and ten years from now, if you will only stay. Stay because there are people here, right now, who crave to hold your hands, see your smile, walk in your footsteps.

Stay. Stay because it is worth it, and even if I can't paint that with my words or write it with my love, I hope that you can see it in my eyes or hear it in my voice or feel it in the beating of my own heart.

It is worth it.

Stay.

Karen Chambers

Lesia, Leora, and Two Other L Words: Life and Love

Sitting here, rocking my brand new granddaughter, Leora, holding her in my arms and feeling the rise and fall of her chest as she breathes, I am thankful she is healthy. I smell her hair and stroke her back as she lays against my chest, safe and warm and vigorously alive. I love to look at her while she sleeps and watch the contours of her face as she smiles a little in her sleep. She looks just like the picture of my older sister, Lesia, right now; the picture which sat on an end table in every house we lived in until I was grown. It's one of only three pictures ever taken of Lesia. There is no way to know whether Leora will continue to look like her as she grows older because Lesia never got the chance to grow. My sister was born on October 19, 1962, nearly thirteen months before I made my squalling entrance into the world. Thirty minutes after she was born, my sister died. I don't know why. My mother never even saw her, alive or dead; never held her in her arms, or smelled her hair. She had nothing except the pictures taken at the funeral which Mom couldn't attend since she was still in the hospital, having nearly followed her daughter into the darkness.

I grew up knowing that I had and didn't have a sister. I used to gaze at her picture trying to get a sense of her. Who would she have been? Would I have liked her? Would she have liked me? At the cemetery I would look at her tiny headstone trying to imagine having a living sister. I could never really picture it. I got the feeling Mom wondered about Lesia, too. When I messed up, Mom sometimes muttered that Lesia wouldn't have acted that way; she would have been nicer, more polite, or more respectful. Lesia would have gotten a better grade, enjoyed



Sarah Nicole Jackson
River That Sings
Watercolor

housework, loved to wear dresses, not been such a tomboy, and she certainly wouldn't have been so boy-crazy. She would have been more like Mom and less like Dad's family. She would not have had a smart mouth and a sassy attitude. At those times I would wish she were here and behaving worse than I was so I could get a little slack. Rather than Mom's perfect daughter, I imagined she would be failing in school and using drugs, drinking, partying, and sleeping with anyone who asked. She would cuss, smoke, wear short shorts and halters, and hang out with musicians in some garage band. I never told anyone what I imagined for Lesia when I was angry with Mom, mainly because doing that would have earned me a smack across the mouth and more than likely, the sting of humiliation of Dad telling his whole family that I hated my poor little sister. I didn't hate her. I didn't even know her. Sibling rivalry can be fierce, but I always felt as if I had lost the battle for Mom's love before I was even conceived. After all, how could I compete with a ghost, an ideal whose potential was forever untapped? If she had lived, would I have even been born? Sometimes I thought, probably not.

Every year, on Lesia's birthday, Mom would stare at her picture and cry. Quietly. Privately. She cried as if her heart were breaking all over again. As a child, I didn't understand why she still cried so many years later over the loss of a child she'd never seen. As I got older, and watched her continue to grieve, I got irritated. I thought she should just let it go. She couldn't bring her back, so in my opinion she should forget the baby and be content with my brother, Phillip, and me. After all, we were actually here, we should have been able to take her place. That sort of thinking changed when I was eighteen, with a newborn son of my own, and found myself on the fringes of a similar situation.

I got married one month, one week, and one day after turning seventeen and had my first child fifteen months later. While pregnant, I began to drive slower and more carefully. I ate right, loading my diet with fresh fruits and veggies and cutting down on red meat even more than usual. I didn't imagine I could lose my baby. I changed my habits simply because I wanted a healthy baby. My first baby was born on a beautiful March evening, after a long, but uneventful labor and delivery. My husband and I were ecstatic with him. He was perfectly formed

and I had already fallen in love with him before he was born. I couldn't imagine life without him. Though Mom had been sure that I would have problems delivering him given the trouble she had with her three babies—Lesia, of course, had died, I had to be taken using forceps, and my brother was a C-section, with Mom nearly dying each time—I had no problems with labor or delivery. Three days later, we took our little bundle home. With only the usual amount of new parent jitters we settled in to being parents.

