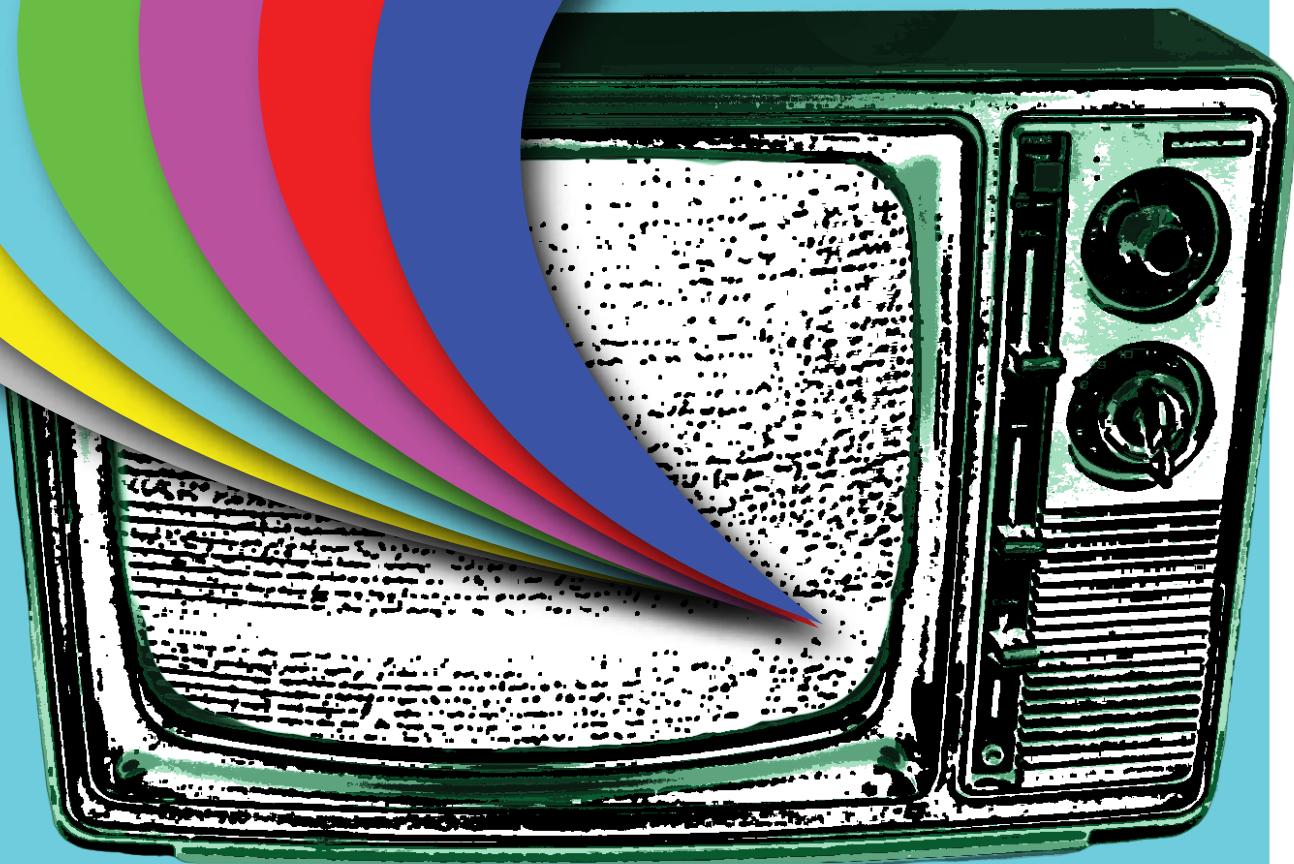


parnassus

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the

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arts

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of

northern essex community college

parnassus



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It's time once again...

Dust off your respective spectacles, pop open those neglected neurons, and tune in that dial to catch the tip top of the latest and greatest from NECC's creative community, near and far and coast to coast.

It's been another mega-groovy year here with your friends at *Parnassus*, and we are, as always, more than elated to bask in the righteous glow with you and your festive fingertips as the pages flip and your mind gets hip to the best poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, artwork, and photography that crossed our paths and which are now shuffled onto yours.

Leave the remote where it is — let us guide you and glide you along instead. We promise to have you home before dark, before the broadcast day is through, and before the static fuzz takes over.

Dig it!

- **Community College Humanities Association**
First Place: 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009
Second Place: 2008
- **Associated Collegiate Press Pacemaker Awards**
Best in Nation, Two-year Colleges: 2011
Finalist: 2009
- **Columbia Scholastic Press Association**
Gold Crown: 2011
Silver Crown: 2010
- **American Scholastic Press Association**
First Place with Merit: 2009, 2008
First Place: 2012, 2011, 2010
Best Gallery: 2008
Best Page Design: 2010
- **National Council for Marketing and Public Relations Paragon Awards**
Gold: 2011
Silver: 2009

awards
awards
awards

table of contents

- 4** THE ROBBED POOR
by David Bowie
- 5** THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION
by David Bowie
- 6** STAY
by Clare Thompson-Ostrander
- 8** SILHOUETTE SWEETHEART
by Eddie Brophy
- 9** ARTWORK
by Vaughn Abbott
- 10** SNOW WHITE
by Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari
- 12** ODES TO THE DESKS IN MY BIOLOGY CLASSROOM
by Elisabeth Beverage

- 14** PAINTING
by Amanda Tempesta
- 15** WHERE TRUTH IS FOUND
by Elisabeth Beverage
- 16** PHOTO
by David Sheeley
- 17** BUILDING A LIFE
by Craig Corsaro
- 20** CLIMBING UP A JOSHUA TREE TO FIND MADONNA
by Eddie Brophy
- 22** PHOTO
by David Sheeley
- 23** MITTENS
by Clare Thompson-Ostrander
- 26** CHASING CARS
by Michele Simon
- 29** PHOTO
by Tim Dwyer
- 30** YOU AND WHAT SALVATION ARMY?
by Eddie Brophy
- 32** BROTHER
by Krista Demarkis
- 34** WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE TO BE ON TOP OF THE WORLD?
by Victoria Pham
- 36** PHOTO
by David Sheeley
- 39** ARTWORK
by Vilavy Vila
- 40** HIDING BEHIND BLADES OF GRASS
by Justin Merced
- 41** ARTWORK
by Eli Portuhondo
- 42** SHELF LIFE
by Trish Malone Shade
- 43** ARTWORK
by Amanda Tempesta
- 44** THE ACCURSED HEART'S FATE
by Timothy Vermette
- 45** PHOTO
by Michele Simon
- 46** PURPLE
by Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari
- 47** PHOTO
by Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari
- 48** MOTHER'S NEST
by Mary Hanewich
- 49** PHOTO
by Michele Simon
- 50** NO MATTER WHAT
by Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari
- 53** PAINTINGS
by Nikki Olson
- 54** THE SEARCH FOR LOVE AND GOD
by David Bowie
- 55** ARTWORK
by Julie Newcomb
- 56** ARTWORK
by Katie Ruiz
- 57** (MY) THOUGHT BALLOONS
by Nikki Olson
- 58** COFFEE BREAK
by Lisa Mahoney
- 62** PAINTING
by Megan Cheney
- 62** ARTWORK
by Katie Pazzanese
- 63** FORGOTTEN
by Michele Simon
- 64** WATER WOMAN
by Molly Bagley
- 65** ARTWORK
by Patrick Curley
- 66** DOORAG
by Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari
- 67** BLAZING CILIATIONS OF EMBER
by Trish Malone Shade
- 68** CONTRIBUTORS
- 72** STAFF
- 73** HOW TO CONTRIBUTE



The Robbed POOR

David Bowie

The shoes on my feet are worn,
The shirt on my back is but a rag.

I am a man of flesh and blood,
not cherished stone.

My most worldly possessions remain inside.
The hopes I carry and the love I feel
Are given freely but unable to steal.

My heart holds no tangible worth, nor my mind.
Neither will fill your pocket, or quench your thirst.

My hands, dirty and calloused have built this world.
These hands that give are worthless to those who take.

There is my pride, no creed or heritage building me up.
Just the words of good men openly shared.

This is my worth,
What little I have,
Is not measured in gold or statues galore,
But in the hearts of those with me,
And the warmth they adore.



The People's CHAMPION

David Bowie

This soothsayer speaks with honey coated lips.
With a smile that reaches from ear to ear.
Hitting points precisely, with militaristic aptitude.
Every idea spoken promises ivory towers and utopian perfection.

This object of criticism answers questions unasked.
A shell of influence paying the debt of a lengthy career.
Showing humanity by a tear shed and a baby comforted.

