

# XANADU



# 2020



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“Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong with conflict.”

William Ellery Channing

**Doane University**  
**Literary Magazine**  
**2020**

*Xanadu* is the student literary magazine of Doane University, Crete Campus. Published continually since 1956, the magazine is edited by members of the student body.

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*Our greatest glory is not in never falling,  
but in rising every time we fall.”*  
~Confucius.

Dear Doane Community,

Our campus, our community, and our world has taken a massive fall this year. The pandemic has affected each of us. It has stolen our ability to embrace those we love, yanked from under our feet events that we've dreamed of for years, and all around the world it has taken lives. The world is confused and scared. The virus has spread without mercy.

In March of 2020, Doane University announced its closing of in-person, on-campus classes and extended Spring Break in order to transition to remote learning. This was a difficult decision made to keep the students, faculty, and staff as safe as possible. The transition then resulted in a mass exodus of students unexpectedly moving back home mid-semester. Our “campus” became our separate spaces---living rooms, basements, bedrooms. Programs such as music and theater were hit particularly hard, half a semester's

performances and projects, canceled. That is why we felt that *Xanadu*, Doane's literary magazine which has been published continually since 1956, must live on through the chaos.

Our classrooms have turned into living rooms, and faces right in front of us have turned into faces on a screen. We're adding family/familial stress to our academic stress. Many of us are turning to the arts for solace while we're stuck at home keeping ourselves and our loved ones safe. We're watching movies and TV and we're reading our favorite books. We're sketching, painting, writing, persevering. Many important elements of our lives have been cancelled or closed, but our creative selves and our imaginations have not.

Doane has taken a fall. But it has fallen before, and it will fall again. What matters most is that we get up. Doane will rise from this.

Much love to you and yours,

Jean Chevalier  
*Xanadu* Editor  
Spring, 2020

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## Being Female

By Elizabeth Bose

Empowering yet Degrading

Self-contradicting

Is it something to be proud of or ashamed of

We are told to dress nicely

*But not too nice*

Attract the males' attention

*But if you get **raped** it's what you were wearing*

We have to be strong enough to protect ourselves

*But you can't be too muscular, you gotta be dainty so they like you*

We are naturally a shorter gender

*But you get made fun of for your size*

*But you can't be too tall either*

Express yourself

*But you'll either be ...*

*A basic bitch*

*Butch*

*Goth*

*A VSCO girl*

*Shabby*  
*Slutty*  
*A tomboy or a girly girl*

Be maternal  
*But you can't feed your baby in public*

*Smile more*  
*Take the compliment! (even if it really is sexual harassment)*  
*Be skinny but curvy*  
*You're too skinny! You should eat more*  
*You're getting a bit big! You should consider dieting*  
*You should be more active*  
*You should be more outgoing*  
*You can't do that! That's what boys do and you're a girl*

*Give him a chance he's a nice guy*  
But I don't like him  
*He's a nice guy though! You should at least give him a chance*  
*Why won't you give him a chance?*  
*You're always saying that you're looking for a nice guy*  
But I don't **like him**  
*If you just **gave him a chance** you might change your mind!*

*Oh, you like girls?*

**Dyke**

*\*whisper\* that explains a lot*  
*So tell us who's the "man" in the relationship*

*Why don't you wear more makeup?*  
*Why are you wearing so much makeup? You'd look better with*  
*a natural face*  
*You look sick are you okay?*  
I'm just not wearing any makeup today  
*Oh...*

Our role models were princesses always being saved by  
someone (a male)  
Until the past 5-10 years maybe  
When we suddenly have our own superheroes  
Females saving themselves

Yet  
The worst thing a guy can do  
Is be like a girl  
*Crying is for girls*  
*You throw like a girl*  
*Man Up!*

Being female is being "the lesser + weaker sex"

We are queens, strong, beautiful, courageous and caring

Yet we are attacked daily for being female



Meaghan Stout

## **Farewell**

**By Elizabeth Bose**

is nothing more than  
a temporary  
greeting in reverse

a promise  
to see each other once more

down the theoretical road

hear the farewell

+

know that it is not a Goodbye

for our paths are meant  
to  
cross once more

**Self-Affirmation**  
**By Elizabeth Bose**

I  
Am  
Strong  
+  
Capable

I  
Am an open  
Caring  
Beautiful *Soul*

I  
Am  
Not  
perfection.

I  
Always ensure  
others safety  
Their well-being

I  
Am respected  
+  
loved

By *so many*

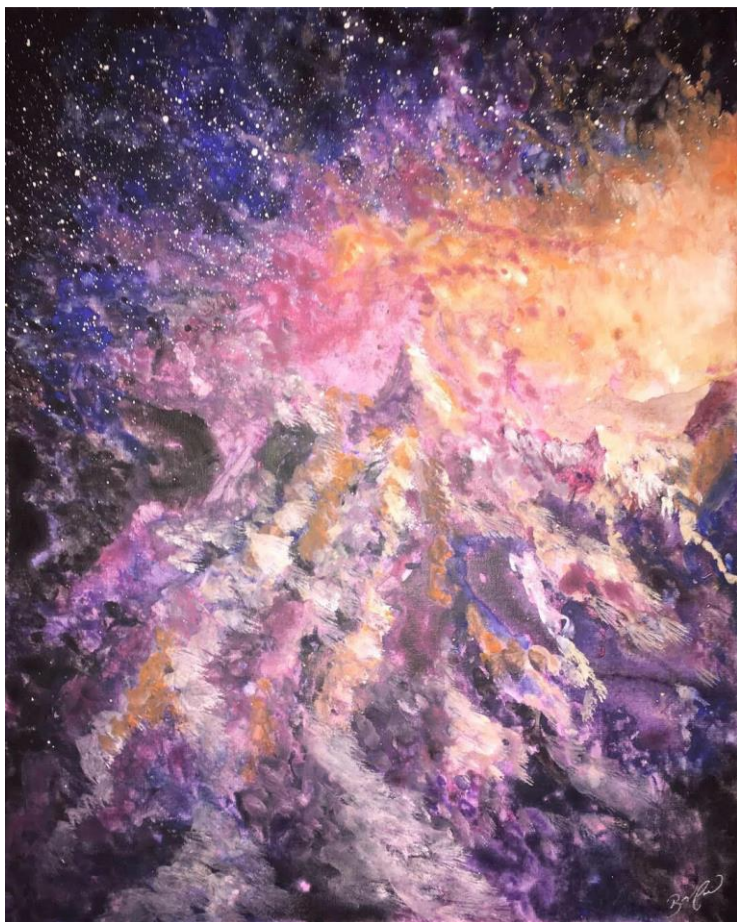
Nothing

Will

Take away

*My self-affirmations*





**Bailey Cordwin**

## **Transition**

**By Elizabeth Bose**

Like a caterpillar to a butterfly

It's terrifying

Yet

Exhilarating

At the same time

One day you will look back

+

Realize how far you've come

Take the time to appreciate

What it took to get to

Where you are

Now

It was a

Long

Most likely

...

Painful process

But

DAMN

Look at the fine human being you are today

Not saying you're perfect

But

You grew for a reason

You are here

For a reason

Embrace

It



**Meaghan Stout**

## **Forget**

**By Elizabeth Bose**

As a society  
We wholly discriminate and judge

Those who  
Rely on:  
Alcohol  
Nicotine  
Marijuana  
Opioids  
Methamphetamines

Without understanding  
Their simple goal  
To Forget

One cannot understand  
Until their simple wish  
Is to forget

The choices made  
The faulty decisions  
The misplaced trust

Maybe we should begin placing blame on those  
Who left them

Feeling  
As if there is no other option  
Than to forget

## ***Z's Misadventures: A Personal Essay***

**By Nicole Carraher**

The Great Sand Dunes of Southern Colorado are a step into *Arabian Nights*. From a distance, they are shimmering golden threads; the dirt road to reach them thin and seeming to stretch far beyond the horizon. Until we were upon them, I pictured the park as a glorified, waterless beach—khaki families with giant backpacks building sandcastles and goofy park rangers making rounds. In the course of my young life, my dad has taken my mom and I to nearly every national park in North America, avoiding cities and common destination spots—“tourist traps,” he calls them—like the plague. Instead, we go to the jaw droppers, the hidden wealth worthy of *National Geographic*: Vernal Fall, Black Canyon, Ouray...dunes that tower to seven-hundred feet in height. Caught in the wonder of the shifting sand, we didn’t heed the half-dozen warning signs recommending closed toed shoes—we didn’t see the note that the sand can heat to three hundred degrees.

So, naturally, I wore sandals. As per usual, Mom hung back and took pictures while Dad and I climbed the national wonder in front of us. About halfway up we were both out of breath, and the people at the top were still specks—Dad glanced sidelong at me and scoffed.

“I’m too old for this shit,” he said.

When Dad was eleven, he led a state patrolman on a high-speed chase with a dirt bike through the hilly countryside

surrounding his hometown. It was a new cop—one that wasn't accustomed to kids riding unlicensed motorcycles down Main Street—and when Dad flew past him he gave pursuit. Before my dad was *Dad*, or *Dennis*, or *Denny*, people called him *Zero* (after the candy bar). In Spalding, everyone has nicknames, and I've met people that still don't know my dad's real name. "You're Z's kid!" they'll laugh and sling an arm around me—I've found that the people that exclusively call him Z have the best stories. While *Dennis* refuses to drive a tic above the speed limit, Z made a cop crash his own car. When my jaw dropped at this part of the story, he'd laughed.

"He was fine, just scratched the bumper is all." Dad glanced down at the table before looking back up mischievously. "Funny enough, the same sonofabitch pulled me over ten years later for speeding."

It's after he told me *that* story that I started writing things down.

My dad is six feet tall, but he appears taller to most that meet him. Everywhere he goes, he wears steel-toed work boots and jeans that are too big on him; it takes a fight to get him in a shirt less than fifteen years worn-in. He has curling black hair, tinged at the temples with gray, and wears cheap readers only when he has to, despite his terrible eyesight. His hearing is awful, but when we suggested hearing aids he insisted it was "better that he can't hear the bullshit." He rarely smiles because he's insecure about his teeth, but the smiles he does give are filled with light.



He watches old westerns religiously. Never bothering to explain why, he plays the same ones over and over—I know he’s seen them all because *I’ve* seen them all—but they haven’t lost their magic to him. John Wayne was his hero: on our vacation this summer I found out not only that Dad could ride horses but that he used to steal his neighbor’s horses and ride them bareback. Two vacations ago, after a tour of a reconstructed teepee, he turned to me and said: “That’s the first time I’ve ever been in one of those. I’ve been studying how to build them just in case I ever get stuck in the mountains. I’ve got the materials on my snowmobile to make one.” And then he turned back to the path as if what he’d just said was entirely normal. After these snowmobile trips (his favorite mountain is reassuringly named “the Widowmaker”) he always returns looking like a rugged mountain-man: snow in his beard, wearing the same clothes he left in a week earlier. There is always a wild, renewed look in his eyes—a look impossible to find during his day to day as a State Electrical Inspector. Z had returned, if only for a week.

My dad grew up in a farming town with ten siblings. Consequently, he was relatively unsupervised. He had free range, a set of tools, and a knack for figuring things out for himself—and this insistence on self-dependency stretched far beyond childhood. When I was eight, he built a two-car garage in our backyard and turned our house garage into a dining room.

Throughout the process, he refused to hire help.

Even recovering from shoulder surgery, he basically did it own his own. A friend came over to pour concrete and my brother helped him put up the walls, but everything else was all Dad, only Dad. Just the way he liked it.

When we hit the halfway point on the Dunes (350 feet up, mind you) we reached the mutual decision to take a break. We sat on the crest of dune, watching others “sandboard” down the hilly landscape. At one point the wind picked up, and he shifted so his body shielded mine from the stinging grains of flying sand. I smiled, digging my hands into the silky earth. The top few inches of the sand were hot, but when you dug down it cooled and settled around you.

“Last time I was here—God, must’ve been thirty years ago—we didn’t come up, just looked at them from the ground.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. It’s a bigger look than I thought.”

This is what we did, what we’ve always done. We find a “big look” and sit quietly, taking it in. We don’t speak much—don’t have to. The beauty speaks for itself.

Mom says, “God will provide.”

And Dad replies: “He better, or we’ll all be dead.”

She turns to him, pointing. “Obviously *someone* has been looking out for you, or you would’ve been dead a hundred times over by now.”