When our son, Bobby, was about three weeks old, there was a knock on the door. It was our friends, Scotty and Celia, who had come to tell us that there had been a car accident. Scotty had some scratches, Celia still had auto glass in her arm and they were on their way to the hospital to have the glass removed, but the reason they had come to get us was that Celia's sister, Yvette and her husband were in the car too and they were seriously hurt. Yvette's husband, Carlos Gonzales, had hurt his back and was unconscious and they weren't sure he would be able to walk even if he recovered. Yvette was pregnant and only a week from her due date. The wreck had put her into labor and the doctors had told the family that they thought the baby was already dead. We picked up Bobby, grabbed diapers and milk and rushed to the hospital.

This large Latino family were the first people we had met after moving to Oklahoma the previous fall in search of work. Joe and Hope Espinosa had eight children ranging in age from nineteen to four. Six of the children still lived at home. Though they both worked, money was tight, but they befriended my husband and me, watched over us without appearing to, and made us feel a part of their family. I was seventeen and my husband was nineteen when we met this loving, caring family with room in their hearts for two young kids on their own in a strange place. We were broke and my husband was looking for work. When we were hungry, they invited us to eat with them. When my husband found work and pulled double shifts, they checked on me and made sure I wasn't home alone. Hope, a nurse's aide at the local hospital, changed Bobby's first diaper and fed him his first bottle. We looked on them as family, and so we went to the hospital to be with them and at least lend moral support.

The Espinosas had a huge extended family and it seemed they had all flocked to the hospital that night. The ER treatment room was packed with onlookers as the doctor used some sort of x-ray imaging thing to find the glass he was picking out of her arm. The waiting rooms were all full of Espinosa and Gonzales family members it seemed. Carlos was in another section of the hospital, his family overflowing that waiting room while he was being treated for his injuries. He, of course, was unable to go to Yvette, who was in a labor room, unaware at first that the excruciating pain ripping through her back and abdomen like large, superheated shards of glass tearing at her uterus, would all be for nothing. There would be no tiny body to dress and bathe and nurse and hold. When the age-old torment of childbirth was done, she would go home with empty arms, aching breasts with no new life to feed, and a hole in her heart where her baby had resided from the moment she felt the first stirrings of life within her. For the rest of her life, the only things she would have of the daughter she had carried, wanted, loved, would be pictures and a stone in a cemetery.

The labor lasted for hours and I took my shift sitting with her, holding her hand as she tried to breathe through the pain. By the time I sat with her, she knew the worst but the contractions came so fast and hard that she had little time between to think about all she had lost and all she still could lose, since Carlos's condition was critical and his survival was far from certain. Between contractions, she hardly said a word; a huge difference from the joyful banter between contractions during my own recent labor and delivery. At mine, we had speculated on who the baby would look like, what gender he would be (in 1982, it wasn't always apparent and I had chosen not to be told), what he would grow up to become, the color of his hair and eyes, and how sad it was that Dad couldn't come to Oklahoma with Mom and my aunt to be with me and meet his first grandchild. None of those topics applied to Yvette's situation. The main topic of discussion was whether or not to allow the doctors to perform a C-section to end this terrible mockery of what should have been such a blessed event. Yvette was so tired and the pain continued and worsened until she was ready to give up and just let the doctors have their way. The women in her family agreed with her nearly unanimously, but since Carlos was in no shape to help decide

for her, it was left to Joe, her father, as the patriarch of the family to make the decision. He refused to allow it. Her life was not in danger and the baby's life was no longer an issue, so it was left to him to take in the ramifications of a surgery. As he told us, "If they cut her to get the baby, she can only have two more, ever. If they don't, she can have as many as she wants."