This reflection speaks the majority's truth.
And seeks not the ivory towers or perfection promised,
But a place to sit and an office to call their own.



f

rom unit six, through branches of winter trees, we saw the lake, nothing but a black mirror on the day I moved in, still it was a selling point. Other than that, you said it was a typical section eight. I asked how you knew, you said, Look at the Bud cans all over the stairs, and we both saw the small boy kick the dead cat by the dumpster. Snow leaked from the sky, but the boy wore short sleeves, his skin, pink as the cat's tongue. You whispered in my ear, The lake turned to mud years ago, but the realtor had two other people checking the place out, so I took unit six, the one with the view.

You never listen, you said.

You helped me move in, carried boxes of my books, lugged that Salvation Army couch you swore had bugs, and we hadn't even held hands yet, or talked about anything other than the fact that you found poverty quirky. I told you I wanted to be a writer, and you said, Sounds like a solid, kid. You were like that, a flirt, told me a 19 year-old-girl making it on her own lubed your shorts. I told you, I won't always be poor.

Our first date was darts at Downtown Charlie's. I drove. You had six months then probation before you got your license back. I left my glasses in the glove compartment on purpose. I wanted you to notice my eyes, my best feature, but you only saw the poke marks my blind darts left on the wall. Don't you get it, you said, I like your glasses, so I ran out into the cold to get them.

It was a frigid night, cold as a skull, fogged my glasses something fierce, and my fingers were still numb from the walk when I picked up another dart, felt it move like a steel bird in my hand. I lined up my shot, and watched the colored feathers swirl into a bulls-eye. That's my Money Girl, you said.

You bought drinks that night, too. I drank a margarita from a straw and you did shots of tequila, licked salt from the inside of your thumb. Don't forget, you're driving, you said, but I didn't hear you because in your next sentence you asked me what happened with Teddy. You listened for a minute and told me, You can't call that rape, kid.

Your bedroom noises were hard to take. You snored and barely talked to me at all, except to tell me I stole all the blankets, left a chill on your skin. I guess I expected something more after sex with you, something more like butterflies in the snow.

You always could read me, so you asked if I liked morning sex better, but I wouldn't know the difference. You were the only boy I'd known after Teddy, and Teddy happened at night, when I drove him home. He told me he wanted to give me the B52's CD, back when CD's may as well have been a million dollars. I followed him to his place, left my car running, but Teddy said, You ain't going nowhere. After it happened, I drove home in my bare feet, cried the whole way because my torn underpants were somewhere on Teddy's floor.

You were the only one I ever told about Teddy.

You took me to Joseph's for our six month anniversary. You never did move in with me, or get your own apartment, said your Mom's heart would fall to pieces if you left her alone. I bought a new dress, the olive colored one that buttoned up the back and puddled at my feet. You told me it fit like a glove. I wore my hair down to my shoulders and put on lipstick, you insisted on my glasses. You had money, too, charmed a fifty dollar tip from the bird watcher's group. I swelled inside when you said you wanted to spend it on your girl.

We ordered expensive shrimp scampi that we could've eaten for free at work, but we didn't care. I ate three different kinds of rolls, smeared them all with the sweet almond butter you called gourmet. When I told you I had news, you leaned in close. I always loved your eyelashes. So long they could've been spider legs.

Spill it, you said, and I told you I got into a college on scholarship, told you I wanted to be a writer.

Didn't know you wrote, you said, ripping a shrimp's tail with your teeth.

You had news, too, told me you were moving to Nantucket for the summer. A friend hooked you up with a bartending gig. Killing time on Nantucket sounded like fun to me.

Nah, kid, this is a solo, you said.

Then, you reached over to my plate.

The thing with Teddy is he left me thrown, but you. I don't know why I let you undo the buttons of my dress after Joseph's. I guess I was hoping you'd see both our feet on the Nantucket sand. Or that maybe you'd forget how you told me you were leaving in a week, how I was the more fun than you ever imagined. You'd miss me, you said. I must've looked hurt because you said I read too much into things, the whole mess with Teddy was a clusterfuck because I made it a clusterfuck. You're one of those chicks, you said, agony was your very womb.

I started to cry, and you said, C'mon, kid. You know me. I can't take the negative on a permanent.

After you said those words, you went to my fridge for a Coke. I wrapped myself in a sheet and sat on the Salvation Army couch, waited for you. My skin burned just thinking about the bugs, but the couch offered the view of the lake. It was much prettier at night until I saw the small boy out by the dumpster again, twitching in the dark like a cat's tail. I watched as he struck a match. Sparks of orange lit his face, brought short blonde spikes of his hair into light, and his eyes, blazing slits of heat. Just then, the weight of you filled the couch. You cracked open the Coke, and I showed you the little boy. You laughed. Fireworks for poor kids, you said, reaching for my hand, but I pushed you away and watched the little boy carve fire circles into the night sky.

SILHOUETTE SWEETHEART

Eddie Brophy

Lunar moons eclipse the baby blue pacific
But I'm not looking for anything or anyone specific
Just a hand to hold when midnight takes over the sun
And Dinosaur killing space rocks are cuing us to run

I just want a relationship with the northern star
That's when I found a silhouette sweetheart filling synapses at the bar
With her anecdotes on life while confiscating the keys to patrons' cars
Alive in cold war nightmares looking for Florence nightingale and here you are

I've been riding shotgun to drive thru funerals at fast food churches
In gridlock processions on elm streets where motorcades are followed by hearses
Where the best man and eulogist sit back exchanging poignant verses
Talking about bogeymen who live on the same roads where their chief lost his head
And widows are kissing grooms, looking for mother's milk and tasting lead

The sky opens up with U2 bombers and zeppelins that ignite
Life's a bitch and you're a fool to eighty six your flight with fight
Under fire cracker flashes, when roman candles make fools erudite
But I should get home, because this whiskey is hundred proof and it's getting late

I fold up some bills into a little paper cup for an education she could invest
Mistaken charity, but I'm in a hurry, and I have cyanide pills to ingest
Because I know if she fills up my glass I'll start divulging what I've repressed
And I'm afraid my last moment on earth shouldn't spent on a bartender to obsess

Under streetlight landing strips I navigate this vacant city
Wondering if she was giving me bedroom eyes or just her pity
And how much longer before we become fossilized with the Tyrannosaurs Rex
Trudging through the snow banks of this nuclear winter lamenting the last time I had sex



Vaughn Abbott

Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombardi

Lady Wisdom

No... it's not.
It's not about the weight
How could it be?
She looks normal
She looks fine
She looks just right
She looks perfect
She's beautiful

But I can't tell her
No... I can't
That's the wrong thing to do
That's the last thing I should do
I can't tell her she's just right
I can't tell her she's perfect
just the way she is
I can't tell her she's beautiful

Cause, she won't hear it,
won't hear my words
She'll hear those other words,
words designed in boardrooms,
marketing offices, and ad agencies
You're not thin enough
You're not pretty enough
You are, simply put, not enough

Those words
words with an agenda
POWER WORDS
The power that brings money
to the breast pockets of
the billion dollar industry that
builds its fortune up from
where your heart used to be

She's a good girl, a protégé of
took her lessons directly from
Snow White, and the dwarves
they remember
they remember with me
after Halloween, fifteen years ago
when she wouldn't take that dress off,
wouldn't answer to anything but Snow White

Snow? Snow? Snow White! You're a good girl,
You devised a plan
a plan that balanced it all
you gave away something to everyone
Their need to have you thin
Your need to feel satisfied
God's need to have you follow the rules

But something went wrong, terribly wrong
Why didn't you tell us? We
could have warned you, we
could have let you know
Your organs will stress,
Your teeth will rot
Your esophagus will split
Your stomach will burn

And that's not all, that's
not even the worst of it
This plan, your plan, eats away at your heart
wears away at your soul, leaves
that space empty, that space where
there is room to discover, to
find for yourself truth, from lies
fact, from fiction ugly, from beautiful

Yet, you are not alone
There are those of us who
back in the day, had a plan
of our own, gave away something
to everyone, may not
have been your plan... exactly, but
a lie, is a lie, is a lie
is a damned lie

So, here's how it works girlfriend,
sister, daughter, neighbor
cousin, niece, sweetheart
It is not over, my love, it
is not all said and done
We will stand with you, we
will stand for you, we will carry
the truth that you cannot hear