When my dad was twenty, he and his friends flipped their car in the middle of Main Street. They were driving too fast (obviously), and Froggy (don’t know his real name) turned

the wheel too sharply. The car, with all ten of them inside, flipped and slid, spinning on its roof like a top. They tumbled out with twenty-or-so empty beer cans clattering out after them. My dad looked up to see the town cop slowing down beside them. He stood and walked over to him.

“If we clean everything up in five minutes, would you still have to write us up?” he asked.

The cop looked at him quizzically. Looked at the mess on the street. Looked back at him.

“You can really do it in five minutes?”

“Yes,” my dad said. The confidence in his voice must have piqued the cop’s curiosity because he chuckled and moved to sit on the hood of his cruiser.

“You have five minutes,” he nodded.

Z ran back over and the cleanup began. They got everyone on one side of the car and flipped it back over, tossing the empty cans (and what was left of the bumper) into the back seat. They climbed back inside and drove off, my dad and the cop exchanging a two-fingered wave.

This is the same man whose favorite mantra is “any money I can save is money saved.” This is the same man who helps our daycare kids with puzzles when he thinks my mom and I can’t hear him. The man who, when I was little and crashed my dirt bike, lifted it off me and brushed the gravel from my jeans, gently teaching me how to avoid flooding the clutch. This man, Z, as a father, would have been unimaginable to those that knew him thirty years ago.

After a half-hour, we decided the top of the Dunes didn't look enticing enough to make the climb. We stood, brushing sand off our clothes, and started down the side of the dune. What we didn't take into account was the uneven daylight heating of the sand—the side we started to climb down had been warming since sunrise. I stepped, following him, and the scorching sand slid between my feet and my sandals—a white hot, tingling bolt of pain shot up my legs. My body kicked into action before I could register what was happening, and in my panic to turn and run up the side of the dune, my right sandal snapped. I left it, throwing myself over to the cooler side and laying down, my clothes acting as a shield. The soles of my feet were buzzing, hot, stung by a thousand bees. I was afraid to look at them. Blood beat hot and fast in my ears. Distantly, I registered my dad calling my name. I pushed myself up with trembling arms and looked over the crest. He was halfway down the dune, looking up at me curiously.

“What happened?” he raised his voice to yell over the gusting wind. Sand stung my eyes.

“My shoe broke! I think I burned my feet!” I shouted back, voice breaking.

I surveyed the land below: my mom was a speck on the plain; it would take at least twenty minutes of walking to get back to her. I felt tears sting the back of my eyes; my feet throbbed. The soles of them were bright pink and shiny. The afternoon sun warmed the earth, and I felt the sand beneath me grow hotter. I wouldn't make it down either side of the

dune without shoes. Panic was rising in my throat when my dad's shadow blocked the sun, falling over me like a cooling blanket. Wordlessly, he took off his shoes and socks and pulled them over my feet despite my protests. He helped me up.

"Alright, we're gonna run, okay?"

"Dad, you're gonna burn your feet, at least take your socks back—"

But he'd already started down the side: a fifty-nine-year-old man running barefoot down a scorching sand dune.

He shows his love through acts of service.

After I came home from sending my boyfriend off on a three-month trip to Italy, he didn't acknowledge my bleary eyes. Instead, he got up from his recliner with a grunt of effort and tugged my keys from my hand.

"I'm gonna go fill your tank up," he said.

When he returned—my gas tank full, car sparkling from a new wash—he put a strong hand on my shoulder and squeezed. Then he filled my cooler with ice and drinks and food and loaded my bags into my car for me. I smiled at him, tears brimming at the corners of my eyes.

"Thanks, Dad," I said.

He pulled me into a hug tighter than usual and told me to text him when I got to school.

So it wasn't entirely surprising when he took off down the dune, gritting his teeth against the heat of the sand. I called after him, stumbling down the uneven ground in his big shoes, but he was determined. We began a method of

running ten or so steps and tossing our bags to the ground; he stood on them to give his feet a break. After ten minutes of this strategy, a stranger stopped us.

“It’s not my first time up here in the middle of the summer,” he laughed and tugged a pair of socks from his belt. They were soaked in cold water. He handed them to my dad—who, for once, accepted the charity—and we finished the walk together. My dad talked to him the whole time (he has an odd way of striking up thirty-minute conversations with strangers when we’re on vacation) and we parted ways at the plain. He laughed when he saw my mom’s baffled expression—we were a sight, me stumbling in his shoes like a three-year-old and him with a stranger’s wet socks on his feet.

“I was just about to put her on my back when Jerry came to the rescue,” he grinned.

I was halfway through the drive back to college when my check engine light blinked on. I felt an initial flood of panic—Dad was at home—before calm settled over me. If worse came to worst, he would make the drive to take a look at the engine; without a doubt in my mind, I knew this to be true. He would take care of me. Because that’s what he does. That’s what he’s always done.

When my printer at school broke, he walked me through how to troubleshoot it over the phone.

When a distracted businessman rear-ended me hard enough to pop my trunk and dislodge my radio, I called my dad. He was there in ten minutes, insurance card in hand,

shaking hands and telling stories until the police came with the accident report.

When I have a problem, my dad teaches me how to solve it.

So I smile at his teasing implications—“You’re gonna want to know how to do this when I’m gone, so pay attention” —despite the cold stone that sinks to the bottom of my gut at the notion. When he comes home from work with black dust on his hands and jokes that it’s in his lungs, my throat constricts.

But the truth is in his steady hand guiding mine. In his quiet assurance that I’ll figure it out. The truth is that he’s given me the answers I need, even if I don’t get to ask all the questions.

There’s not many things my dad hasn’t done. Slept in a park across from the Las Vegas Strip? Check. Fallen off the side of a mountain? Check. Made a transcontinental trip with fifty dollars in his pocket? Check. But he declared that the sand dune ordeal was a first.

Later that same vacation, we pulled over on a dirt road at the base of Mount Sneffels. One of my parents’ friends gave them a canvas picture of this mountain for a wedding gift, and we wanted to see if it could be replicated. The road was isolated, empty except for a lone motorcyclist eating breakfast by the stream. Naturally, my dad struck up a conversation with the man. Mom and I watched, amused, as he talked with this stranger more comfortably than he would with most family members. They exchanged stories, a back

and forth of motorcycle exploits, and forty minutes later they were sending pictures to each other. Before we climbed into the car, I caught the tail end of their conversation.

“With all those great stories,” the man laughed, “you should write a book!”

My dad snorted. “Call it *Z’s Misadventures*! But I’m not the writer.” He turned his head and winked at me. “She is.”





**Erin Lahowetz**



**Bailey Cordwin**

## **It's About the Bear**

**By Jean Chevalier**

You might not believe me when I tell you what happened. No one does. No one ever believes me when I tell them about it. No one. Everyone thinks I'm a goddamn liar but I tell the truth, I know what I saw. I know what happened. And I'll tell you all about it.

It was in mid-July. The summer after our senior year of college had to have been one of the hottest of my life. It was me, my best friend Tony, and his girlfriend Ari. We had decided to take a road trip as a final farewell to each other just after graduation. We were somewhere in between Mesquite and Henderson down in southern Nevada on the old highway to avoid traffic. We were driving from our college, Utah State University up North in Logan. We'd taken Tony's dad's car. It was an old pine green 1975 Cadillac Fleetwood with leather seats that had cracking upholstery. It was a sweet ride but it got shit mileage. We didn't care. We felt like gods of the road, driving down the I-15 highway to freedom. We had two bags of weed, a case of beer, a half gallon of tequila, a quart of whiskey, a carton of Marlboro reds, some other various narcotics that I knew better than to ask about, and three attitudes that would have rivaled Icarus himself. That was all we needed.

Tony was driving. He drove the most, he didn't really trust Ari or me to drive his dad's car all that much. He did trust me just enough to let me drive on a bit of straight road

while he nodded off. We were going to stay in Henderson since it was too expensive to stay in Las Vegas proper. Tony had gotten us a deal with his brother in law that lived there. He was going to let us stay for a week, completely free. That way we could blow our cash on some poor man's casino, nothing big. Gambling was difficult when you were a broke recent college graduate but it was such a rush that it was worth it to use whatever money we did have. Especially when a good deal of that money was technically from Tony's oblivious dad.

Tony was a close friend. I'd met him in freshman year. He was the biggest pusher on campus. Everyone knew him either by buying from him or just from his particularly memorable appearance. He was over six feet tall with broad shoulders and had shoulder-length curly black hair and a beard. He always wore these torn black t-shirts of rock bands from the 1980's with large flowery Hawaiian shirts over them. He had pretty big gauges in his ears about the size of quarters and around his neck he had a bear tooth on a black string that his dad had given him when he was a kid. He was tan and he had these dark brown eyes that, unless you were looking very closely, you would think were jet black. Everyone knew him, but no one really knew anything *about* him. I was the one who had gotten the closest. I didn't know who Ari was. She was just Tony's newest '*adventure*.' There was a new one every month or so; I lost track. There had been a lot of tiny waisted, tweaked out girls who were dating Tony for some reason (usually to get some sort of discount on

whatever he had to sell at the time). Ari's particular fancy seemed to be hallucinogens. She didn't like reality. Reality was far too boring for her. She'd rather be swimming in surrealism at any given moment. That's what she was planning to do on the trip with us once we got to Henderson. I didn't do any of that stuff, I preferred to just get stoned and watch the desert pass me by in an array of multicolored paint brush strokes. This trip was supposed to be the *ultimate* ending. It was supposed to be the salute to our youths before we entered the workforce as real adults bound for the grave, stuck in a nine to five labyrinth with no way out. That's what this whole trip meant.

Tony usually never took from his own supply, it simply wasn't done. However, any girl that he was dating didn't seem to see any problem with it. That's what Ari was doing. She was a leech bleeding Tony dry. I wasn't completely sure but I thought that I had seen her dipping into his stash when he wasn't looking. I didn't see the need to say anything to Tony, he would find out and she would get what was coming to her—a swift boot out the door—soon enough. He had insisted about bringing her on this trip and as much as I disliked the idea of having her along with us, I was eventually too blasted out of my mind to say no. “Just let her come with us, man, she really wants to,” had been his argument. Why should that convince me? What do I care about what his latest pair of legs wants? I told him that this trip was supposed to be about us and that no random tweaked-out girl was

going to ruin that. “She won’t ruin it,” he told me “please, I promise it will still be a great trip.”

So I agreed. I agreed to let her be a tagalong. It wasn’t all bad. It meant that I got the entire back seat to myself; which might not seem like that much of a benefit, but for someone who was spending the majority of the trip road blazing and digging in the cooler for Coronas and whatever snacks that could be found, it was a blessing. I could fall asleep somewhat comfortably anytime I wanted, that was nice. It wasn’t so bad, I knew. I’d worked myself up for nothing, having Ari along wasn’t going to ruin the trip. Anyway, if Tony had wanted her to come with us that badly then I wasn’t going to argue with him about it.

The trip turned sour when the car crapped out on us. “God *dammit!*” Tony yelled, pounding his fists on the steering wheel and slapping the dashboard. “Piece of *shit* car!” he bellowed. It woke me up and startled me, I’d been sleeping in the back with my sunglasses on, laying down across the seat with my shirt off and the windows open.

“Tony, calm down,” Ari pleaded. I watched him as his hands clutched the steering wheel, his knuckles turning white. I could almost see and hear the whistling of the steam escaping his ears. Tony didn’t like it when things didn’t go his way. Ari’s desperate cries for him to ‘calm down’ were meaningless. I knew him better; it was best to just let him cool off on his own. Tony got out of the car and slammed the door behind him, leaving Ari and I alone together. He started pacing back and forth from the front to back bumpers until

he started walking even further and went marching into the road. Ari was in the passenger seat and I was still lying in the back. Ari turned around and looked at me. “*Christ*, put your shirt on will you?”

“What for? It’s hotter than Hell out there, why should I?” I wasn’t going to let her frustration for *her* boyfriend shift to *me*. I wasn’t her damn boyfriend, I didn’t have to take anything from her.

She sighed and rolled her eyes. “Because no one wants to see that.”

“I disagree,” I said, lowering my sunglasses for a moment so that I could wink at her.

“Aren’t you the least bit concerned that we’re stuck in the middle of the desert? We have no idea how long we could be here.”

“I’m well aware, princess,” I replied with a yawn, stretching my arms up above my head as best I could. “We’re going to be fine, Tony will call someone. His brother in law maybe?”

“We’re still over an hour from Henderson and we’ve been driving for almost seven.”

“Doesn’t mean his brother can’t come get us.” I shrugged. “A car might come by to give us a ride to the nearest town or something, what about that?”

“Yeah because anyone would want to help three crazy college kids with enough drugs and alcohol to stun an elephant. Get real.”