Eventually, she had the baby naturally, and that baby was beautiful. She had thick, longish black hair and she was perfectly formed except for the depression in her skull caused by Yvette flying over the seat when the car left the road and hit a tree. Carlos was awake by the time the baby was bathed and swaddled in a tiny blanket. Tears poured down his cheeks as he held her and stroked her tiny cheek. He had been driving the car when the right front wheel dropped off the edge. His overcorrection had sent the car careening across the road and into the ditch on the other side and he just couldn't dodge the tree. I can't even imagine his grief and guilt. I also couldn't imagine Yvette's anguish or that of the rest of the family who, instead of welcoming a cherished new addition to the family, would in a few days say goodbye to her forever. I can only say that I held my little boy just a little tighter, watched him a little closer and cherished him even more.

I finally came to realize that I wasn't supposed to be the replacement for the daughter my parents lost. I was their second daughter, no more able to take Lesia's place than Phillip could have taken mine. So, I could now understand why even though she later had two more children, Mom still grieved for Lesia and cried on her birthday/deathday. Lesia having died didn't change the fact that my parents had three children, each of whom they loved equally. I think that her mourning never, ever stopped, but on their special/terrible day, the grief was too overwhelming to hold it inside. Then what amazed me was that she could go through the rest of the year smiling at the world and doting on her two younger children, even when they did things to disappoint her.

Though Mom only had two living children, we gave her twelve grandchildren, and five more great-grandchildren, all of whom she loved deeply. However, she didn't get to meet little Leora Grace, who

looks so much like Lesia. She left us behind in 2011 to finally follow the baby she had held in her heart for forty-eight years, but never in her arms. She believed in God and was a born-again Christian. She lived a good life and all who knew her proclaim her a good, kind, godly woman. In her heart, she believed that one day she would meet her baby in Heaven. I want to believe that's exactly what happened.



Kristin Busby
Response to Western Silence
Silver Gelatin Print

BIOGRAPHIES

Tia Alexander is an English graduate student of English at Morehead State University. She currently resides in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she works to end homelessness. This is Alexander's first time being published. In between fits of creativity, she enjoys binge watching "Doctor Who," searching for the world's best chocolate and maintaining her sanity in a house full of boys.

Arlo Barnette is a working musician and journalist at Morehead State Public Radio. Raised on a goat farm in Bath County, he is now an Honors student studying English, Spanish and biology.

Alex Bauer is a fourth-year art education major at MSU with hopes of teaching in the Eastern Kentucky area. He works mostly in drawing and printmaking with a focus on blending representational and conceptual art. Recently, Bauer was awarded Best in Show for one of his drawings in the *Juried Student Art Exhibit* in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

Maria Lind Blevins earned her Bachelor of Arts in Art Education from MSU in 2014 and is now a graduate student completing a body of work for her spring 2016 M.A. thesis exhibition, *Human Nature*. Being well-versed in digital photography, ceramics and intaglio printmaking, she uses diverse media to explore the consciousness between humankind and our tendencies to distance ourselves from nature. Throughout her studies, Blevins' pieces have been included in issues of *Inscape* (2013, 2014 and 2015).

Christopher Burton is a convergent media major at Morehead State University. He has received awards in the past for his work and also was published in the 2011 issue of *Inscape*.

Kristin Busby is a W. Paul and Lucille Caudill Little Scholar for the Arts at Morehead State University. She is an art and design student who maintains an interest in arts advocacy and the utilization of the arts for regional development. Busby's work was published in the 2014 issue of *Inscape* and exhibited at both the historic St. Vincent's Cathedral in Louisville, Kentucky, and the Gateway Center for the Arts in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

Karen Chambers is a native of Jeffersonville, Kentucky. Chambers is an English major at Morehead State University with a minor in history. She is a nontraditional student and mother of five grown children with six grandchildren. Chambers enjoys writing about the life she finds around her.