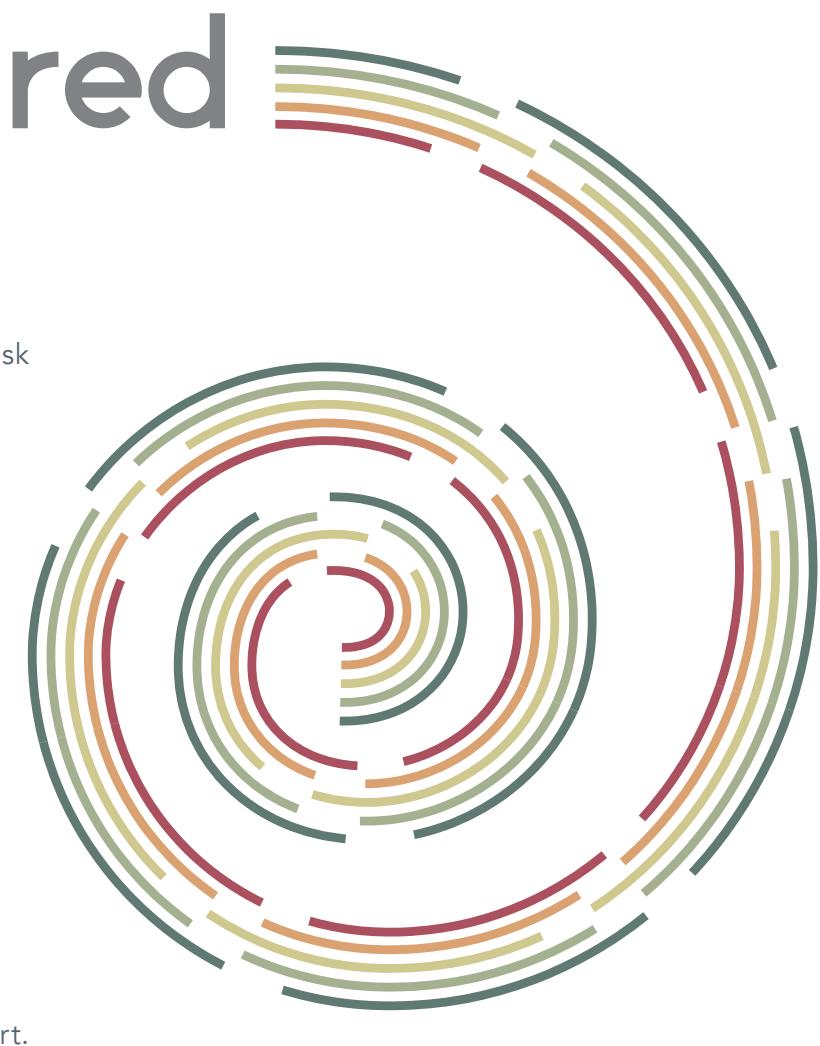
Lady Wisdom will shout it out
from the rooftops
to the town square, from
the busy street corner to the
hiding places deep within your soul
There will be nowhere to hide
the truth, the light illuminates
separates, real from unreal

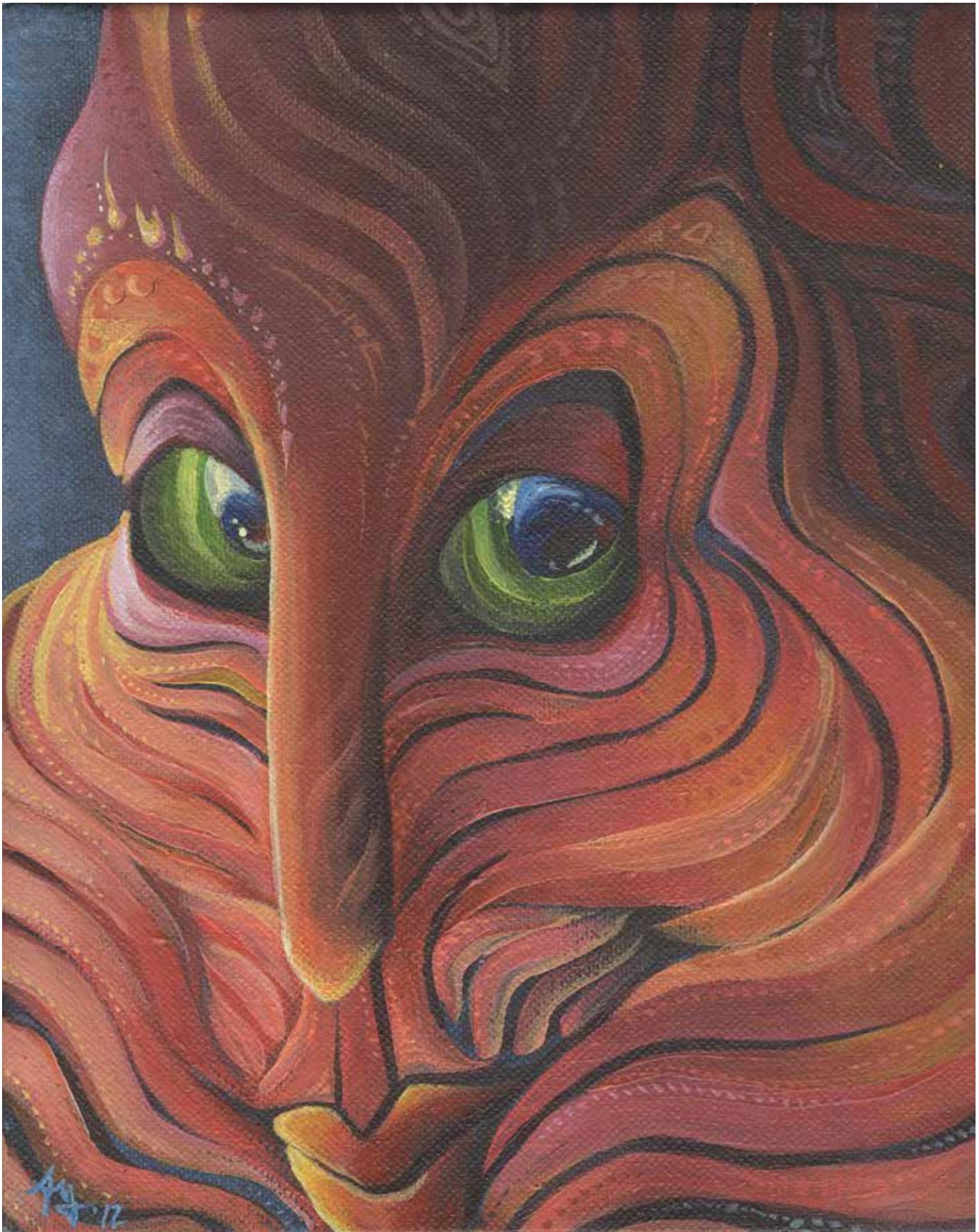
We will shout with her
your name, my darling
It is your name we will bring to her
your name, is the only one
that can drown out
the hum, the drone,
the constant rumble and shake from
our heartbreak, that is yours

And when you can hear it
And when you can see it
And when you can know it
When you can live it
only then, will we quiet
will we still, will we
breathe, deep in the knowledge
that truth is your beauty

odes to the desks in my biology classroom

Elisabeth Beverage

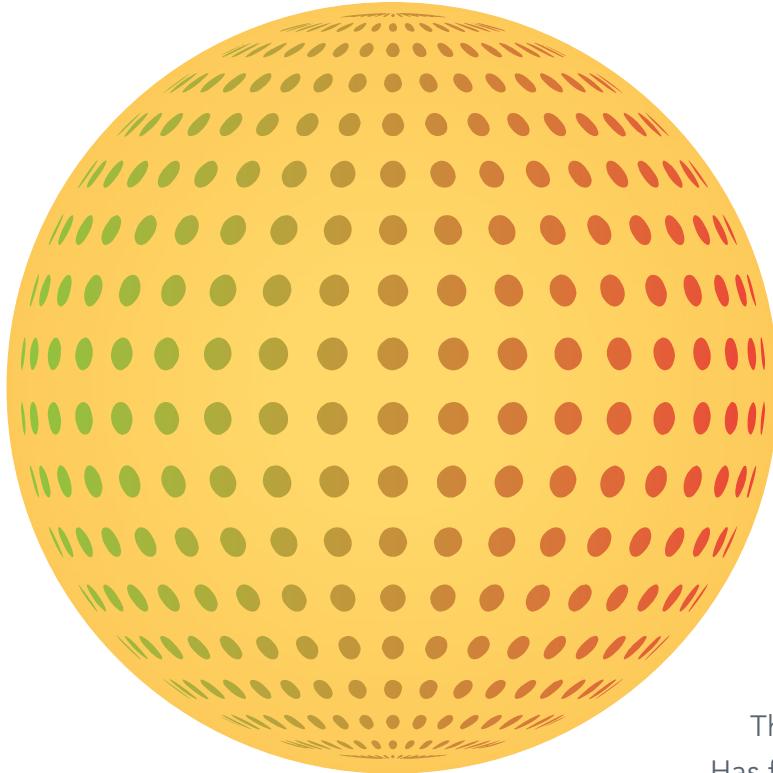




Amanda Tempesta

Where Truth... is Found

Elisabeth Beverage



For many years of my life I thought
That rain and dinge and grey have not
In them any poetry
And grace and any beauty
Was only in sun or splendour caught.

And then over time I'd see
That in struggle, strength there'd be
Heart behind law
Determination's jaws
And in sacrifice, nobility.