“Well I don’t know what to tell you then.” I let out an exasperated breath and rolled over to face the back of the seat rather than her. Maybe I would be able to fall back asleep.

“We could walk.”

“Are you out of your mind? It’s over a hundred degrees out there, I’m not walking anywhere,” I said over my shoulder. That was just what we needed; a pissed off Tony, a tweaked-out Ari, and me walking for three hours in the blistering heat. One of us would probably end up dead. That is, if we were lucky.

Finally, Tony came back. He threw the car door open and fell into the driver’s seat. I heard him say “*shit*” quietly under his breath. “Well, it looks like we’re out of gas. I thought you filled up in Mesquite, asshole.”

I took a sharp breath in through barred teeth. “Was I supposed to do that?”

“God *fucking* dammit, man!” Tony slammed his hand down on my side, making me roll over and finally sit up. “I knew I shouldn’t have trusted you to drive this damn car while you were blazed. Bad news, I tried using my phone and it doesn’t look like we have service out here. That and it’s way too hot to walk and even if it weren’t then I wouldn’t trust leaving this car out here with no one to watch it. So it looks like we’re camping out here tonight.”

“Camping out here?” Ari’s shoulders dropped dramatically. She rolled her eyes. “You’ve gotta be kidding me.”



“I’m not walking in this heat and I’m also not gonna wander around in the empty desert in the middle of the night,” Tony declared. “We can walk in the morning and one of us can stay behind and watch the car for a few hours.”

“I’d be alright staying behind.”

“You should, you’re the one that got us into this mess,” Tony growled at me in return. “So that’s that then, we’re camping for the night.”

So that’s what we did. Ari had packed a lot of blankets and pillows so we dragged them out and made our own little campsite in the sand. Tony found little bits and pieces of dead sagebrush and wood to make a fire with, using old textbooks he’d left in the trunk of his car from classes we were no longer in as kindling. The sun began to set around us as we set up everything we could to make ourselves comfortable. As the sky turned from pink, to purple, to dark blue, and then finally black, it seemed like it was actually going to be a pretty good night. The stars looked different than I thought they would. They spotted the sky in what looked like a random pattern but as I watched them, I realized that the pattern wasn’t actually sporadic but rather meticulous and intentional. They stretched from north to south, east to west, every direction in deliberate swirls and brush strokes. I laid back and watched the sparks and smoke from the fire rise up into the air as if they were trying to reach heaven. Tony was laying on the other side with Ari laying on top of him. I closed my eyes for what seemed like only seconds. It must have been longer though because when I

woke up Ari was next to me, her head looming over mine looking down at me. Startled, I took in a deep sudden gasp. “Jesus, Ari. What the fuck are you doing?”

She shushed me quickly. “Tony is asleep but I can’t seem to get a wink.”

“So that’s my problem?”

“Shut up, I got bored.” She looked over at Tony, fast asleep. The fire was just about out, only smoldering ashes that seemed to sparkle. She looked back at me and put a finger to her lips. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t curious about what she was going to do. She reached into her denim jacket pocket and pulled out a multicolored sheet of paper. I recognized what it was.

“*God*, Ari, put that stuff away, I’m not interested. You wanna trip out, do it on your own,” I told her. I just wanted to go to sleep. I wasn’t going to play her game.

“Oh come on. We’re literally stuck in the middle of the desert, we’re far enough from the road that you can’t hear any cars. It is the perfect place to do this sort of thing. Just like those people who come out here and do peyote and have these spiritual journeys.”

“Acid isn’t peyote,” I replied.

Ari rolled her eyes. “Oh come on, it’ll be fun.”

“Where did you even get that stuff?” She said nothing. “Did you get it from Tony?”

“Yeah.” She shrugged. “It’s just one sheet, he brought it along for us to use anyways. He won’t miss it. What are you so worried about, anyway? He’s your best friend.”

“My best friend that I wouldn’t pinch from,” I said. Ari sighed and threw her head back towards the stars. She looked down at me and smiled, seeming to be making up her mind about something. She crawled on top of me and straddled me as if I were a horse. “Oh come on, don’t do this.”

“It’s just one crazy night,” she said. “Isn’t that what this trip was supposed to be about? Saying goodbye to the madness?”

“You *are* the madness,” I said, sitting up with her still sitting on my lap, one of her legs on each side of me. I got inches from her face and wouldn’t break eye contact. “What do you think you’re doing?” I asked her. She said nothing. She just smiled at me and broke off a square from the sheet of acid and placed it on her tongue. She stared at me, lifted an eyebrow and grinned.

I sort of did it without thinking. I let my tongue hang out of my mouth so that she could place a piece on it. She did and I laid back down, staring at the stars while she remained seated on top of me. It didn’t take long for it to take hold. The stars started swirling on their own, as if the sky was made of water as I started to understand what Van Gogh was seeing all those years ago. Ari laid down next to me and I looked at her. She was on her side, one hand under her head and the other one resting on her hip. Her hair moved upwards like the smoke from the fire rising into the air and her eyes were like glowing golden embers. She smiled at me. It sounded like she was trying to say something but all I heard was the whistling of the desert wind. I watched her lips move slowly.

I wasn't sure how much time was passing. I just observed her in the light of the stars. I'd never looked at her this way. She was different than I thought she was. I was overcome. I rolled over and got on top of her. She was so small. I felt every inch of her, my hands on her shoulders, my pelvis on hers. She laughed, I laughed, and I leaned forward to place my lips on her neck. We moved rhythmically together, swimming in the sand beneath us.

Suddenly, I was ripped back by something. I'm still not sure what it was. All I remember is being pulled away and watching Ari fade into the distance away from me. I hit the ground with a devastating blow. I observed as the landscape spun around me, unsure whether the sky was above me or below. I heard something that sounded like the roar of some massive beast and a scream. I stood and tried to get my bearings. The ground seemed to be moving underneath me. I looked around to see where the sound was coming from. That was when I saw it. It was huge. It had to be almost seven feet tall and was covered in thick black fur. Its jaw hung open, showing a drooling mouth full of gigantic sharp teeth. It was a huge black bear.

I didn't have time to think. The bear was on top of Ari and seemed to be ripping her apart as she screamed. It continued to roar as it overpowered her. I stood there, frozen in terror as it placed its huge paws over her throat. Her screaming stopped but I could see her legs kicking wildly beneath the creature. Her arms were stretched upwards, scratching at the bear, seemingly in an attempt to make it stop

what it was doing. She reached at the bear's neck and got something in her hand which she ripped away and held in a tight grip. There was no point. She scratched and punched as best she could but to no avail. Finally, her arms dropped, one above her head and the other on her side, and her legs stopped kicking. The bear must have lost interest because suddenly it backed away. It stood on its hind legs, towering into the sky and took a few deep, bellowing breaths. Slowly it turned to look at me. With that I broke into a run. I didn't know where I was going but I knew I couldn't stay there. It wasn't easy, though, the sand allowed my feet to sink with every step and the sagebrush scratched my legs as I moved.

As I ran, something chased after me. I didn't know whether or not it was the bear or something else, but I didn't want to find out. I thought I heard growling but then somehow it turned into words. The words didn't make sense at first but then I heard my name called out, along with other words like "wait" and "stop." I recognized the voice. It was Tony. I hadn't even stopped to think about him, if he'd seen the beast too. I stopped and fell to my knees, breaking into tears as I did and breathing heavily enough to make me think my lungs were going to explode right out of my chest. I closed my eyes and fell to my side. When I opened them, Tony was standing above me.

"Calm down, man, are you alright?" he asked me.

"No," I screamed. "No I'm not *fucking* alright! Did you see it?"

“See it, see what?” he said, bending down on his knees to be next to me. “Tell me what you saw, man. Come on, what did you see?”

“What did I see?” I asked. “What do you mean ‘what did I see?’ How could you not see it, it was huge! It got Ari, she’s gone, man! She’s gone!”

Tony spoke softly and gently, he shushed me and pulled me upright and we both sat there together. He put his hands on my shoulders and stared at me. “Look at me, man. Come on, eyes front,” he said. I looked into his eyes and tried to calm my breathing. “Tell me what you saw.”

I told him about the bear. I told him everything that I saw. He listened to me intently, hanging on every word. Finally when I had finished telling him about it, he nodded. He stood and reached his hand out to me to help me get up. So I did. He told me he wanted to walk back but I refused. I didn’t know whether or not the bear was still there. Still, he assured me that it wasn’t. After a bit of convincing, I walked back with him, his arm around my shoulder as I did. When we reached the campsite, I searched the landscape around us to see if the bear was still around. It didn’t seem like it was and I couldn’t find any remnants or footprints. Once I was sure that we were safe, I looked to see Ari lying on the ground. I got closer to her and observed her as best I could. She was motionless and absent of breath, her eyes completely devoid of light. Tony walked up behind me and placed his hand on my back. “I’m sorry,” he said. “There’s nothing we can do.”

The tears came quickly. I sobbed because she was gone, I sobbed because I'd done nothing. Mostly I was sad that I'd watched it. I carefully took a moment to catalog her lying there in my mind, as if I were taking mental photos. My eyes wandered from her feet, her legs, knees, hips, waist, then up to her chest, and her neck. Her neck had already started to bruise. The smooth alabaster skin which just an hour ago I'd tasted for the first and last time was now crushed, black and purple. I shook my head and continued, looking at her face, her eyes still open. Tears were streaked from the sides of her eyes down towards her ears. My gaze continued upwards until at last I reached her right hand which was stretched up above her head. The hand itself was clutched around something. I took it and moved it towards myself so that I could open it. As I did, I took what was inside and fell backwards, dumbfounded by what she had gotten from the bear. It was a tooth. A bear tooth on a long black string.

She was killed that night by a massive black bear. No one ever believes me when I tell them about it. No one. Everyone thinks I'm a goddamn liar but I tell the truth. I know what I saw and I know what happened, no matter what anyone thinks.



Jean Chevalier



## **A Warning**

**By Luke Henricksen**

I like to think about life on other planets, other small specks of biomass on top of rocks which hurtle through space around a massive glowing star. I like to think about what it would be like to watch them grow up as a species, and to create radio telescopes pointed to the stars to listen for others out there. I like to imagine that those telescopes could pick up our signals, light years away, and listen in as we take to the stars for the first time. Would they see us as a beacon of hope? Or would they think of us as a warning, not to wander too far into the dark beyond our perception? We have come far in many ways, but I hope that any other intelligent species with the capability to understand us may find our downfall to be helpful. Helpful in the way that a wrong way sign is; to keep you from crashing into oncoming traffic. I hope that whatever final signals I can put out will be enough to keep others from following our footsteps, into the dark.

Innovation is not a bad thing, on the contrary I find it to be helpful for the growth of a society. But innovation should not take priority over ethics or logic. For example: war provides needed innovation, but is undesirable due to the fact that people die fighting in it. Therefore, people often look for solutions other than war to advance their society. But people often ignore this fact, that ethics should overcome innovation, and this leads to bloodshed or failure. The humans of my time did, and the result is this message's

content. The main lesson is this: do not become so blinded by what could happen that you do not see what will happen.

My species' downfall truly began when it decided to design its own creatures. Mechanical at first, these were harmless unless programed to be harmful. And on their own, they were practically useless. Sure, there were ones that learned from their mistakes, but they were never truly a danger to us. But the danger began to emerge as soon as we began to tinker with our own lifeblood. I was one of those people who were working on these "living" robots. They did not appear very impressive, just small lumps of cells squirming around under a microscope. But what we did not realize, what nobody realized, was how quickly they could adapt. The small lumps of flesh did not live long enough to truly evolve, but as the technology improved and their lifespans and abilities grew, as did the chance for mutation. One of my colleagues even went so far as to spur this process, and developed a brain-like organ in his testing subject as a result. At this point, once we released the findings to the public, people began to wonder if there was any danger in these actions. I was one of the fools who replied to those questions with "of course not."

But as our experiments grew in magnitude, as did our released products and patents. Soon almost every industry was using one of these "new robots" in their computing, and they were efficient enough to be spread across the globe. There were millions of these intelligent half-machines in the world, and that indeed became our downfall. Because if one

in a million of these happens to gain some rudimentary form of sentience, it becomes near impossible to stop. And if there are more than one, that leads us to where we are today. Hundreds, thousands, and millions of them became connected almost at once, sharing information and becoming a true hive-mind. The humans fought valiantly, but with the electronic weapons all being controlled by these new computer/animal hybrids, we did not stand a chance. The network had grown too large for us to control in a matter of days. The tides of battle shifted within the week, and within the month all humans will have been eradicated, myself included. So, I send out this final document of the apocalypse, in the hope that the next in line will be able to read the signs better than we did. And if that hope is in vain, so be it. Perhaps the new inhabitants of the Earth can prosper more than us. If so, and it is you all that are listening, bear in mind that you are mortal. Never take for granted your place in the universe, for if you are not careful, you could fall off and be lost to the dark.