Waylan Coffey is a senior at Morehead State University and is double majoring in business management and art. In 2015, he exhibited work in the *Advanced Photography Show* at MSU, the *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Art Center and the *Morehead Art Guild Show* at the Carl Perkins Center, where he received a Third Place Award for one of his pieces in his division. In June 2016, he will collaborate with Michael Hutchinson on an exhibit at the Rowan County Art Center.

Melissa Dawn Conn resides in Olive Hill, Kentucky with her husband Bryan and two fur babies, Jack the cat and Gadriel the dog. Conn has already been published in *Inscape* in 2015 and finds it to be the highlight of her writing career (so far). Her main inspirations in life are her late mother, George Eklund, Jim Henson and the internet show "Game Grumps" (especially for comedy). Conn's goal in life is to entertain people. Hopefully she has succeeded.

Sean L Corbin is an MFA candidate in creative writing at the University of Kentucky. He holds a BFA in creative writing and an MA in English from Morehead State University. His work has recently appeared in *Still: The Journal*, *Poetry Fix*, *Crow Hollow 19* and *Eunoia Review*, among others. Corbin lives in Lexington, Kentucky, with his wife, the writer Amanda Kelley, and their two sons.

Julienne Cornett is a native of Blackey, Kentucky. She grew up rooted in the unique heritage that small town Appalachia is known for. Cornett is a junior English education major and enjoys reading and writing in her spare time. She is currently working on fictional prose and continues to write poetry about the things she knows and the people and places around her.

Adam Davis is a BFA candidate with a concentration in ceramic arts and a minor in Arts Entrepreneurship. Davis completed an internship at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Snowmass, Colorado in the summer of 2015, influencing his current work in ceramics. Experimentation in form and surface decoration led Davis to use traditional techniques and handmade tools to create a body of work that is solely his own.

Dylan Doker is a junior from Erlanger, Kentucky. He is majoring in creative writing with a minor in sociology at Morehead State University. Doker is currently the vice president of the ALLYance organization on campus. He is mainly focused on poetry writing at the moment, using his Catholic upbringing and interest in dichotomies as inspiration for his poetry.

Lauren Eastep is a sophomore double major in biology and art, and has dreams of scientific and textbook illustration after graduation. Eastep was featured in *Inscape* as a freshman in 2015, and is excited and thankful to be a part of the publication again.

Daniel Edie is an art education student and junior at Morehead State University. He is currently taking studio courses in Black and White Photography and Graphic Design. Edie enjoys working across several media to produce a single body of work. Typically he combines, but is not limited to, graphic design, oil/acrylic paint, and photography.

Brooke Farmer is a junior at Morehead State University pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Art with an emphasis in Graphic Design. She presented her work in the 2015 *Sophomore Art Show* at MSU and the 2015 *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Arts Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. A native of Stanton, Kentucky, Farmer has an appreciation of ancient art history and garners inspiration from both historical artwork and contemporary illustration.

Symone Franklin is a junior at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky. Franklin is currently a co-editor of her school's literary magazine, *Incriminating Ink*, and has worked with many writers in her class to improve herself and each other.

Julieann Helton is a senior art major with an emphasis in graphic design at Morehead State University, and her work often deals with human complacency, emotion and detachment. Helton displayed artwork at the 2014 and 2015 *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Arts Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. Helton also has displayed work at the Claypool-Young Gallery and Strider Gallery at MSU, and in the *KIIS Italy: Winter and Summer 2014 Art Exhibit* at the Morrison Art Gallery in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. In 2014 she received the Outstanding Sophomore Award from MSU's Department of Art and Design.

Heather Holbrook was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and received the George M. Luckey Honors Scholarship to attend Morehead State University. She is an art education major who is currently working on a series that details contemporary mythological creatures and human perception. Holbrook recently received a Second Place Award in the Ceramics/Sculpture category at the Gateway Regional Art Center's *Juried Student Art Exhibit*.

Kristin Howell is an art major at Morehead State University. While her concentration is in graphic design, she also spends time on photography and printmaking. Howell displayed work in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Art Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, winning First Place in the Photography category (2014) and Second Place in the Drawing/Printmaking category (2015). Howell's work was published in the 2013 and 2014 issues of *Inscape*, receiving an Honorable Mention Award in 2014.