Just the same the shattered light
Fragmented from streetlights in the night
Broken upon wet streets
The mist easing off the heat
Has feeling for those who use their sight.

And yet despite the truths that I
Found in darkness and sorrow's cries
When taken all in all
Light deep and shadows tall
I prefer the splendour of an azure sky.



building a Life

Craig Corsaro

"I've never seen one shaped like that," I thought out loud the first time I saw it. My parents' response to my keen observation was laughter—a reaction I was not anticipating. I don't know if they laughed because it was a strange first impression, or because they were thinking the same thing themselves. What I do know is that my assessment was a fair one: it was an oddly shaped house.

It was a big lopsided triangle, the kind of shape I drew every Friday afternoon in art class; the kind of shape that caused my report card to get stamped with an "S-" in art for every semester of third grade. Yet plain as day, someone decided to turn one of my sickly shapes into an actual house, and I was going to live in it.

The inside was just as odd to me. I found myself in a room that seemed to be made only of glass, which appeared to serve no other purpose than to be a room with a lot of windows in it. I strained my neck as I looked up at a giant, twisting spiral staircase that lead up to a third

floor. In this moment, I learned not only about the existence of spiral staircases, but also of third floors. Then, two floors below that, I noticed my basement had a bar in it. Here, I imagined myself serving drinks to faces I've never met, because surely strangers were going to come drink at this bar, and someone would need to serve them.

I continued to make my way through my new house like a tourist taking in the local sights: observing and appreciating, but not developing any deep personal attachment to what I was looking at. Because, as fascinating as the house was, it didn't feel like mine. The carpets were ugly, the walls were ugly, I didn't like this color, I didn't like that color and not a single room I saw had any of my memories in it.

"Come help me and dad," my mom would yell up to me every Saturday for what seemed like the remainder of my childhood. Every few weeks, my parents would need help with whatever new project they were working on. They peeled off carpets like layers of dead skin, built walls, painted walls, installed tile and hardwood floors, and replaced countertops. An entire lives' work had lead them to their dream house, and they poured all of themselves into it. Finally, they were going to have everything they wanted. Finally, they were going to be happy.

That oddly shaped house was transformed into my parents' idea of perfection. Their determination filled the air, becoming the gravity that held everything in place. Together, they succeeded in creating a refuge from the rest of the world— their own private paradise. It was more than a dream house; what my parents made was not a place to live, but a place to grow old, a place to die.

But even a perfect paint job begins to chip the moment it dries. Maintaining perfection did not have the same mysterious allure to my parents as achieving it, and chipping walls become more obvious over time. At first, it was a pile of laundry on the couch an extra day or two, or a light bulb my father would put off replacing. Chips so small a guest at the house wouldn't even notice them. But laundry piles up and light bulbs burn out no matter how beautiful the home they exist in. For every pulled muscle and blister they put into it, the only difference my parents noticed in their lives was a new house, and all new houses become old.

"It's all ruined, Craig. Don't you see?" My dad desperately screamed as he attempted to jump out of the third story window. My mother shouted at him in a drunken stupor from the other end of the room and I was caught in the middle. My fervent pleas were no longer enough to persuade my dad from the window, so I had to forcefully pry him away, much to the protest of both my parents. After, I slammed the window shut— trapping us all inside a little longer.

I herded both parents down the spiral staircase and into separate rooms. My father instantly fell asleep in his bedroom while my mother blasted music from the living room. I don't know whether she did this to spite him or because she felt herself slipping away into silence, but I was too happy about them both being safe to care.

Alone, I walked through the house of my parents' self destruction. Beer cans and pill bottles lay scattered over a floor of dirty clothes and broken furniture. The once bright rooms and hallways now echoed dimly in burnt-out darkness. I gazed upon the wreckage and collapsed into it, powerless to do anything else. I was forced to live within the chipped walls of my parents' imperfection; I took shelter in the shattered ruins of lost hopes and dreams.

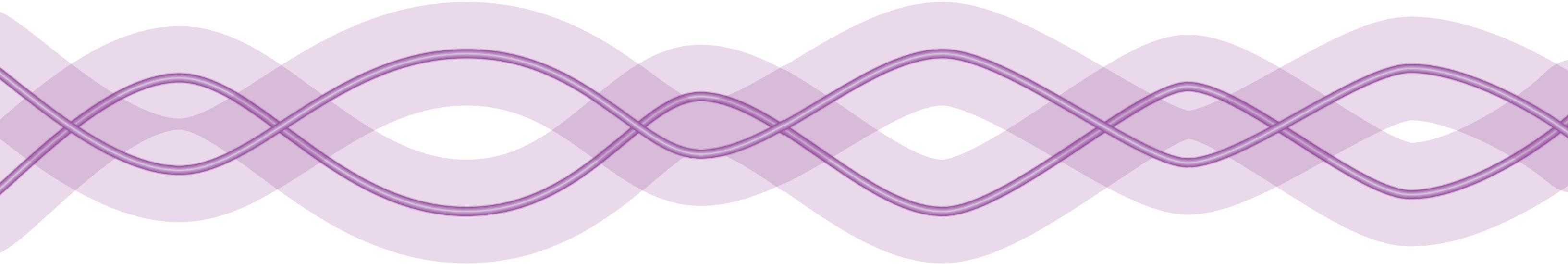
On my last day in the house, I was overcome by a feeling so nameless and complex that it can never again be experienced by a human. It was the type of emotion that is so specific, so present that it can only exist for an instant; the type of emotion that always accompanies deep joy or pain. I made my way through every empty room, unable to remember what my parents' perfection once looked like. All could remember was their sorrow and regret. But now, as I was being forced to leave, I wanted to stay in that house forever. It was safe. It was home.

Sometimes, I think about what family lives there now. I remember my parents determination as they tried to build a life for themselves, and I wonder if there is any sign of it left. Other times, I think about how, even though I stopped living in that oddly shaped house, it never stopped living in me.

My parents are still inside there too— building a life.

CLIMBING UP a JOSHUA TREE to find MADONNA

Eddie Brophy



In my dreams-
There are devils,
And there are sprites
There are intimations
Through the tedium of this fight
Heeded through the scoffing of ex lovers
Telling me I'm just a cog
A minion to the plight

White collared devils
Selling out blue collared saints

I'm a panhandling prophet
With orisons heavier than the light

In my memories-
There are rainy days on a lonely avenue
Bankrupt financial districts,
And third eyes, blinded by narrow sight

I was just a boy
Carried on the shoulders of a young man
Bearing the cross of a modest life
Bouncing checks, and lacking strife,
And all he wanted,
Was to find the right record,
Without sermonizing the despair,
Of standing on bended knee,
Hoping he had the courage to take a wife

In my dreams-
There are romantics,
And there are cynics
There are accusations of lunacy,
That fills up lonely clinics

I find that in all these dreams I'm dying,
Or wounded in landfills, under metaphoric gutters,
But empty are the pockets,
Of a man broke of affection,
Anyone can buy a three piece suit and claim their wealth
Very few have a heart that flutters,
And make the most of being impoverished with their health



David Sheeley

MITTENS

Clare Thompson-Ostrander

Frank Todd lost his wife. Not in the usual way men lose their wives. He lost her the day they took away his driver's license.

Forty-five years ago, he married a girl named Frances and brought her to live with him on the lake. Francis and Frances, he'd say, what are the chances? Everyone knew them as Frannie and Frank Todd, and they lived at 32 Cross Street, exactly one street over from my own home at 17 Midland. We both had clear views of Lake Frontier.

Frannie suffered a stroke six months before Frank lost his license. The map of her brain seized and left her memory as hollow as a footprint, but Frank drove the distance everyday to sit across from his Frannie, ignoring the silence that formed her lips into the opening of a cave. No words escaped the cave, just the wheezing that told doctors her vital organs were failing.

Frannie and Frank had two grown children, a daughter that moved 3,000 miles away, and a son that lived the next town over, never married, a good man, round as a pumpkin, and a mechanic. Every summer, he helped his father put his skiff on the lake so the old man could ignite his youth again. Two summers ago, wind proved too much for Frank, so his son advised him to set down the tiny mast and sail, and use the old girl as a row boat on the lake. Frank agreed, but now that Frannie was sick, he'd let the little wooden skiff rest in the sand all summer.

I missed the sounds of Frank's skiff that summer. Every morning, I'd wake before the sun, and sit in the office that used to be my daughter's bedroom, before she moved away with a man made of midnight leaves. I'd sit in those early hours and knit, something about working the needles to create mittens, scarves, most of which, I made for no one. I wasn't talented, but I'd gotten into the habit of knitting before sun up, and that's when I'd see Frank. Through my office window, cracked just a little, I'd hear the rhythm of the oars on Frank's skiff rising and falling, a heartbeat in the clouds, until the bent man in his little boat curled away from the gray mist of dawn. The old man pushed and pulled with his oars, and I'd go up and over with my needles, push and pull, up and over, push and pull, up and over. Even after the little skiff was out of my sight, I'd work my needles to the rhythm of the oars, the two of us weaving our wake across the water's edge.