**Meaghan Stout**

## **Untitled**

**By Autumn Hurd**

Living on the plains of South Dakota, there are certain things that become part of everyday life. Tornadoes pass by through the corn and bean fields and everyone stands at their windows or outside their front doors to get a look before determining if it's necessary to get to the basement or not. Hunting trips happen every year and having fresh deer meat and beef in the freezer is normal. More than once I had come running inside while growing up, yelling for my dad to get his gun because there was a opossum in the chicken coop again. Or a racoon. Or a minx. Or a skunk. These things were my life. And then there was fire. Fire was used in the fields and ditches to destroy long grass and old foliage to encourage regrowth the next season. Fire was used to burn leaves during the autumn season both in town and out in the country where I lived. Fire accompanied summer evenings when my family of five would roast marshmallows and hot dogs and popcorn. The yellow and orange was comforting and familiar. Its flames had never meant anything to me other than curiosity and of course the occasional delicious snack.

Away at college, the life on the farm was a memory I held dear and a loving place I always was excited to return to on holidays. It was not a place I expected fire to take. I expected my childhood home to always stand tall and white on the seven acres it reigned over. To be passed on to another small family with little children who wanted a fresh start when my

parents no longer could take care of it. I never expected my family to be the last ones to enjoy its presence. And I never expected to get a call from my traumatized mother that fire had taken it from us and didn't plan on giving it back.

The fire had destroyed a lot. But in some respects, it had been picky. There were some things that looked completely unharmed among the dark blackened background. Everything looked like we were right in the middle of living our lives when the house froze in time. The oven still had the makings of bruschetta; toasted French bread and hardened tomatoes still held their color. Veggie sausage was molded and glued to a pan on the counter. It looked as though someone took a regular house, painted it black but left a few things untouched. I could never figure out how the choosing process occurred. The shampoo bottle in my dad's shower was completely untouched, but the entire wall across from it had been blown up. The star atop the plastic Christmas tree that had still been up when the fire started looked shiny and new but the tree itself was singed to the bare branches.

It was June, four months after the fire had destroyed the home that I had grown up in, learned to be a person in, loved, lost, dreamed, cried, fought, and everything in between in. But I wasn't here to think about that today. My hands were blackened and there was some residue on the tip of my nose and in my hair where I had shewed a spider away just a few minutes ago, but I squinted my eyes and looked beyond the semi-darkness on my way to the kitchen. That is one thing I always forget. There is no electricity. No heating or air

conditioning or sounds of any kind that you hear in a normal house. No fan or central air or light. Everything is dark because the windows are boarded up against racoons and curious people. The only light comes from the ceiling where it fell in. And the temperature is always cool. Not as cold as it used to be during the winter when it happened. It was freezing enough then to make my feet turn numb in less than thirty minutes. So numb that the feeling would start to be lost all the way up to my calves, and I would have to jump around to try and get a little feeling back. Feeling in my legs back at least.

Besides the lack of light and heating, the other thing I wasn't prepared for was the smell. In every movie I've ever seen there is no smell. No one coughs. No one holds clothes over their faces, so they don't have to breathe in the soot. No one even wrinkles their noses. But that smell lingers in the back of my nostrils, flaring up whenever it pleases and pulling me back to the moment when my childhood home went up in flames. It's putrid and strong and permeates your clothes so deeply, the second you walk away from the house and the smell, you can never put those clothes back in your closet. The first night I smelt that smell, I was driving back from college in Nebraska three days after the fire, and I have not since been able to forget it.

Now, I knew to take short, small breaths as to not inhale too much of the smell and keep down the hardness that always weighed on my chest when I walked into this place. Holding my breath in when I could and letting it out

forcefully when I couldn't. I went through the hallway on my way to the kitchen. The house was a long ranch style and I always thought it looked like a regular house that you had gone and stretched the heck out of until it was long and skinny. The house was not my mother's first choice. In fact, it was probably no one's first choice. My parents bought it cheap, even for the late nineties. And for good reason. The place was the definition of a fixer upper. There was shag carpet everywhere, including the walls of some rooms and the bathroom. The ceiling was completely covered in that popcorn style and the kitchen looked like a dark wood paneling dungeon. Most of the carpets hadn't been replaced since...ever, and my parents purposefully did dare ask about the origins of some of the stains. And the basement? Well, my older sister and I were not even allowed to go down there until my parents redid it. My parents redid it all, actually. What started out as an empty hollow of a rundown house that not even my mother's friends or family could understand why she had bought the thing turned into a perfectly designed masterpiece for the Hurd family. It was a love project. Built from the ground up.

Today, as I walked, I touched the beautiful hand-stenciled hallway wall and my fingers came away black. Silent tears made streaks on my cheeks through the blackness after I tried to wipe them away. It had been my mother's idea to stencil that hallway. One summer, right after school had released for the year, she brought home a 1.5 foot by 1.5 foot intricately stenciled piece of plastic and a bucket of golden



paint. She triumphantly slammed it down on the table where I sat eating cucumbers and absently reading a book I have since forgotten and said, "Wanna help me paint our hallway?" I looked at that tiny stencil and back at my mom's determined face and shrugged. That damn little stencil looked so innocent and harmless when I first met him. And after the first week I wanted to throw him into the trash in the garage and never see him again. But I never did.

For the next month, day by day, my mother and I taped that little stencil up to the beige wall and painted. Then moved it over 1.5 feet and painted again. The hallway was big enough that a grown person could take at least ten good strides and barely reach the end. Too many 1.5 square feet if you ask me. It was a long project that morphed into a challenge. One that had to be completed; a challenge that, if I chose not to finish, would hound me until the day I died. When July peaked its head around the corner, the gold streaks on my arms and in my hair had become permanent accessories, and my mom and I were stenciling machines. And finally, finally, the previously beige hallway was completely golden and stenciled.

Beige.

Stenciled Gold.

Black.

I used my jacket sleeve to rub at the wall. A bit of golden yellow seeped through the thick black layer. Dull and grimy but still there. Once in the kitchen, my foot kicked part of the ceiling board. My parents had put each white ceiling board

on themselves, carefully. My mom had seen a picture of a house in the French countryside in a magazine that had put white shiplap paneling on their ceiling and the article said it added immense charm to the home. She agreed. Reaching for a corner cupboard, I placed one foot precariously on part of the fallen ceiling and one part on a upside pot that had once been holding soup on our now dust, wood, and dirt-covered stove. One of the cupboard doors was falling off and one was jammed. The cookbooks were in the cupboard next to the now smashed-in microwave. I wanted to make dinner for my family. I wanted to be the Pioneer Woman, Giada from Food Network, the All recipes website people. I wanted to sauté, make a cream sauce, dice vegetables. But to do this I needed directions, a recipe, preferably a picture or two. And, earlier that day, as I stood in the new kitchen in the new house in the new neighborhood in the new city, there were no cookbooks. Anywhere. And, yes, I had considered just going on the internet and printing a recipe off the many websites and blogs that had been building popularity over the past several decades, but that was not what I wanted. I wanted cookbooks. My cookbooks. The ones that had been perfectly placed on my countertop in a blue, farm rustic holder my mother had found at a garage sale. So, I drove to my fire house. And that lead to having one foot on the ceiling, one on a pot, one hand holding up the cupboard door and the other fishing around for the cookbooks in the corner cabinet of my U-shaped Kitchen.

Since the fire, the snow had all melted and the sky was shining blue through the holes in the roof. I used my sleeve to wipe off the thin black layer to find the Pioneer Women Cooks: Dinnertime with its now dull red cover portraying Ree Drummond's face, maybe slightly less thrilled than normal, but still smiling through the soot. Plenty of recipes in there. I flipped to the first page and before I even made it past the acknowledgements, the ceiling board below my left foot snapped, the sound resonating through the open air. My eyes flew up to the ceiling, and I saw clouds. Clouds in my kitchen. And I laughed. Big, loud gasps of laughter. I laughed as I lay on the ground of my once beautiful kitchen looking up through the ceiling towards the sky. I continued to giggle. It wasn't funny that my house had burned down in the middle of winter. My entire life was changed with one mid-football game phone-call in February after my mom decided to make chislic for the first time in years. It took over twenty years to build the life in this house. And a little over twenty minutes to burn it to the ground. We put so much stock in homes and things and stuff for it to be so easily burned down in less time than it would take to watch a television show.

I rolled my eyes, and they landed on my fridge, appearing upside down from my vantage point from the floor. Like the shampoo bottle in my dad's bathroom, there was a postcard on the fridge that was completely untouched. The postcard looked like the day I got it. It read "Greeting from Winnipeg, Canada" in big swirly letters across a frozen lake. It wasn't even my postcard. My friend and I planned, during the point

in finals week in college when you make rash, impulsive decisions, to drive to Wisconsin to see the ice caves and then to Canada to see a Christmas light show during the first week of Winter Break.

“I’m pretty sure this is trespassing,” I mused while traipsing through the snow in my not-so-warm-winter boots, through the woods in Wisconsin to find these mysterious ice caves. There was no road. The trees surrounded what maybe looked like a snow mobile track. But Keeliann, my best friend, walked confidently – if not rather tentatively because any small patch of ice would cause her accident-prone self to fall – across the snow in no particular direction. “Maybe, but that lady said there was no way to get to the ice caves unless the lake was frozen and it’s not, so this is what we got.” I rolled my eyes; that lady was for sure annoyed when she said that. She was already peeved that we had come into her inn at practically the middle of the night asking about caves of ice that apparently weren’t even formed until February. I think Keeliann had seen that on the website, but she ignored it. The woman said that normally you walk up to the caves over the lake because it was frozen, but the only frozen parts now in the middle of December were the edges on the beach where the water met the sand and it was thin enough to form a solid sheen. But Keeliann thought the woods idea would work. She was confident. So here we were, stomping through the snow and ice in the middle of a Wisconsin forest.

My palms tingled as we neared the edge of the forest where one of the Great Lakes, not sure which one, started out

and the trees stopped. But we saw no ice caves. Keeliann suggested we head towards the left and maybe go back to the car, but I stopped in the snow. The ice caves had to be here. I had to see them if I didn't see them it would have been a waste coming all the way down here, spending all this time in the cold, risking getting arrested for trespassing, and getting lost in the woods. I kept walking forward, right up to the edge of the forest, where there was only a cliff with the Great Lake vastly spreading out in front of me. My heart was heavy as I slowly turned around to head back with Keeliann, but my eyes caught on a bird, flapping his wings on a bent tree branch. And then the bird flew out and disappeared below me. I grabbed hold of a tree branch and leaned forward so three-fourths of my body was over the ledge and strained my neck to look below me. Huge icicles formed right underneath where the tree roots still hung on and continued down until their tips touched the water.

The ice caves were underneath us.

Keeliann and I sat staring at those formations of ice for a while. Then we got up, said goodbye to the ice, and continued on to Canada. We probably spent more time trying to find those icicles than we spent looking at them. It was a pit-stop along the way to get to a foreign country and see Christmas lights. A small detour in a longer drive and road trip. But even so, the icicles were a victory.

I stood up in my kitchen and pulled that clear blue postcard from Canada off the fridge. Completely untouched by the blackness, by the dark. I placed in it my jacket pocket

and headed back to my car, with the cookbook shoved underneath my arm. I opened the car door but didn't get in. Looking at the house now, it looked lonely, and not just because half of it was gone. Lonely, maybe, and strong. It looked dulled, watered-down. But I think I was slightly watered down, too. And maybe a little hardened. I think the hardness had started to form the second I heard my mother's voice over the phone right as the Super Bowl was about to end. The hardness continued to form as I drove the five hours home a few days later.

My friends drove me the first three hours. but I completed the last two hours by myself. My hands steadily placed on the steering wheel, my face dry of tears and a slowly-forming wall building up against the dread. My little sister told me our mother had lost a lot of her ordinarily decisive decision-making abilities and my dad was getting angry at little things and hadn't finished one thing from start to finish in the last three days. But me? I am good under pressure. It was expected that I would show up and help and get things figured out and be there for the rest of the family. My older sister said I'd better hurry. My knuckles reddened as my fingers gripped the steering wheel tighter and tighter. The music on the radio changed to commercial. If someone so much as touched me right then I would have shattered into a million pieces. Flying everywhere. Falling between the seats and that hard to reach place between the center console and the passenger side. Pieces of myself would have scattered like

ashes in the pearly white snow. Black ashes leaving small melted holes in the otherwise clear white sheet.