Damon Huff is a junior convergent media major at Morehead State University. He is a published poet and journalist, recently being published in the 2015 issue of *Inscape*. Huff spends his literary time trying to find a balance between the cold facts of news writing and the heated emotion of poetry.

Michael Hutchinson is a senior creative writing major and studio art minor. He has been published previously in *Inscape* and is currently exploring the relationships between his art and literary interests. Once he completes his creative writing BFA, he plans to pursue a second BFA in visual art.

Sarah Nicole Jackson is a Morehead State University art student with an incredible and colorful art career. As a high school student, she competed in multiple art shows, and her unique techniques and creative interpretations resulted in an award her senior year of high school at a Morehead State University show. Jackson's first published work in *Inscape* was an intaglio print, "Fixing in Time." In 2015, she spoke about her *Inscape* experience on the MSU television program called "Art This." Jackson is currently working with acrylic paint using a pallet knife and also practicing with oil paint. Although she enjoys learning new techniques, Jackson's preferred medium is working with acrylic paint.

Michael Jarvi is a native of Louisville, Kentucky. He is a sophomore at Morehead State University and is majoring in creative writing with a minor in Appalachian studies. He won the 2013 Secretary of State essay contest in Kentucky, received Honorable Mention in the 2014 Kentucky State Poetry Society poetry contest, and was published in the 2015 edition of *Inscape*. He's currently working on assembling enough poems and short stories to create a book.

Shian Jordan is a theatre major with a studio art minor. She has been extremely involved in Morehead State University's Theatre Department productions, both on and off stage. Jordan's off stage endeavors include designing for some of the shows, which resulted in her receiving a Graphic Design Award from the department. Jordan is new to the art department and is anxious to continue to build her skills.

Josef Krebs' poetry appears in *Agenda*, *Bicycle Review*, *Calliope*, *Mouse Tales Press*, *The Corner Club Press*, *The FictionWeek Literary Review*, *Burningword Literary Journal*, and *Crack the Spine*. A short story has been published by blazeVOX and a chapbook of his poems will be published soon by Etched Press. He's written three novels, five screenplays and a book of poetry. Krebs' film was successfully screened at Santa Cruz and Short Film Corner of Cannes film festivals. The past seven years, he's been working as a freelance writer for *Sound&Vision* magazine having previously worked at the magazine for 15 years as a staff writer and editor.

Erica Kress is a university studies major at Morehead State University and has taken various art courses. During her journey in the Basic Black and White Photography course, Kress exhibited 35mm film varying in subject matter from natural landscapes to mind-bending, long-exposure frames filled with sparkler fragments. Kress had the opportunity to display a piece of her work in the 2015 *Juried Student Art Exhibit* in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

Cierra Landrum is an art education major at Morehead State University.

Rebecca S. Lindsay has had poems published in *Change Happens*, *For a Better World*, and *Pegasus*, and short stories published in *A Few Good Words*. Her poem, “The Baker of Pompeii,” won First in the 2014 Green River Grande contest. She is currently peddling her finished novel, *The Peacemakers*, while she drafts a sequel, *The Meek*, both books based on the struggles of her Mennonite great-grandparents—pacifists and Unionists in the Shenandoah Valley during the Civil War. Lindsay served as president of the Kentucky State Poetry Society (2011, 2012) and is currently editor of *Pegasus*, KSPS poetry journal.

Jerica Lowe is a creative writing major with a minor in philosophy. She is from Rhode Island but has been living in Kentucky for several years. Currently, she is one of *Inscape*’s assistant editors. Lowe loves to read and hopes to write flavor text for video games in the future.

Ron Lucas is a former Morehead State University student from long ago. His poetry has appeared, off and on, in various publications for years. Currently, Lucas has accepted work awaiting publication in a forthcoming *Social Justice Anthology* from Emory University, a piece in the upcoming November issue of *Poetic Diversity*, and a collection called *The Mother Goose Market* (after an actual place in Hazard, Kentucky, near where he grew up) being edited by Lummo Press in L.A.