After Frannie fell sick, Frank stopped rowing in the mornings, and I had a hard time knitting much of anything. My still fingers made my mind wander to my daughter and the man that made me want to burn matches, one after the other. Twenty-two years old, and she decided he's the best she'll ever get. She'll never earn what I had at her age, an apartment of my own with bills to pay and the freedom to say no to any man. With thoughts like these, I'd ache for Frank to move the dark water again.

On the morning Frank lost his license, he came to see me. We had never really been close, but he and his wife were good, neighborly people. I had known Frannie when my daughter was little. Frannie would let my daughter pick white Peonies from her garden. I remember the peonies, how they looked like a bouquet of brides, waiting. Frannie's fingers would test each stem to find the perfect peony. My little girl would skip all the way home, waving the delicate flower in her hands, leaving the poor petals spinning in the air. I'd watch them land on the ground, hoping Frannie didn't see how my little girl reduced her beautiful flowers to so much exhaust from a tailpipe. Frank always loved his wife's garden, even though others told him it took over the view.

Frank had a butterfly bandage above his left eye. He told me he was helping Frannie up from her seat, when the poor woman, whose atrophied limbs were as

heavy as Christ on Saint Christopher's back, leaned too deeply into his chest, and he lost his footing. When he came to, he was lying on a gurney, and a young woman, a nurse's aide, was by his side, offering him orange juice and cookies. He asked about his wife, and the aide told him, "You gave us quite a scare, Frank." Her voice was as sweet as church, but she never worked up the courage to tell him that Frannie had died in his arms.

"Three hours later, they took away my license," he said.

"Did you ask them why?" I asked.

"I don't remember why," he said. "But, they wrote it down for me."

He reached inside of his pocket, and took out an official looking piece of paper. It had been folded to fit inside of his wallet. His old fingers fumbled to open the paper flat.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Dementia...but I will get my license back."

"I'm very sorry, Frank," I told him.

"For what?" he asked.

"Your license."

"They took my license away?"

"Yes," I said. "They took your license away."

"How will I bring flowers to Frannie?" he asked me.

I didn't have a straight answer for him.

That night, I went to my daughter's room, and rummaged through my pile of mittens. I pulled out my very best, a clumsy white pair, the ones that looked most like a flower. I put them in my pocket and walked down to the beach in the dark. I found my way to Frank's skiff, resting in shadows and sand, and I laid the mittens down on the seat.

Two days later, Frank left me a note in my mailbox.

It read, simply: "I prefer blue."



Chasing Cars

Michele Simon

His chubby little baby hand reached out and took the toy car from mine. It immediately went clunk into the plastic container in his lap. He peered at the car in the container like it was the long lost missing piece, his eyes never wandering from it for a moment.

"He's such a good baby," I commented. My husband continued chatting on like he hadn't heard, telling his latest funny anecdote of someone he knew at work. He didn't look over at me, just continued driving our cramped Ford Escort down the long road. I listened to his story and laughed and peeked back at my baby quietly playing in his car seat. His wavy brown hair glistened in the sunlight highlighting the determined look on his face. He looked like a soldier preparing for battle. *Mama's little soldier boy.*

The trip was the longest we'd ever attempted with a twenty month old. Most babies would have become restless by now sitting in a car seat for a two and a half hour drive, but Zach just continued to play with his toys, never making a sound. He was so different from Ashley, his three year old sister, who would have been throwing things and vocalizing her dislike by now. It was a good thing we'd decided to leave her at home with her grandmother. This was Zach's day, and she could easily devour all the attention.

Zach made a little noise and I handed him something else from the bag stuffed with food and his favorite things I had packed for the trip. The orange slice went straight into his mouth, the juices splattering down his chin. He held his hand out for more. I tried another orange slice but he grunted his disapproval, so I handed him another car. It went plunk into the container. Knowing I would soon

run out of cars I gave him another plastic container. He took great care placing it in his lap, like it was a cherished kitten, and started to empty the contents of the first container into the new one.

I turned back around, knowing that would keep him occupied for a long time, and watched the landscape drift by. It had always been one of my favorite things; to go on a long drive, find the most beautiful houses with gardens and barns, and imagine it was my home. I loved to think of my kids playing outside of those houses and watching them grow.

My husband stopped telling his latest story. "We're here," he said, pulling the car into an immense parking lot.

"I hope they have some good toys in there," I said, scouring the pristine building with its huge glass windows and doors. That thought echoed in my mind when we went through those doors and were greeted with one of the largest playrooms I had ever seen.

It was probably the only time I can remember regretting that we didn't have to wait long in a waiting room. I was having as much fun as the rest of the kids there, just watching Zach get engrossed in a glass covered table that had small toy cars in it which could be moved around with magnets. He was so fascinated he never looked at me even once.

When the nurse came to get us, I regretted having to pull him away. He gave a small whimper of disapproval then came along without another sound, but his eyes were riveted on the enchanting car table as we walked away.

He's such a good baby, I smiled, carrying him on my hip down the long corridor to one of the numerous offices.

The visit was about as long as the ride. Zach sat in my lap about half the time, the rest of the time he played on the floor. He was given a whole assortment of things to play with but ultimately settled for the container of cars I had stashed back in the bag. He lined them up in a straight row along the floor, bumper to bumper. When he was done he would push the row of cars like they were chasing each other. Ultimately he would have to stop because a wall or chair blocked his way. Then he'd take one car from the front and put it in the back, and continue doing that until the line of cars had moved back to the other side of the room.

Several doctors came in during the visit. Zach mostly ignored them, much to my dismay. He was too busy concentrating on his work. When an older psychologist offered him a colorful peg board to play with, I beamed with pride as he conquered test after test.

"Amazing," the kind old man said, peering up at me through his glasses. "He's well beyond the ability of his age group."

"He has an excellent memory," I replied grinning.

"Do you mind if Sally takes him out in the playroom for a few minutes?" he asked.
My first gut feeling was Yes! — I never wanted to leave my babies with anyone.

"No," I sighed.

Sally took him out of the room. He didn't even whimper.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this," the younger doctor said, sitting across from me.
"Your son is Autistic."

I sat dumbfounded, not knowing what to say. My husband spoke up with a surprising fierce force and started drilling him with questions.

"He doesn't make eye contact," the doctor explained; I listened to his discourse without interruption, having lost the ability to speak. "... plays repetitively... lining things up or putting them in and out of baskets... doesn't cry... doesn't speak..."

"He used to speak," I said. He was putting two words together.

"That's typical with Autistic children," the doctor told us. "Many start to speak and mysteriously lose that ability."

"But he did so well on the peg board."

"Autistic people have been known to have incredible memories."

It all made sense—but it wasn't real.

He started explaining all the things they had tested during our visit.

"I'm sorry," he said, "your son may never talk or behave like a normal child."

I didn't know what to say. What does a person say when someone says something like that to you? I said nothing, just stared at the sunlight gleaming through the blinds.

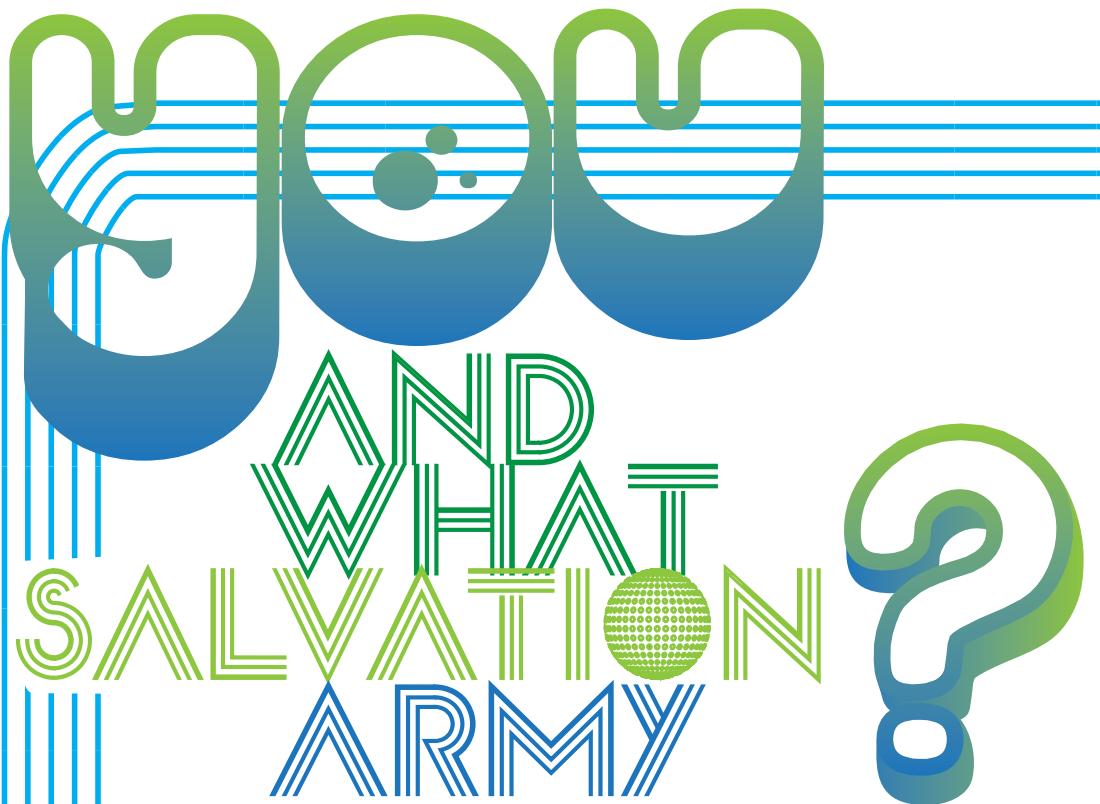
The doctors and nurses handed us an armful of pamphlets and a long list of names to contact. I took them all but as I tried to listen to their explanations the blinding white light coming through the window sucked me in.