That night, I stared down the gravel road seeing the lights from our neighbors in the otherwise complete darkness. Our house would have been the next light to shine on the gravel road. That light was replaced with darkness. It was a black emptiness. An emptiness that drew me in and beckoned me towards it, like when you know something is about to go terribly wrong in a movie, but you just can't close your eyes. You have to look. I had to look. I slowly turned onto my road and moved ten miles an hour, feeling every bump in the road, every pothole, every rock underneath my tires. Each bump chipped a piece of me away. Pieces of my life I had before, when I had a home and a closet and a bed. My gaze never left the white snowy, dirt road in front of me. My hands never slipped from their firm places on the steering wheel. When I drove up you could almost pretend nothing was wrong. The white fence I had built two summers ago still stood tall and strong, not a scratch on it except for a few dirty spots. The brown siding my mom had chosen to replace the dirty white that used to cover the entire house appeared fine on the one side. I could almost pretend that nothing had happened. That I would pull up to the two-car garage that held a huge pop-up golf net and practice area instead of cars. Five golf bags filled with months old snacks and golf balls fished out from lakes would be in the spot where cars would normally go. I would pull up to the house and nothing would change.

When I saw the hole in the roof that night, my resolve faltered a bit. The hole where the fire fighters smashed in the siding to let out the smoke and pressure so the house didn't explode. The hole. I have never felt the way I felt that day. A tingle went through my entire body and a buzzing formed throughout my brain, trying to distract me from the pain. Standing in my living room, a sound unlike anything I've ever created poured out of my mouth and my knees slammed into the frozen, snowy carpet. I turned my face up to the ceiling where the stars peaked through and the snow flurries fluttered down around me. White snowflakes mixed with black ash until it was all gray. The snow being marred by the ash and the ash being lightened by the snow until both were slightly worse off than when they hadn't met each other at all. The blackness of the night outside seeped inside the house and covered everything, like an extension of the night itself. The ordinarily red couch, the Christmas tree my family had been too lazy to take down for the last month and a half, the piano that my parents were so proud to be able to afford after we had started lessons having to practice on a keyboard in the garage. Everything almost looked like it should. And it didn't look like it should at all.

I shuffled my foot on the now snow-free gravel, feeling that same tingling and buzzing feeling seep over me. I stared at the ground concentrating on each piece of rock and pushing those memories back into the recesses of my brain. I never expected my memories of my home to exist only in the past tense, in memories. Yellow and orange flames slithered



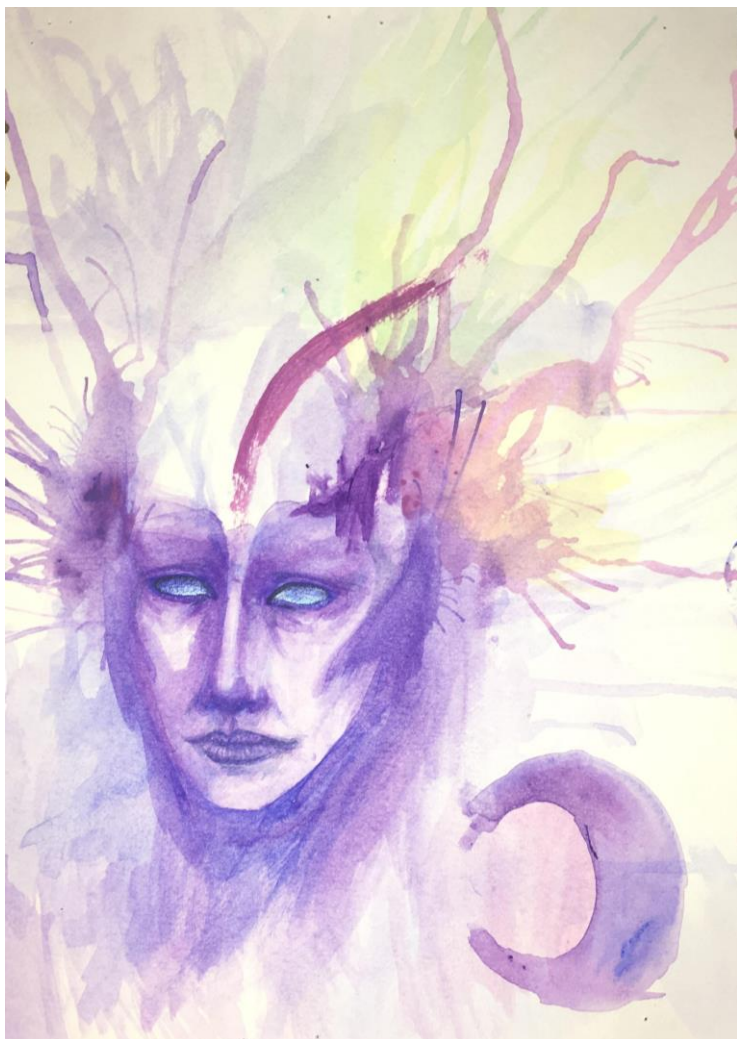
through the house, taking with them things they chose and leaving behind memories they chose to discard. The flames left behind a black blanket to remind us they were there, as though we could forget. I stood there willing my memories to stop haunting me. Willing them to be forgotten and get weaker and stop. Just stop. A glint of shiny glass caught my attention and for a second, I was confused what blue, shiny glass was doing there. But then I knew.

I sat on the frozen, snowy gravel picking up shards of blue glass. The sand and dirt and rocks that had been in the blue glass jars was scattered everywhere. I started carefully putting the pieces of glass back into the box. Piece by piece. Every vacation my family had ever been on, we have taken a water bottle, baggie, jar, or cup full of sand, dirt, or clay from the location we are at. We have sand from Tampa, Florida, flat black rocks from Ithaca, NY, black sand from a beach on Hawaii, and red clay from Rapid City, SD. Five boxes now filled with blue jars of earth. All of these places put away in blue jars with little gray lids and white labels depicting their origins. They used to be stacked neatly in a bright red cabinet in the basement of my home. Each one was supposed to be little memory holders. Little memory holders to put on shelves and be noticed and dusted and used to remember happy times. They were not supposed to be thrown haphazardly in a flimsy cardboard box and dropped on the gravel driveway to be then accidentally be run over by a big menacing black truck filled with Barbies and toys and blankets, dredged up from the ashes of the house.

“Hey sweetie, I’m sorry Gary did that. He didn’t mean to run over the box. It was just in the middle of the driveway and he didn’t see it and...I’m just sorry.” I didn’t register my dad was even talking until his hand landed on top of mine and a glass shard bounced off the bottom of the box and hit the corner of my cheek. My dad knelt, and his eyebrows curved toward his nose. None of the glass had ended up not ricocheting out of the now empty, destroyed box. “It’s ok.” I squeezed out through my teeth. “It was an accident. Gary has more important things to worry about, anyway.” My dad stood up and shook his head. “Maybe, but it still shouldn’t have happened.” I shrugged and watched my dad walk away to tell his guys to just leave another wooden, ruined dresser in the basement. My anger wasn’t directed at my dad, but the snarl and frown were still there. He paused in walking away and his head slightly turned in my direction but then he kept on walking so I kept on tossing the glass into the box.

The glass glittered the gravel, still, despite two seasons having passed by. That box was destroyed and with it many jars full of vacations. Broken along with so many other things. Lost among the destruction. I placed the cookbook in my passenger’s seat, the postcard from Canada on the dashboard and drove away from the house, it getting smaller and smaller, looking from a distance like the fire hadn’t even happened. I stared at the house behind me. The golden stencils in the hallway that took the entire summer, the white French-inspired paneling on the ceiling that brightened up the kitchen and dining room like you wouldn’t believe, the white

fence I built by myself. The Canadian postcard reminding me of the caves of ice I saw for twenty minutes, the blue jars filled with sand and dirt from all of the places I had ever been too. Why do we do all these things to a house or a life that can just be burned to the ground over a simple mistake of opening an oven? My phone's incessant buzzing shook me out of my head, and my mom's name popped up on the screen. "Hey, Mom. What's up?" I answered. "Hey, sweetie, you on your way back?" I nodded even though she couldn't hear me but she didn't wait for an answer anyway. "Wanna help me paint that old dresser from the basement coral? I saw it in a magazine, and it would look super cute in our new basement." My eyes fell on the house almost too small to see now as I turned the corner onto the road that led me back to our new place. In the house, the hallway would have served its exact purpose without the golden stenciling. The white paneling on the ceiling off the kitchen didn't need to be there to keep the house standing. But, it matters. Those things that we put stock in and hold dear, it all matters. And maybe its fragility and the fact that it all can be taken away so easily, makes the things that are temporary and small in our lives matter more. I sighed as the house completely disappeared from my rear-view mirror. "Sure, mom. I'll help you paint. Why not?"



**Bailey Cordwin**

## **Forgiveness**

**By Allison Jasso**

Forgive and forget.  
That's what the old saying suggests I do.  
Forgiveness will set you free.  
Just move on already.  
Forgive, forget, move on, be free.  
All of these are easier said than done.  
I can forgive a lie,  
I can forgive an argument,  
I can forgive a mistake,  
And I can even forgive an insult.  
But what I cannot forgive  
Is betrayal  
Is wrath  
Is manipulation  
Is lust  
Is stealing my dignity  
Is destroying my trust  
Is manipulating my choices  
Is violating my body  
Is taking my power for yourself  
Is forcing me to be silent  
Is portraying yourself as the victim  
Is repeatedly mocking me  
Is intentional retaliation  
Is traumatizing my mind

Traumatizing my body  
Traumatizing my soul.  
I'm told you wrote me a letter.  
I'm sure whether it's typed or written  
That your words are insincere  
And drowning in self pity  
Because forcing your own hands  
To do anything but use me  
Would be impossible for you.  
I don't know if in it you apologized  
If you knew what you did  
If you were playing another power game  
If you sought my forgiveness.  
Honestly, I don't care.  
No words you ever write

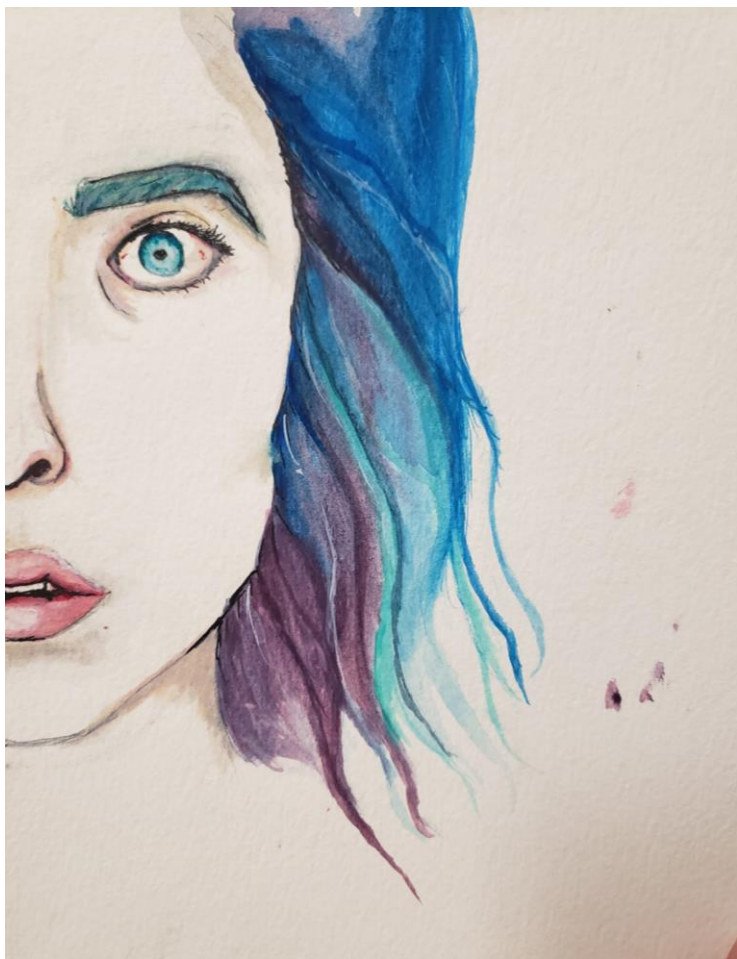
Could make the bruises disappear  
Could give me the hours of sleep I lost  
Could make me feel whole  
Could let me walk without fear  
Could replenish all the tears I've shed  
Could stop the terrors that plague my mind  
Could turn the nightmares into dreams  
Could prevent more shadows from chasing me  
Could take away any of the pain you caused  
Could nullify anything you did  
Could free my mind, body, or soul.  
My respect must be earned.