Avram McCarty is a senior biology major at Morehead State University. Coming from the heart of Eastern Kentucky — a little town known as Salyersville — he has been passionate about writing from an early age. He was published in the 2014 edition of *Inscape* and has multiple publications in Big Sandy’s *Cut-thru Review*. After graduation, McCarty plans on matriculating into PA school through the University of Kentucky. He plans to pursue an avid writing career on the side, always catering to his favorite hobby.

Paige McCreary is a senior art major at Morehead State University with a focus in illustration. Her recent work includes stories featuring female characters struggling with issues of character identity, sexuality, depression, anxiety and self-awareness. Digitally, McCreary experiments with combining digital painting with cell shading to create full-color illustrations. She exhibited work in the 2014 and 2015 Juried Student Art Exhibit in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, and was published in the 2015 issue of *Inscape*.

Alia Michaud is a native of Key West, Florida. She is an English major with a minor in creative writing at Palm Beach Atlantic University. Her work has been published in *Living Waters Review* and she's currently working on a number of short stories.

Casey Miller is a sophomore art major at Morehead State University. She is currently working on a narrative about domestic abuse, among other projects.

Hanna Mills is an art major at Morehead State University. She displayed work in the 2013 and 2015 *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Art Center in Kentucky and placed First in Digital Art both years. In 2015, she also presented pieces in the *Advanced Digital Photography* exhibition in the Strider Gallery at MSU.

Reva Murphy is a nontraditional student focusing on international studies and will be a senior in 2016. She enjoys traveling and finds that people from around the world can communicate through art. Murphy has lived in Russia and traveled to India, China, Turkey, Europe and all the lower 48 United States. It is the sharing of art through museums, festivals, exhibits, artists and shops that makes Murphy feel at one with those in foreign lands or even those in her own country. Murphy's charcoal drawings were exhibited at an MSU fundraising banquet in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

Josie Neff is attending Morehead State University and studying graphic design. Neff mostly works with watercolor and photography.

Sarah Nelson is from Ashland, Kentucky. She is majoring in creative writing with an English minor at Morehead State University. Nelson is currently working on a new short story and poetry.

Sean Porter is a second year art major at Morehead State University. He primarily works with ink and digital image manipulation.

James Prenatt is a graduate of Towson University with a degree in English. He writes a lot of poems about women and really likes breakfast food. Prenatt is about to be published in *Gay and Lesbian Review*, despite being “only a little queer.” He is currently looking for a real job and writing with any free time.

Adam Ramey is an art major at Morehead State University whose focus is abstraction in photography. Ramey’s current project focuses on shallow depth of field in photography to create abstractions in the background. His work is slowly transitioning from shallow depth of field to completely out of focus to show the viewer what objects and scenes look like through his eyes without his glasses. Ramey displayed work at the 2015 *University Open* at the ArtsPlace Gallery in Lexington, Kentucky, and at the 2015 *Juried Art Student Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Arts Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky.

Kinsey Ramey is a senior studying art at Morehead State University. She was recently awarded Second Place in photography in the *Juried Student Art Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Arts Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. Her current project focuses on macro photography to create a unique experience for the viewer. The subject of each photograph is presented in a way that most people would not normally see them.

Lamborghini Robinson won three awards in high school for her Prismacolor pencil drawings. While she is not an art major (she is currently majoring in marketing), Robinson is interested in photography. Recently, Robinson worked on her final portfolio for her Black and White Film Photography class.

Dawn Sargent is a junior at Morehead State University. Her major is CIS and she is also working toward a minor in visual communications. An artist who enjoys computers, graphic design and web design, Sargent's "Thoroughbred" painting was displayed in the *Juried Art Student Exhibit* at the Gateway Regional Arts Center in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky. She has a 5-year old Jack Russell and two playful ferrets, Biscuit and Taz. She also enjoys painting pillows for her friends and family.