My husband and I thanked the doctors and went out to retrieve Zach. Of all the wonderful toys in the waiting room, he was engrossed in the car table again, trying to get them to all line up. I couldn't pull him away from them fast enough. We went outside and walked toward the car in silence.

I looked up at the sky. It was the richest blue I can ever remember, sprinkled with puffy white clouds. I couldn't remember the air ever having any texture to it either but it had suddenly become a living entity that surrounded me, stroking me with its crisp edge. I reached down and took Zach's small hand into mine. He put his other hand up toward his dad, who took it. We swung him between us, back and forth, all the way back to the car, with him mewling small noises of glee.



Tim Dwyer



Eddie Brophy

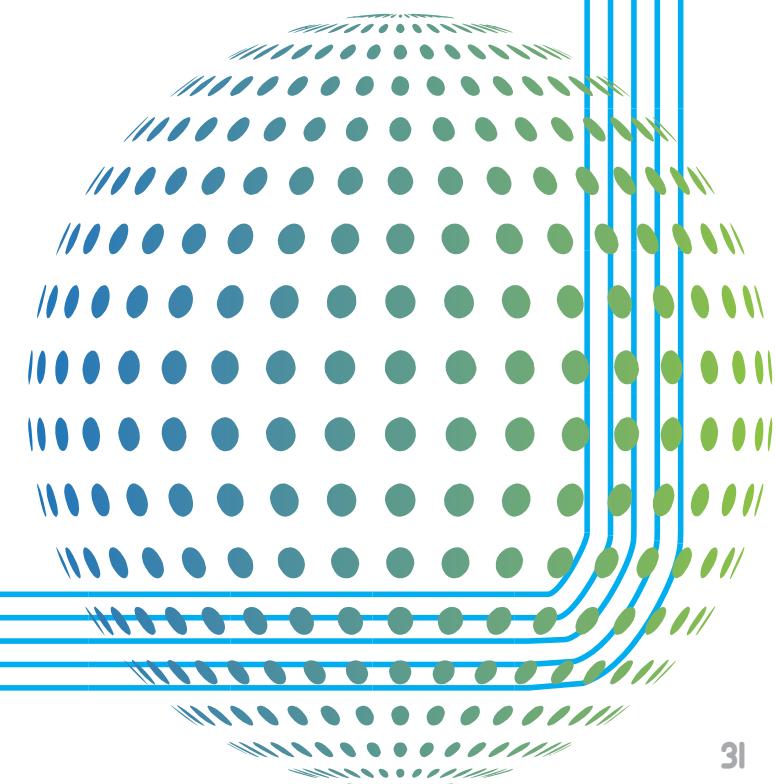
My guts are tangled
Like the innards of a favorite mix tape,
Regurgitated from a boom box after repeated plays
And my heart resounds like an 808 drum
At the behest of my Janet Jackson desire to give you a beat

Coyness is the cancer to all our penny fountain wishes
We could be ethereal high fidelity, but we never make a sound
I'm growing weary of nursing tired alibis back to health
I'd rather dine you over honeymoon kisses, and volunteer to do the dishes
Than to wait until the end of the world
To make love like the sky around us was falling
I've loitered outside enough seven eleven payphones
To wax rhapsodic about tedious affirmations apprehensive about calling
And I've worshipped enough cough syrup demigods

To know when kismet is more potent than a drugstore utopia
And there's as much clarity in retrospect as a polluted bloodstream
Stoicism isn't a refuge when your veins are introverted and your skin keeps crawling

Resurrection shouldn't be an epiphany cascaded in a cold sweat
Cresting tidal wave superstitions
Swimming intravenously through the vestibules of my heart
Far from the shores and harbors of superficiality and carnal desires
Now I'm surviving for a tarot card muse who will incinerate
Funeral pyre, catacomb, twilight zones, through the sincerity of her art

If only I could be like the soothsayer raconteurs on clairvoyant FM
With the calloused and methodical hands that navigate the recesses of my mind
You'd know how imperative it is to embrace this otherwise convoluted genesis
Because thrift store treasures are far and wide
And I'd give anything to make sure this mutual flirtation won't subside
There's romance in this poetry, but it never sounds profound
And I'd like to keep you like ubiquity, but you never stick around





Krista Demarkis

Sometimes you come here so much like yourself
and those are the days that whisper of when you showed me the world
from the handlebars of your bicycle, wind whipping warm in my face
whistling in my ears down, down, down the big hill
to the corner store for penny candies, Warheads,
or for a pack of Garbage Pail Kid cards
that had that hard stick of gum inside
that bonded like sweet spackle to our back teeth.

When you're like you-
your cackle chops the silence of the moment
and suddenly you become the guru of good tunes
bands blasting in your attic room
your three quarter sleeve Van Halen shirt with the baby smoking a cigarette
sliding past my knuckles
neck slipping off my little shoulder
I'm holding my head high
for I am dressed in the admirable robes of a king.

I can recall the nights when dark shadows crept
into the corners of my room
threatening to suck out my breath, burst out of my closet and reach out from underneath my bed
And you would become the commanding officer
delegating jobs to each stuffed soldier;

bunnies manned post by my head, bears at the foot of my bed,
dolls in front of the door,
all armed with promises of protection and magical might,
because you said so.

But as I look at you now, thin, with white globs of sticky spit
stuck in the corners of your mouth like spiders' nests
it can't be the same you that lay with me
on damp earth to search the white cotton candy clouds
for cars and animals and people we know.

And when your glazed eyes glare
into that invisible black hole by the edge of the curtain,
I can't remember
if that was you who taught me
how to perfectly launch a paper plane.

That other you is a lying thief
with a head like an oversized poppy, bobbing, nodding
this way and that and could never catch a snake
slithering through the tall grass
in the top secret field one street over and down past Cat's Alley.

I see more and more of that other you, of that stranger in your skin
I am forced to hide my purse but I'll always let you in
And I see much more than I care to remember
as you spew the sad song of your life
I feed you a hot meal and confess who you are to me
but send you off by yourself in the night.

Still, sometimes I catch a fleeting glimpse of you
from underneath that gray sheath draped over the brown of your eyes
and torrents of memories crash over my heart
filtering all of your lies.

what does it feel like to be on top of the world?

Victoria Pham

What does it feel like to be on top of the world? I wouldn't know, but I can tell you how it feels to be on top of a bridge, one hundred and forty feet above water with heavy winds slamming my back. My friend was with me. Scared as hell, she wanted us to turn around—"Victoria, this is crazy, maybe we should stop!" As long as I was there, there was no way we were going to simply walk home.

"You should come to my place tonight."

I looked at John with eyes squinted. I wanted to see what was behind that façade he wears—big blue puppy dog eyes framed with soft dirty blonde hair and an Oscar-winning smirk that was ever-so permanent. Defeated in cracking his fortress, I relaxed my glare and broke down my walls.

"Will Marc be there?" I asked.

"Course not, don't you think I know better than to put you two in the same room?" I almost wanted to say 'yes,' but I resisted. Instead I geared up in making another condition clear:

"You know I am not going to drink, right?"

Then, that half-smile appeared.

"Please, that's what they all say. With the way you have been lately, you'll definitely drink, and this time, it won't be because of me." I shouldn't have let go of my guard, but as I watched John walk away, I couldn't help but listen to what he said.

Being only 65% sure of myself, I asked Cassidhe if I should go or not. My roommate gave the typical college girl reply of a yes. Still uncertain, I asked her if she would like to come with me. She looked at me, and smiled. "Of course," she said.