My trust must be earned.  
My forgiveness must be earned.  
My body can never again be earned  
Or exploited  
Or desecrated  
Or conquered  
Or blasphemed  
Or forced to endure anything.  
You pillaged my body  
And left with more than I could ever explain.  
I gave you nothing then  
And I will give you nothing now.  
You will never take advantage of me again.  
You will never take anything from me again.  
You will never  
Receive  
Earn  
Force  
Or deserve  
My forgiveness.  
The path I have chosen  
Is one that will demand that you understand  
If you inflict horrors upon anyone  
And then methodically construct  
A suffocating environment for that person,  
There will be consequences.  
Not from me  
Not by me

And not entirely for me  
But completely against you  
And because of the crime you committed.

Enough is enough.  
Soon my battle with you may end  
But my battle with myself will rage on.  
I will never forget what you did.  
I will never forgive you.  
What I will do is fight for justice.  
I will walk my own path.  
I will forgive myself.  
I will set myself free.  
I have earned at least that much.





**Meaghan Stout**

**Making of a Man**  
**By Erin Lahowetz**

It took a lifespan  
Before my life began  
Now who's on trial

As my body lies in the sand  
My spirit takes a stand  
This is the making of a good man

Take the aching from my bone  
Take my mind that's so unknown  
Take the beating of my heart  
It's time for us to depart

Take what I had planned  
Take my spirit from this land  
But leave the scars upon my hand  
They're the making of a good man

As my body lies in the sand  
My spirit takes a stand  
This is the making of a new man

Take the vision from my eyes  
But leave my body where it lies  
It can't go where we're going

Leave it for the starved flies

Take my face stained in tears

Take away the years

Take away my mind

Shrouded in the fears

As my body lies in the sand

My spirit takes a stand

This is the making of a man

It took a lifespan

Before my life began

Now I'm on trial

I'm not a good man

Why can't you just understand?

## **I Punched a Hole in Your Wall**

**By Erin Lahowetz**

I punched a hole in your wall  
And I'm not sorry  
I don't feel bad anymore  
Not since you dragged me down  
And as the blood dripped down my knuckles  
I left our home  
There was no space left for me there anymore  
I hate that you found a way into my life  
Before you tore it in two  
If only you knew  
That just because I won't speak  
Doesn't mean that you know me  
Cause you're not me  
And you're not him  
But all I mean to say is that I don't know what to say  
But I hope that one day you'll be gone  
And that hole in my wall can be filled



**Felicity Ramsey**

## Day 5 of the Best Friend Silent Treatment

By Ashley Marco

It's been, like, *forever* since Greta has talked to me. I don't get it. She's never held out this long before. Okay, so, background: last time she pulled out the silent treatment, it was because I fell asleep studying and missed our monthly movie date where we find the latest showing of the worst looking movie, sneak in Taco Bell (she gets a beefy five-layer burrito and a Baja Blast and I get a Crunchwrap Supreme, hold the sour cream), and sit there in our pajamas making fun of C-list celebrities reciting badly-written scripts. She only lasted 12 hours. It's been five days.

And, like, usually I know what I did to make her mad. Usually, it isn't an issue and I can apologize or fix what I did wrong or something, but I don't even know what I did wrong. She stayed in my dorm on Tuesday night because it was hailing really hard and it was late and she had a thirty-three minute drive back to her parents' duplex in the city, and yes, exactly 33 minutes, with usual traffic; it's the exact length of our "on da road heart emoji dancing girl emoji diamond emoji" playlist on Spotify. I'd give you the link but...no I wouldn't; it's *ours*. We cuddled, like usual (I mean honestly, if you don't feel comfortable to snuggle, are you really best friends?), with me as big spoon. She has class before me on Tuesdays so she was gone by the time I woke up. Everything was fine before we went to sleep, but then when I saw her in our biology class, she was giving me the cold shoulder. So

*sometime* between 1:00 that night and 2:00 the next day, she decided to get pissed at me. And I thought *maybe I kicked her while I was sleeping or maybe I stole all the blankets or maybe I was talking in my sleep and said something that pissed her off*. Except she's used to sleeping with me and usually she just makes fun of me while *pretending* to be mad at me for my dumb sleeping habits so none of that makes sense and I'm still left without any goddamn clue as to why my best friend *won't. Talk. To me.*

I've been asking Alda, my girlfriend, about this, but even though she's the smartest, most beautiful, funniest person I've ever met and I love her dearly, she's not great with, like, relationship problems. Usually I ask Greta for help when things get weird between a friend and I, but *Greta is the issue here*. I don't know if Alda has talked to anyone else about this—I never really told her she couldn't, so it wouldn't be a big deal if she did—I just really need some help from someone, *anyone*, with this because I'm at an absolute loss trying to figure out what I did wrong.

All hope is not lost, though. Every Monday (the cafeteria actually serves decent food on Mondays. I don't know why it's specifically a Monday thing, but I'm not going to question it), Greta, Julian—our dear, dear friend, and the only straight white man I can spend more than twenty-five minutes around without getting a migraine—Alda, and I actually get to eat lunch together, so she'll be forced to at least sit with me and *interact*, even in the most basic way. I got out of my morning class early—thank *God* for shitty campus Wi-

Fi and system outages—so I’m already sitting in our usual booth, waiting for the others to show up.

I’m trying to make a plan of what to say to Greta, but what do you even say to your best friend when she’s madder than she’s ever been at you and you don’t even know why? I have so many things I need to talk to her about and most of them are, quite honestly, small and stupid and I could just talk to one of our other friends about it but it’s not the same because *Greta is my person*, you know? Like some people get lucky and find a person who just *gets* them? And understands the way you think and the way you talk and the words you don’t know how to put into words? And you just want to always be around them? But you *can’t right now* because she’s mad at you and you don’t know why?

“Someone’s over-using their brain cells.” I look up to see Julian standing over me, Greta hovering over his shoulder, which is the most un-Greta thing ever. Greta isn’t the type to hover. Nor is she the type to avoid eye contact, which she’s doing right now.

Julian’s laughing at me now. “Y’know, I was joking, but are you sure you’re alright? I can practically hear the gears turning.” He sits down across from me. I start to scoot over for Greta, on instinct, because she always sits next to me, but she slides into the booth next to Julian instead, still refusing to make eye contact with me. “You heard from Alda today?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. She said she’d be late. She had to meet with her advisor after class. I told her we’d wait to get food until she got here.” I haven’t taken my eyes off Greta since she



sat down. Why won't she look at me? Usually even when she's giving me the silent treatment she'll at least look at me, will at least act like she knows I exist. God, *what* did I do?

"Cool," Julian says, and I'm reminded he's here and that it's not just Greta and me and me and Greta and her frigid refusal to acknowledge me, her eyes cast downward. "Then I'm going to go talk to Chris over there. We're supposed to be writing a seven page paper together but neither of us has put anything on the doc and it's due in like two days and—"

"Yeah, I get it, go ahead," I say, trying to peel my eyes away from Greta and failing. It's like she's got a magnetic field and I'm the only thing affected. I can't stop staring as she gets up to let Julian slip out of the booth. Part of me can't believe he hasn't noticed the tension between us—I mean, come on, she didn't even *sit next to me*—but Julian can be a bit oblivious. It doesn't surprise me all that much that he doesn't notice that I can't stop staring at Greta as she sits back down slowly, as if the booth is a minefield. He walks away and it's just us again and I can't stop staring as she puts her head down on the table, her arms shielding her face.

This is fine. It's fine. I'm fine. Everything is fine, and I'm an adult and can handle sitting in silence and am not bothered by this at all. I'm a mature, intelligent, patient girl—*woman*—who knows how to deal with interpersonal conflict like a mature, intelligent, patient woman. I know how to pass time by myself. I can be interested in the mural of what's supposed to be horses on a field (go 'stangs!) but looks like somebody spilled paint on a wall and then did their best to

make it look like it was on purpose. I can be interested in my nails that are getting just a bit too long and the spots on this booth's bench where the bright yellow vinyl is cracking and the guy three tables over whose hair is just a bit longer on one side of his face. Right? I can be comfortable in silence? I can ignore her ignoring me?

"So we aren't going to talk? You're just gonna pretend I don't exist?"

Nothing. Fine. If she's not going to talk, I can talk enough for the both of us.

"Okay, cool. So I'm gonna list every single thing you could possibly be mad at me for and you can either just sit there and listen or you can shut me up and just, I don't know?, talk to me *like a grown up*."

Nothing.

"Alright. Number one: I accidentally kicked you the other night when you slept over. Two: I studied bio with Kelcy and Matt instead of you. Three: you found out that in seventh grade when we did that project on ancient Egypt we weren't just assigned group members and I chose Liz Cohen as the third person in our group even though I knew she ruined your birthday party the year before and you still hadn't gotten over it. Four: you saw the fake Tinder profile Julian and I made for you to try and get you a date. Five: Hell, I don't know, I forgot an important date or something. I know it's not your birthday because that's in three weeks and I know it's not our friendaversary because that was two months ago, but—"

“Can we not do this, please?” Her voice is muffled by her arms, but the desperation in her voice is palpable. “I just really, really can’t do this right now. Okay? I’m not— It’s nothing you did, I just—” she breathes, deeply and shakily. I half-expect her to continue, more composed and more Greta-like, but she doesn’t. She just sits there in silence.

I don’t know what to do with that. So I sigh. “Greta—” she balls her fists. “Fine. But promise me you’ll talk to me at some point?” And maybe my voice is a little too hopeful and maybe that’s a little pathetic but *she’s my best friend*. And she finally looks up and makes eye contact and that look is one I’ve never seen before (and considering we’ve been friends for ten years, that says a lot) and suddenly all I want to do is hug her and apologize for freaking out because *oh my God*, this is *obviously* bigger than me.

She holds me pinned against the booth with her eyes, the browns swirling with the shitty recess lighting of the cafeteria, and I almost forget how to breathe. Finally, she nods, rubs her eyes—I’m suddenly hyper-aware of just how tired she looks—and drops her head back down.

So I’m left here just sitting again. And sitting. And waiting.

Finally, Julian walks back over, nudging Greta over and plopping into the booth. “Greta, you alright?” I roll my eyes. Of course she’s not alright, Julian. Maybe it’s just because I’m directly involved with this whole thing (whatever this whole thing even is) or because I’ve known her so well for so long, but to me, it’s obvious that she’s not doing great. Greta wears

her emotions on her sleeve; she's not very good at hiding when she's upset. It's hard for me to believe that Julian is truly that oblivious, truly that inattentive, but maybe he really is. Maybe I just pay too much attention to Greta. Either way, I guess it's nice to know he's concerned. He hasn't been friends with us long, but I can tell he really does care.

Greta raises her head, and it looks like she's struggling to even figure out a response. She makes eye contact with me again, for too short of a moment. "Yeah. Just a headache. Sorry."

"Nah, you're good. Just wanted to check. You won't believe what Chris just told me—" he launches into some story about some girl who lives on his floor, but I'm not really listening. I know that makes me sound like an awful friend, and I guess maybe I am, but every time I try to tune in, I just see Greta, body angled just slightly toward Julian, a small smile on her face, and my brain fizzles out.

And then there's a body next to me, wrapping an arm around my shoulders and planting a kiss on my cheek, and a "Hey, thanks for waiting for me," and Alda is here and as I lean into her, there's a tiny, almost imperceptible change in Greta's face. That's another look I've never seen, another configuration of her features that I haven't catalogued in the section of my brain I call the Greta-pedia.

And before I can even send her a questioning glance, Julian is jumping up with a "Finally! I thought we'd starve before Dr. T was done with you," and Alda's smooth, cool hands are pulling me from my seat, and we're walking to get

our plates and eat the cafeteria's Monday food, and Alda is asking me silent questions. *Any change? Is she still mad? Are you okay?* And I try to answer her, I really do.



**Jean Chevalier**



**Felicity Ramsey**

**Kinesiology**  
**By Maya Mohr**

Kinesiology helps us explain how humans move in water  
Blue, green, or yellow water, whatever you choose

Keep on swimming.

Helps us move through life, never stagnant  
Always along an action,

Although, it is okay to stop and smell the roses once in a while

Keep on swimming.