Dustin J. Saunders is currently an undergraduate art major hoping to join the B.F.A. in Art & Design program at MSU.

Chanda Scobee is a 20-year-old from Winchester, Kentucky. She is studying to earn a Bachelor of Arts in English Teaching (8-12). Artistic expression has always been a passion and while Scobee has no hesitations about sharing her illustrative art, her writings have been mostly for her own enjoyment. After taking a poetry class at Morehead State University, she has been more proactive in sharing her written expressions.

Mike Sealand is a multi-media artist who brings his painting and drawing talents to his newfound love of photography. He enjoys creating images and compelling portraits using dramatic light and unique perspectives. Sealand is a senior at Morehead State University and will graduate in Spring 2016. He is an athlete and cheerleader who loves the outdoors. For future research in photography, Sealand is considering using nature in combination with storytelling and portraiture.

John R. Secor grew up in Toronto, Ontario. Trained as a medievalist and romance philologist at UNC-Chapel Hill, Dr. Secor taught all levels of French during a 31-year career at Washington State University in Pennsylvania and at Morehead State University. Now retired, he is spending more time pursuing life-long interests in words and word-play. Frequent visits to France where he taught with the Kentucky Institute for International Studies in Paris multiple times gave inspiration to a volume of poems in French and English, *Dessert du soir / Evening Sweets*, he published with Pippa Editions, Paris, France. Secor is currently preparing a cycle of poems in English, reflecting on many experiences in exotic landscapes and different times.

Josie Singleton is an art major at Morehead State University. She not only loves producing artwork but studying art history, as well. Singleton focuses on painting, photography and drawing, and enjoys many different subjects from portraits to landscapes.

Misty Skaggs, 33, was born and raised in the foothills of Eastern Kentucky, where she still resides. Her work focuses primarily on Appalachian themes and what it means to be an Appalachian moving into an unsure future. Skaggs' poetry has appeared in such literary journals as *New Madrid*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *The Pikeville Review*, *Limestone* and *Kudzu*. Her poem "The Local News" was recently selected as a part of the anthology *Quarried: Three Decades of Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*. Skaggs is also a regular contributor to *Fried Chicken and Coffee*, an online blogazine for rural literature and maintains her own blog at lipstickhick.tumblr.com.

Josie Sloan is an art major at Morehead State University. She is currently working in the digital art and animation field. While Sloan's most recent work was completed for her animation class, the portrait published in this issue of *Inscape* was created in her spare time.

Samantha S. Smallwood is an art education major at Morehead State University. Most of Smallwood's experience is in sketching still lifes. However, since arriving at MSU, she has learned more about both 2D and 3D art.

Jessie Smith finished up a semester of black and white photography in December 2015. She has been working on various projects, one of which is the piece published in this issue of *Inscape*. “Skeleton Cat” was experimental, with Smith superimposing the skeleton of a cat onto pictures of her cats.

Caillin Wile is majoring in French and English at Morehead State University. Wile has been writing since the age 13 and has been published twice, once in the anthology *From the Roaring Deep*, and once in the anthology *Seasons of Grace*.

Julie Willian is a photographer and graphic designer from Winchester, Kentucky. She is pursuing a career as a graphic designer for a nonprofit organization.



Inscape is a Morehead State University publication with a long history of cutting edge visual and literary art. Media and genres of work range from prose, poetry, short story, long narrative, non-fiction and creative essays to ceramics, photography, printmaking, drawing, painting, sculpture, design and digital art.

The Department of English offers MSU students the opportunity to submit work for publication. Students may submit poetry, fiction, non-fiction, translations or drama. The works are reviewed by a panel and top selections are included in *Inscape*.

The Department of Art and Design offers students two opportunities to have their work juried for publication. For every issue, jurors review the competitive pool of submissions for both the cover design and the visual artwork published within *Inscape*. Their selections help form a unique and diverse issue of *Inscape*.

For specific guidelines and submission dates, visit
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