The bridge stretched 1,200 feet.

For a time, it was prized as the longest bridge in New England.

It may have seemed like we arrived 'casually late,' but we purposely waited in our room: Cassidhe lying on her bed, flipping through the latest *Cosmo* and drinking little sips of beer from the bottle she held, while I was finishing the last of my homework at my desk. With John's parties, there would usually be a predictable time-lapse. Cassidhe and I knew better than to come early since John would not be fully intoxicated, therefore, not as friendly.

We arrived to meet with a funny, giving, and cool John. This was the kind of John that Cassidhe liked. He liked her, too, I could tell: the stereotypical rugby jock who plays girls like trading baseball cards meets friendly naïve free spirit, willing to see the sun than its ominous clouds—I could see it all.

The party was like any party and I decided that I had enough 'fun' for the night, if you called drinking up sadness an enjoyment. Cassidhe was slowly getting closer to John when I told her I was done for the night. She refused to let me walk out alone, and followed with me. She could have stayed and hung out with John a bit more, but because she didn't, I was thankful.



David Sheeley

Found in Rhode Island, a link between Bristol and Portsmouth.
This bridge has been a key link in transportation since colonial times.

The breeze was refreshing and the stars shined a little brighter as we quietly walked arm-in-arm around campus. There was a loud silence and I could not help but ask:

"Do you ever wonder if this is what it is supposed to be like?"

"What, college? I mean, yeah, but I guess it depends."

I looked at her, and then up towards the stars. *It depends*. As we kept on walking, I held that note in my mind. The uncertainty.

"Cassidhe, I want to do something."

"Like what?"

"I don't know. I just want to do something big. I want to do something that I haven't done before. Isn't that what college is supposed to be like?"

"Yeah, sometimes I feel that way, too, but I don't know, what do you want to do?"

Right when we were outside of our dorm, I looked up at the bridge.

There are two things to know about this bridge. First, was that it was close to my dorm. So close that it was almost impossible to miss when glancing around campus. I would always wake up to the sun streaming through its suspending cables, and wonder what it was like to go on it. Well, of course, that was before I found out the second thing: it was illegal to walk from one end to the other. After learning that, I was itching to walk on it.

Though it is deemed safe for cyclists to cross the narrow bridge, one must be cautious.

There are no guard rails to keep one from falling into traffic, or worst.

"Oh my God, Cassidhe, let's walk over Mount Hope Bridge!"

As soon as I said that, she gave a quizzical look, and laughed an uncertain laugh. It was only after looking straight into my eyes that she realized that I was serious.

"Victoria, you are drunk— we are drunk. Do you think this is a good idea?"

"Cassidhe, we've already smoked under it a dozen times, what makes it any harder to simply walk over a bridge?"

"I don't know..."

"Well, why not?" There, the famous line of the night. Stumped, she could not find a reason to argue.

And why not? It is just a bridge. Going over it illegally was more than the bragging rights. For me, it meant something deeper, its essence hidden under my pale, sickly colored skin. This was made to define, shape, and chisel away what was left of me and unveil a new person who embraces on acting within a moment's notice. I wanted to feel again, because lately, I have not been myself. Lately I felt worthless and stupid, friendless and pitted. I wanted this

bridge for its inability to break hearts, as well as its lack of human error and social dysfunction. So why not, it's only a small risk...

We started walking on the bridge. First, side by side, but then as the banks dipped down and the water started peeking through, we walked one after the other with me leading. I laughed to myself. *This is crazy.*

The lights on the bridge were bright beacons that showed us the way. At 3 A.M. in the morning, there were no cars in sight. The salty air filled my lungs as the wind tugged and pulled at me. I would stop at times just to stare into the black abyss below. This was such a high. I remember thinking, *God, why do people even do drugs?*

I felt alive and reckless. If I were to die right then and there, I would have been fine with it. Nothing mattered at that point in time. Of course, Cassidhe did not feel that way. Going only about a fifth of a mile, she begged to turn around. Unlike her, I wasn't a true friend. I should have walked back with her, but I flat-out told her no. I even walked towards the middle of the highway where, straddling the solid yellow line, I stood with my eyes closed and my arms wide open. I felt fearless. I felt a new life in me.

Cassidhe screamed for me to get off the road, the chaos and confusion she made, loud and heavy, as if she was crying... I would never forget that. I didn't want to look at her, I couldn't. A couple more feet and we would be half way.

Right then, there were two bright eyes beaming at us. Closer, closer. *Shit.*

If a driver sees a person walking over the bridge, it is urgent to call the police.
To walk over this bridge is a very serious matter.

We were lucky that it wasn't a police, or else we would have been handcuffed right then and there. Instead, it was a girl and her friend coming back from a party. She was concerned and urged us to get in the car before a cop finally does come. Ending Cassidhe of her misery, we both went back. . .

I eventually got admitted to some clinic. I needed help, 'structure' they told me, or something that would control my inhibitions and dilute my pain and sorrow.

It was hard on Cassidhe. The air still lingers over us whenever we meet. Yet days, weeks, even months passed where I still remember that night. Oh man, what a rush. You know, I can't tell you what it feels like to be on top of the world, but I think my answer would be pretty damn close to it.



Vilavy Vila



Hiding BEHIND BLADES OF GRASS

Justin Merced

In the desert, I remember hiding;
My forts behind the single blades of grass
No quarter—My pockets thinned from tithing;
My holy ground bare but rich in chiding

And noticed foremost my looking eyeglass
The man—but a man—we so did repute
Lived—breathed at behest from forward my casque
No peace; scorching love so cultured—so crass

I beg nothing but the wear of dispute;
The spread of truth to familiar shores
Men die, but still our hubris imputes—
Ignorance! None so far gone to refute

Spring up! Grow! Prick the mounds underfoot for—
We, the rebels for peace—Amnesty's lore