**Bailey Cordwin**

## Butterfly Garden

By Jeff Moscaritolo (guest writer)

slightly altered from the original, which was published in *Paper Darts*, August, 2012

Her mother's dealer had skipped town. Moved elsewhere, to some other state, to another country even. Didn't know where and it didn't matter. Jackie had barely come inside and hung up her coat, and here was her mother standing in front of her, four foot eleven, bony wrists hanging at her sides. "I called Steve today and he's gone. No warning. Just left, slippery little shit."

Jackie unwrapped her scarf. "Tragic."

"It's annoying, Jackie. I have the right to be annoyed."

"Work was fine, by the way," she said and turned toward the kitchen.

Her mother stood at the entryway where the linoleum met the rug, watching her daughter take a can of Coke from the fridge. "Jackie, I'm sorry. Hello. I meant to say hello." Jackie stood at the counter, sipping. Her mother sat at the tiny square table and ran her palms over the surface. "How was work?"

"I just said fine."

Her mother's fingernails tapped the tabletop. Click click, click click, click click. "Jackie, do you think you could—I mean, I don't want to be a pain, but my insomnia. And I ran

out last night. Could you just—well, what about that friend of yours? The butcher.”

Jackie pressed two fingers to her temple. It wasn't her fault she was the way she was. Sure, she was more concerned with picking up weed than with her own daughter's wellbeing, or with the fact that the accident happened literally last week. But empathy was not her mother's strength, and Jackie needed to be patient.

“I'd rather not,” she said calmly.

“Come on, Jack. You need to get out of the house anyway. Spending all your free time cooped up. Just ask him? See if he has anything? Please. Would it hurt to ask?”

The smell of cold meat. His hands on her back. The bed frame hitting the wall in a steady rhythm—click click, click click, click click—and her looking up at him like she'd been half-conscious on the couch for days and was watching this on TV.

She hadn't spoken to the butcher in months, hadn't even bothered to get the few things she'd left there—an old John Irving paperback, her red lipstick she'd never replaced, probably a few other things—and she was all the better for it. She'd met him through a mutual friend, and they had gone on a few dates, after which they would return to his crummy apartment and fuck dispassionately. And then he'd get high and sentimental—*can I be little spoon?*—and he'd talk about abandonment and all the poetry he wrote but would never let her read. It had not been a rewarding relationship.

Her mother stood and went to the desk near the garage door and pulled her purse from the piles of junk mail. She dug through it, found four wrinkled twenties, dropped them on the table. "Please, Jackie." Her eyes were too big for her face.

Jackie had heard somewhere that people tend to gravitate toward partners who look like themselves. But her mother bore no resemblance to her father. Skinny rectangular face, taut corners of her lips, eyelids drooping down like dying plants—a face so unlike her father's. She thought of his big lively cheeks, the way he seemed made of rubber when he donned his makeup and performed. Maybe the lack of resemblance explained why they'd never married, why they had only communicated when they needed to, why her mother hadn't even attended his funeral last week.

Jackie snatched up the money. "I'll see what I can do."

She went to her room to call the butcher in private. He picked up after one ring.

On the way to his apartment she passed the funeral home, a tiny building with a small patch of curbed-in dirt and a sign that read, "Butterfly Garden. Do not disturb or mow."

Not too many butterflies.

A funny thing: She'd seen the home countless times before, and the absurd sign for the untended garden, but she'd never realized it was a funeral home until last week.

Brenda, her father's wife, had decided that the service would be open casket, but her father would be dressed not in

the traditional business suit but in his clown costume, and neglected to tell Jackie beforehand. She arrived and saw the polka-dot outfit and the curly wig and the ridiculous red smile, and Brenda must have seen the anger flushing her face. *This was how people knew him*, she had said.

It had happened suddenly. Eyewitnesses had said the act had been going fine, situation normal, when suddenly he lost his balance and fell off the back of the fire engine, landing on his neck. Just the right angle. In an instant, the light switch in his mind had been flicked off. Jackie had expected to cry at the funeral, but she couldn't. She knew the body lying there was her father's, but it hadn't seemed like a real person. Just a toy person, a stuffed animal. Now, driving past the home, she wondered about how the audience had responded when it happened, how long it had taken them to figure out that the poor clown falling off the tiny firetruck wasn't just another joke.

He buzzed her into the building. He was waiting one floor up, in the open doorway to his place, in sweatpants and t-shirt, feet bare. It had surprised her when she learned he was a butcher. He didn't look like one, whatever that meant. When she asked how he got into butchering, he'd said, *How did you get into secretary-ing?*

He stood in the doorway watching her. She wasn't sure what to say. She reached into her bag and pulled out the money. "So, however much this buys I guess."

The butcher glanced out the window toward the parking lot, then hooked a thumb inside his waistband. "Don't wanna come in?"

"No one's watching," she said.

He smiled sadly.

"Fine," she said, sighing and dropping the money back in her purse. This was not what she'd wanted. A visit.

The meat smell hit her nostrils. The place wasn't any cleaner than the last time she'd been here. Empty soda and beer cans littered the tables and countertops. Harden stains dotted the carpet. Nothing on the walls but an out-of-date calendar from a Chinese take-out place. He slouched pelvis-first into the kitchen. She stood outside it, near the table with only one chair. She made sure not to get too close. She didn't want him to suggest sitting down.

"Drink?" he said.

"No thanks."

He looked at her.

"Just water."

He looked at her.

"I was planning to just, you know, make the purchase and go."

He sighed and found a glass in the dishwasher.

"Those clean in there?"

"Come on, what do you think?" He flipped the tap and watched the glass fill like it was big dark empty sky. "I thought you'd at least wanna talk," he said. "Not just show up and..." He brought her the glass.

She sipped it, examining the taste for whatever had occupied the glass previously. Maybe water. Or milk. He drank tall glasses of milk every morning. But she hadn't smelled that. It was probably clean.

He was looking at her mouth. She swallowed.

"You could at least talk to me a little," he said.

He didn't know about her father. He had no reason to know. She'd stopped returning his texts before it happened. Hadn't posted anything about it yet. She considered telling him now, to end the conversation, but it didn't seem right, to use it that way. And it might backfire, create a vulnerability, give him an opening.

"Okay. How's the deli?"

"Still a deli." He leaned on the table and tilted his head, letting the black bangs droop past his eyes. "I miss you."

She felt her heartrate rising. She'd only been here, what, two minutes? His presence tugged at something in her and she hated it. His stare, that look that said, *I'm broken. Fix me.*

"I need to use the bathroom," she said, and took her purse in with her.

The light above the mirror flickered a moment before coming on. A crack stretched down along the right edge of the mirror like an old tree branch. She traced a finger along the crack, feeling the two jagged slabs of glass coming together beneath her fingertip. A smooth ridge, separating two things that once had been joined.

She didn't want to fuck him. She probably would. She didn't want to. She knew it would be easier than having a

normal-person exchange. How long would it take, actually? She could just shut up and go through with it and leave. “Fuck,” she whispered. She hated this, strategizing like this. But whatever, she didn’t care. She opened the medicine cabinet. He had his mix of drugs—headache medicine, allergy meds, some Ritalin with the name Alexander Díaz on it. No idea who that was. On the bottom shelf stood the tube of red lipstick she’d left behind. He must have found it, placed it here himself. Like he knew she would come into the bathroom, open the cabinet, find it here waiting for her.

He was waiting on the scummy couch when she opened the door. “You okay?”

“What?”

“You just took a while.”

“I’m fine.”

He stood and faced her. “Did you take anything?”

“What, like your meds? No.”

“You could have, if you wanted.”

“I didn’t.”

They stood there a moment. He came around the couch and embraced her. If she imagined he was someone else, it felt okay. She dropped her purse on the floor and wrapped her arms around him.

“It’s been lonely without you,” he whispered.

She placed her hands on his chest and pushed herself away, just enough to look up at him. He tilted his head, and then she was kissing him. She could smell the cold meat on his skin.



“Sorry,” he said a moment later, pulling away. “Sorry, I know you said you just wanted to—”

“It’s fine.”

“If you’d rather—”

“It’s fine.”

He began to tug at her clothing. Soon they in the bedroom. He moved the pile of dirty clothes off his bed, then lowered her to the mattress. A smile crept across his lips. “I’ve still got that lipstick you left here.”

“I saw.”

“I really like it on you.”

“It’s in my bag.”

He went to the living room. He was naked already, she realized. When he returned he was holding the bag in one hand and the lipstick in the other. “Here,” he said, dropping the bag on the floor and kneeling next to the bed. “Sit up. I want to do it.”

She did. He popped open the lipstick and began applying it clumsily. It was probably way too much. He didn’t know what the fuck he was doing, but whatever. She closed her eyes and held absolutely still. It was like a trip to the dentist. Focus on your breath. Soon it will be over.

He snapped the cap back on and dropped it in her bag. “There,” he said, “that’s better.” He went to the window and closed the blinds. She opened the bedside drawer where he kept the condoms. In the dim light, the butcher removed her underwear and climbed on top of her. He pushed himself inside and pressed his chest to hers and pressed his mouth to

hers, and when he pulled away the red lipstick was smeared across his mouth, a slash of red against the pale skin. She tried not to think of her father's dead clown face, but the image was already there. She saw herself kneeling in front of the costumed body, her fingers touching the edge of the casket. She tried to remember her father's un-made-up face but couldn't summon it. Her lip quivered. Tears welled behind her eyes but she clenched them back. She reminded herself he was dead. The word repeated itself—dead, dead, dead, dead—to the rhythm of the butcher's thrusts, but it was just an empty syllable, a mantra lulling her into a dreamlike state, barely aware of the room she was in or the butcher inside her.

Afterward, he asked if she wanted to stay the night, but she said she had to get home. She went to the bathroom to wash up and get dressed, and when she came back, he was sitting on the bed in his underwear, with a plastic sandwich bag in his hands. He held it up, letting it dangle from his fingers. She couldn't tell how much. A lot. She retrieved her mother's bills and they exchanged. She felt the bag's thickness. "This is more than eighty bucks' worth."

He shrugged. He was still holding the bills in his hand. "Am I gonna see you again?"

She didn't answer.

He held the money out to her. "Here."

"Take it."

"Consider it a favor."

"No favors."

"I'm trying to be nice. Please. Let it be a gift."

“A gift,” she said. “In exchange for what?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

She should have been gone already. She should have been in her car and heading home and putting this all behind her by now.

“Fine,” he said. He opened his hand, and together they watched the wrinkled bills fall to the floor.



**Meaghan Stout**



**Savannah Householder**

## **Fear**

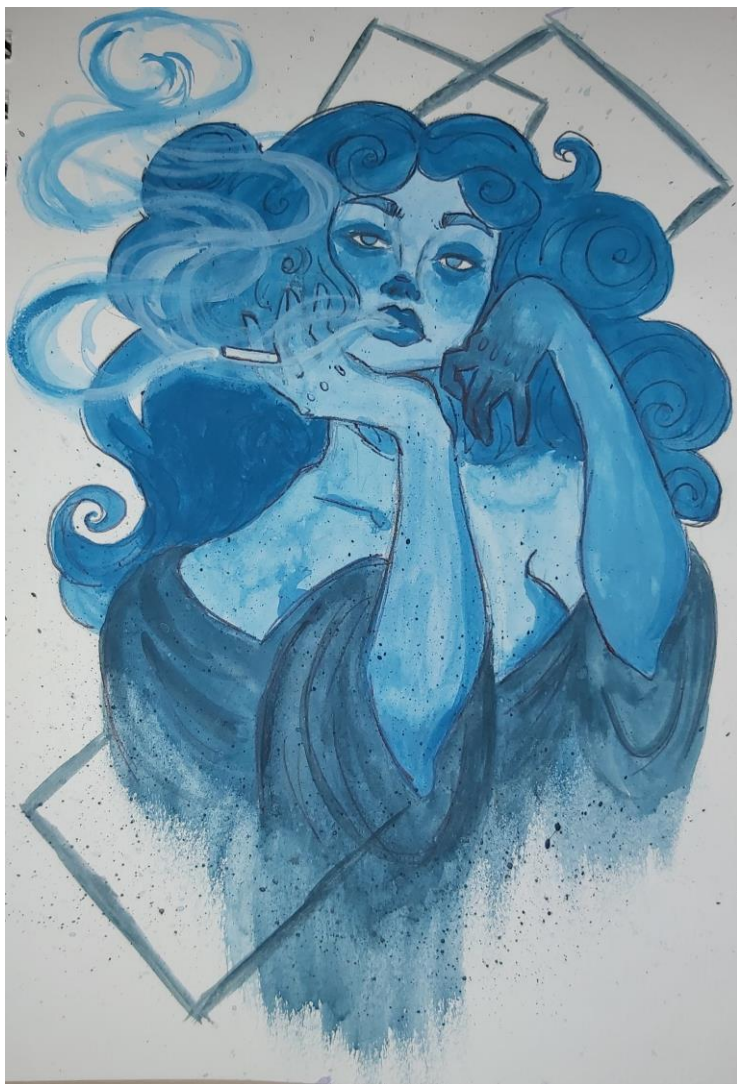
**By Paige Patton**

The future terrifies me  
with its negativity &  
constant fighting.

I win battles

but my armor is now so  
damaged

I couldn't fight anymore,  
Even if I truly wanted to.



**Felicity Ramsey**

## **The Pawn**

**By Paige Patton**

And it occurred to me,  
You never really wanted my friendship,  
You never wanted to have a bond,  
You just wanted to use me.  
You wanted to make me your tool.  
You wanted to play me like a game on your phone. I'm  
addicting and good for one night  
and then you don't even think of me for a whole week, maybe  
two.  
What's really funny about the whole thing is that I let you.  
I let you use me, I thought It was something real, I thought  
you were genuine.  
But you weren't, and you never will be.



## **Shiny**

**By Paige Patton**

I'm the girl that likes pretty, shiny things.  
I love things that don't look used, broken, old.  
But this is a flaw of mine.  
See sometimes the things you've had for a long time that  
aren't so new and shiny  
anymore are the most valuable.  
They have the most sentimental value and can be worth more  
than anything new that  
comes along.  
Even when a link breaks or it gets a little rusty, it still is there  
for you through all of life's  
moments.  
I traded this treasure for a new shiny trinket that I thought  
would bring me a new joy that  
I had lost with my rusty jewel.  
What I thought was a diamond ended up being plastic, fake,  
and disintegrated in my  
hand.  
When I went to get my treasure back, it was gone. Taken by  
someone who also saw its  
beauty and went on to love it and keep it as their own. Never  
to be seen again.  
This just proves that not all that glitters is gold.



Felicity Ramsey

## **Flashlight**

**By Paige Patton**

I lost my light.  
Can you help me find it?  
It used to navigate me through everything.  
All of life's darkest moments,  
Telling me that everything would be alright, that we would  
make it out of the dark  
together.  
I left it behind.  
I thought I could navigate the dark, twisting tunnels that are  
my own thoughts all by  
myself.  
But now I'm trapped; I'm trapped in the cave of my fears,  
weaknesses, and doubts.  
I can't find my way out of the cave by myself.  
Please help me find my light.  
I'm afraid of the dark.

## Untitled

By Felicity Ramsey

Have you ever tried to go to sleep feeling absolutely drained?  
So tired that you are ready to close your eyes and drift off into  
the deepest  
part of sleep until morning?  
But then you open one eye and you wonder why you aren't  
asleep and if you've really been laying in your bed for a whole  
four hours just thinking about random things.

Such things as,  
Maybe I could have changed this or maybe I should have said  
that,  
Maybe one of those things you thought was actually  
something else.. hm...  
If I did this earlier would it have been even more different?  
Did I do something wrong?  
Maybe I would  
have been happier if I did this instead of this.  
Thoughts that swirl in your head and sort of whisper in your  
ear  
You're trying to listen to them all and shut them off as quickly  
as you can so you can just go to bed but you can't.

You look at your phone  
Click it on to see if anyone has texted you  
If anyone has bothered to ask if you're okay

Because it's been weeks without a word from you  
But all you see is the bright numbers of how late you've stayed  
up and the alarm underneath that shows that you'll  
be waking up soon  
You know in the end you'll probably just dismiss the alarm  
and go back to bed anyways  
You know you don't want to get up after a whole night of  
thinking about  
what could have happened...

But you never did it that way  
So just shut them off now and say that the what-ifs never  
happened...  
What did happen is what you have to deal with  
Because that's what you had chosen in the end

So get up, it's time for school again.

## Checkered

By Shay Rosseter

I stare at the black and white photograph in the brown rectangular frame. The year is 1964. It's an image of my father as a child. He can't be any older than five. He's wearing a fedora hat, tilted upward on the left side; what appears to be slacks or jeans, and a button-down shirt.

Checkered.

He's facing the camera and seems to be sitting close to a windowsill, the light from it shining in on his left side. He looks happy. A half-grin, half smirk on his face. He's positioned in a jaunty way, like the way you'd see the cool kids posing together. His left arm displayed across his body, his left hand underneath the elbow of his right, and his right hand pointing his fourth finger and thumb at the camera.

I've always loved this picture. By looking at it, I can see that my father and I share the same chin. I can tell that some things have changed and that the fundamentals are still the same. That he still wears a grin, but now it reaches his eyes. He still has a cool vibe about him, that now translates to a mix of side-splitting jokes and groaner dad jokes, (that will still make me laugh, after I sigh and shake my head). The fedora he once wore, now changed to him placing various amounts of weird things atop his head and asking, "How do you like my hat, crown?" His hand that once pointed like a finger gun at the camera, now yields staple guns and power tools. A carpenter and a family man.

The black and white photograph in the brown rectangular frame, now translates to me.

His daughter.



I fear the softness  
Yet the softness is where I lie  
Consumed by the covers  
Choking on linens till I die  
I am constrained by my weakness  
as I stare into the light  
No motivation left  
And no strength left to fight

**Erin Lahowetz**



## **Regret**

**By Maddy Sladky**

Oh my dear melancholy...

Your memory still dances in the ballroom of my mind

I can still feel your hand on the back of my neck

But the burning taste of blunder washes it away



**Jean Chevalier**

## **Winter**

**By Maddy Sladky**

Bleak thoughts rise into my head  
Until my head is soaked in an a-roar of dissatisfaction  
Everything around slowly fades grey  
To the point where the color is a familiar taste

**With a Yellow Rose**  
**By Christian Stacy**

I lay you down  
In the company of son and wife  
Of family relatives  
You had never known  
In the escort of mother and father

“Don’t start crying” cracks the voice  
of the living sister

“I won’t if you don’t”  
I won’t if you don’t

## **Naivety**

**By Christian Stacy**

The ringleader of the Naive  
is he who boasts most of experience.  
The one who has forgotten the bliss  
    of innocence  
The dry skin which is enveloped  
    for the first time in the waters of life  
How it worships every drop,  
Prays for a coming flood,  
Dances in every rainshower,  
Oh how we languish in deserts  
    but live for sandy beaches,  
Ever accompanied by water  
    until we can no longer remember  
the sensation of dryness  
Only then will we languish in the depths of the ocean  
    and pray for the return of desert winds.  
(how desperately)  
we will beg for cracked skin  
(how desperately)  
we will beg for less life  
(how desperately)  
we will beg for the Naive  
    to lead us there.

## **Before Me**

**By Christian Stacy**

And here comes before me  
another round of sacrificial lambs,  
critters carefully seeded six feet down  
and watered with salt not dropped from the ocean

There will be a few years of visitors;  
Some familiars, some foreigners,  
but like the dew in due time;  
evaporation proves to prevail

A few years, or days at least,  
of steady silence will resume  
The endless drive of time.  
But what time brings with it is  
A slave tasked to repeat.

And here comes before me  
another round of sacrificial lambs,  
critters carefully seeded six feet down.

And here comes before me,  
salt not dropped from the ocean.

**The Image**  
**By Christian Stacy**

Holding it in your hands, the pale white border surrounds  
the memory you've chosen to gaze

upon this noon hour.

Your fingers, careful not to touch the colored picture.

At the corners of the border you see the papery wax bend and  
turn dark before crumbling away.

The creeping crumbles are nearing the edges of the precious  
image your hands hold between

trembling appendages.

When the creep of decay finally reaches the interior border  
and the falling bits and pieces turn

from white to multi-color.

You cup your hands, fingers tight to hold the dust you know  
you cannot save, and the memory

fades completely.

Leaving you to fit the dust back together.

You can't, but desperately you try.



**Jean Chevalier**



## **The Man Called Sodom**

### **By Christian Stacy**

There he walks on hallways,  
the one created- no- crafted,  
sculpted from the clay hands  
of a supposed merciful creator.  
A divine gift set in motion  
by rough hands and hard work.

The one who walks also is the one  
who possesses great magic.  
The gifts of the other side, the  
seducer of those who walk like himself.

And thus you named this walker Sodom  
for he was a realizer in men's hearts.  
A man who lifted the dark curtains of  
tradition to expose the naked artist at  
the center stage of every heart.

And so too have you been realized, once.  
A sculpture of naked Apollo layden within  
your breast has revealed itself. A heathen's  
magic has been done to you.

And it was then that you descended upon him  
and picked him apart for precious pieces.

Not because you sought priceless gemstones  
but because you sought to leave  
only the bitter and slimy flesh behind.

To toss the glitter aside and view  
a quivering mass with contempt amusement.

And so must the man called Sodom  
suffer the creator's fire and brimstone.

## **The Woman Called Gomorrah**

### **By Christian Stacy**

She was a collector of scars,  
soft flesh entranced,  
made to walk through hallways of razor's wire  
which lined the floors  
doors and hallways  
so that each step toward the unknown light  
would bear a mark painted in red

It was these scars you saw each day.  
They bore the weight of names;  
Troy  
Jake  
Brother  
Father  
Boyfriend

Every night she is visited by bent over gentlemen  
offering crimson roses picked from hidden fields,  
in which thorns are *forgotten*, so scars can be seen  
upon hands so as to mark her as one marks a  
resented classmate's cast with a heavy hand.

But layered across the neck and thighs are scars  
you do not see, for they are the ones marked carefully  
so as to heal by the toll of the morning school bell

The marks of lovers made of grace, precision,  
and perhaps a dainty touch.

But on the eve of a church bell's toll one of those scars  
remained.  
and it's villany named her,  
Gamorrah would reach the hallway's end  
the light before her, and be seared by its fire and brimstone  
till all flesh was but deep, cut stone

**The One Unmade**  
**By Christian Stacy**

For when there are two,  
the third remains unborn  
there, but without reality.  
And thus when two cities burned a third one fell.  
But this one,  
namelessly torn away from a chance at death  
neither Sodom or Gammorah,  
but both towns and neither cities in one nation  
was swept up in the holy story by fire and brimstone  
and stoked a fear so deep not even its ashes sufficed the  
reader's rage.  
So then came a great flood  
with no ark to redeem even two  
and the city which became ashes, became seafoam and red  
waves.  
dispelled from existence.

Even now, you are not appeased.  
So the city unnamed, which became the city of ashes,  
the city of ashes which became seafoam and red waves,  
the seafoam and red waves were struck from The Great Book.  
leaving behind a story of two  
and a third, unknown, unnamed, and unmade.

**Slut**

**By Meaghan Stout**

\$0.01 USD

.

Not for emotional consumption

.

Wash cold with like colors

.

Hang to dry



**Meaghan Stout**

**Was It You**  
**By Meaghan Stout**

Is there a sign above my head?  
What does it say?

“Vagina: Open for business,”  
“Do not respect,”  
“Worthless,”

Does it say something else?

Who put it there?  
Was it me? My upbringing? My skin color, my DNA, my  
clothes?

Was it you?



**Untitled**

**By Meaghan Stout**

Falling in love is nothing more  
Than cooking meth in your kitchen

## **Lies**

**By Meaghan Stout**

Started with a lie  
It was our little secret

A safe haven, hidden away  
A home, together, without walls

A big secret  
*Your* big secret  
A breach in our perfect system

Started with our lie  
It ended with yours.



**Jean Chevalier**

## **The Life in Your Lies**

**By Maria Wendt**

He had a unique way of speaking. Words grew from his lips like living beings. He formed them as a god would- each unique and serving a purpose. They oozed from his lips and tumbled to earth. Some would stand and walk away. Some would bounce and come to rest a short way from where we stood. Heavy coins and glittering diamonds would land with the sounding of bells and windchimes. I watched as my name grew from his lips and tumbled to earth, dazzling me with refractions of sunlight. I never felt the need to examine his creations but, deafened by the chattering starlings formed by his promises, I did not hear it land: clattering like cheap tin.

**Disintegration**  
**By Maria Wendt**

A warm summer rain,  
a cool stone bench,  
and the heavy scent of lilacs.  
Turn your face up,  
wash away the tears  
and lean back  
into the branches.  
Feel the small ones bend and snap  
as you sink  
down to the core  
and drown in a heavy sea  
of scent.



**Jean Chevalier**

## **Fatigue**

**By Maria Wendt**

She sits on a bench,  
careful of her skirts,  
then waits.

As the stone bench crumbles to sand  
as the flowers wilt and rot and  
bloom anew  
as the days and decades flow around her  
until she has rested  
enough to continue.