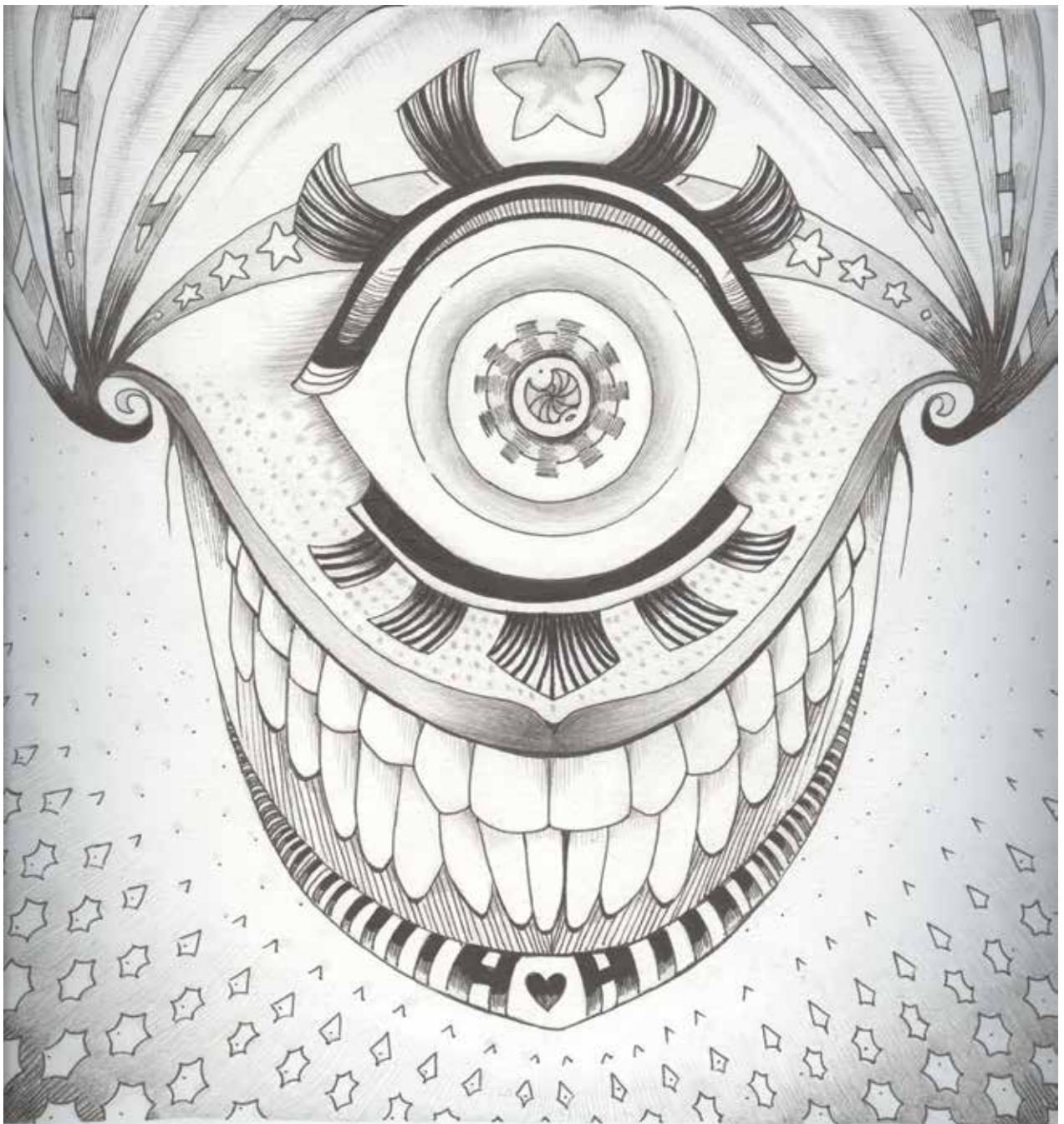
Eli Portuhondo



Shelf Life

Trish Malone Shade

Shelf Life is a really short period of time. Time was in transition for her now as she waited for the news that would change her life. Life had been full of challenges and change lately since her father's death. Death changed everything, and like the kingpin falling, when her father went, so did her family, in a way. Way too many changes for one person to process without feeling overwhelmed and detached. Detached, she checked the date on the milk carton as she thought, "I'll know by then." Then she cradled the plastic gallon, balancing it on her hip and thought about the choices she would be making before the milk went sour, probably before it was even gone. Gone were the days where life seemed normal because normal was now strange. Strange, living by expiration dates and decisions made "best by." By, by, when? When the milk expires in a week, she will know. Know the possible plans she must make for herself, for her family because he was gone and now her brother was sleeping on her living room floor, his marriage imploding. Imploding because his wife found out about the affair he was having. Having both of these deaths, her father's and her brother's marriage, felt like swimming through broken shards of glass. Glass doors opened behind the dairy section of the grocery store as the stock person restocked the milk. Milk with the purple stamp, smudged slightly on the plastic that held a date and somehow a secret to what would happen to her. Her fingers grazed over the random date and she thought, "I'll manage until then." Then she turned her attention to the next item, the next shelf.



Amanda Tempesta

THE ACCURSED HEART'S FATE

Timothy Vermette

Oh, beating heart
within my chest
thou has cursed me
for the last time

Remove yourself
from thy dwelling
and purge me
of your curse
or face the blade,
which would either way
seal my fate

Long you have plagued me
with your tattoo of Disappointment
and your impulsive obsessions
of many a fair maiden

You bear the appearance
of several stab marks
of arrow and blade alike,
and that your usual
crimson shading
has purpled and shriveled

I can bear it no more!
Your curse must end now!
Too late to repent!
Now, kiss my blade!

The deed... is done
The curse... is lifted
Now... do I... fall
Farewell... wretched life!

Heaven, open thy gates!
Your newest brother cometh!



Michele Simon

PURPLE

Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari

Purple, hues of red and blue

born of duty, service and honor

to cast the shadow, drape the cloak

on shoulders tall, proud to comply



Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombari

MOTHER'S NEST

Mary Hanewich

My mother's nest; of warmth
Encouragement, formed branches, I cradle
Myself in, confined and stable, are her branches,
Rich with red, white, and blue pointed petals, the petals gather
About me, like soft satin pillows, her thorns I do not see, they always
Seem to bend, for only me. The songs that came from
Her hollowed, blackened, trimmed bark knot,
Were always sung in strong summer wings,
Colored by autumn leaves,
The winter white, would
Breeze by my
Cheek with
Soft kisses,
Only, so the storms, of
Spring rain, would once
Share growth, and sing
Again for me, she lowers
Her guarded branches;
Slowly, to let me bare my
Own roots, stems and grow my
Own leaves, but still, just enough
To still hold me up, with solid thorns;
Of hers that will always be meant, just for me.



Michele Simon

no matter what

JUNIOR YEAR

"Mom, I don't want to disappoint you. I think about it all the time, every day," Jacob said, staggering the words in between turbulent sobs. He bent over like he was in pain, talking the words into his knees.

"I just hate to see you go through this Jacob," I wept, wiping the tears flowing down my face. "Why didn't you say something? If you were having a problem, why didn't you come to us?"

The pellet stove burned bright and hot. The orange triangle flames turned yellow at the tip before leaping to their death. I could see the smoke from the stove blow past the window, the white clouds eventually turning to gray and blending into the color of the sky outside. We sat in silence, Jacob and I, feeling as cold and raw as the weather.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

...the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.
Luke 15:13-14 NIV

SIXTH GRADE

The whole team rushed onto the field. The parents yelled in wild unison. The coach, in his perennial carpenter style khakis, jumped up and down like a two year old. The outfielder slowed from the momentum of the jumping catch. He looked up to see his teammates hollering and rushing him. He glanced into his glove to make sure he had caught the ball. It was in there.

"This is it," I said to my husband. "This is the year we get the big trophy."

Mary Ellen D'Angelo-Lombardi

IN FRONT OF THE FIRE

I can't say how long we sat, but I spoke first: "Jacob, this has been a dream of yours since you were six years old."

"Mom, it wasn't a dream. It was a childhood fantasy, just a stupid childhood fantasy. I'm getting older now. It's time for me to grow up."

"Jacob, I won't claim to be any kind of an expert here, but according to your father, you've got some serious talent. You're good enough to play in college and be a starter, too."

"Well that's not professional ball. That's only college."

"Only college..." my voice started getting loud. "Are you serious? What do you mean only college? That's a heck of a lot more than most people get. Why are you making nothing of it?"

JACOB PREPARES TO MEET...

...Your name will not be Jacob anymore. Instead, it will be Israel. You have struggled with God and with men. And you have won.
Genesis 32:24-29 NIV

FIRST GRADE

We sat on cold metal bleachers in the early April wind. My husband had laughed at me in the parking lot while I adorned myself with winter hat and gloves and grabbed an old flannel blanket out of the back seat of the car. The coach stood on the pitcher's mound. It took the first batter six tries to hit the ball off the T. I pulled my blanket closer around my ears as the wind gusted, evaporating the last vestiges of snow mounds still left on the field. Slap. The kid connected. The coach walked a few feet to pick up the ball where it had stopped rolling. The batter made a mad dash – for third base. The coach bends down to tie his shoe while the kid runs to third base.

"Coach, hey coach!" said Jacob from first base. He was waving his glove back and forth. "Throw it over here! I'll get him out coach. Throw it here, we've got plenty of time. He's running to the wrong base!"

COLLEGE

I closed the car door, started the engine and switched the air conditioning on full blast. In the four minutes it had taken me to go inside, grab my mail, and get back into the car, the leather seat had become almost too hot for my bare legs. The cool air from the vent sent a chill through the sweat on my scalp. I quickly flipped through each envelope, talking to no one in particular as I predicted the inevitable conclusion to opening each piece of mail.

"Gas bill, college tuition bill, credit card offer, 'lectic bill, credit card offer, credit card offer..." A second envelope from the college? Curiosity, or maybe relief from the monotony made me switch gears.

THE PARABLE OF THE GROWING SEED

Night and day the seed comes up and grows. It happens whether the farmer sleeps or gets up. He doesn't know how it happens.
Mark 4:27 NIV

JUST LOOK

"Jacob, you don't have a dream because you think it's going to get you something. You have a dream because God places it on your heart. He places it there because he wants you to follow it; because in following your dream, you are following Him."

"That is so stupid. So you're saying God wants me to work my ass off just to sit on a bench all season and watch everyone else play?"

"No, I'm saying if you follow your dream, if you follow Him, all kinds of doors will open."

"Yeah, right."

"I'm saying when you put yourself out there, no matter what happens, all kinds of doors get opened. You never know what can happen in your life until you just put yourself out there and see what happens."

"You don't know what it's like. You're not out there, living in the world I'm living in."

BACK TO COLLEGE

We are pleased to inform you... scholarship... you must write a thank-you letter... you must show up for a media event... you must meet the deadline... \$1000...

"A thousand dollars, they gave me a thousand dollars? For what - filling out a piece of paper and writing an essay? I got paid to write an essay? I got paid a thousand dollars to write a three page essay. This is unbelievable. Who would have thought I would get paid to write? This is too much like fun. I seriously have to think about changing my major – to writing."

BACK TO THE FIRE

Once again, we sat in silence, Jacob and I. The pellet stove droned on, churning out heat that expanded the room, air currents pulsating and the temperature rising. I felt the energy draining from my muscles. My legs and my arms felt like rubber. I thought I might sit here for days before I could gather the energy to move. I lied down in the loveseat, putting the back of my knees over the arm. I stared out the window into the gray horizon.

MORE THAN CONQUERERS

I am absolutely sure that not even death or life can separate us from God's love...
Romans 8:38 NIV



Nikki Olson



The Search For LOVE and GOD

David Bowie

Something true as solid stone,
That holds the sun and stars.

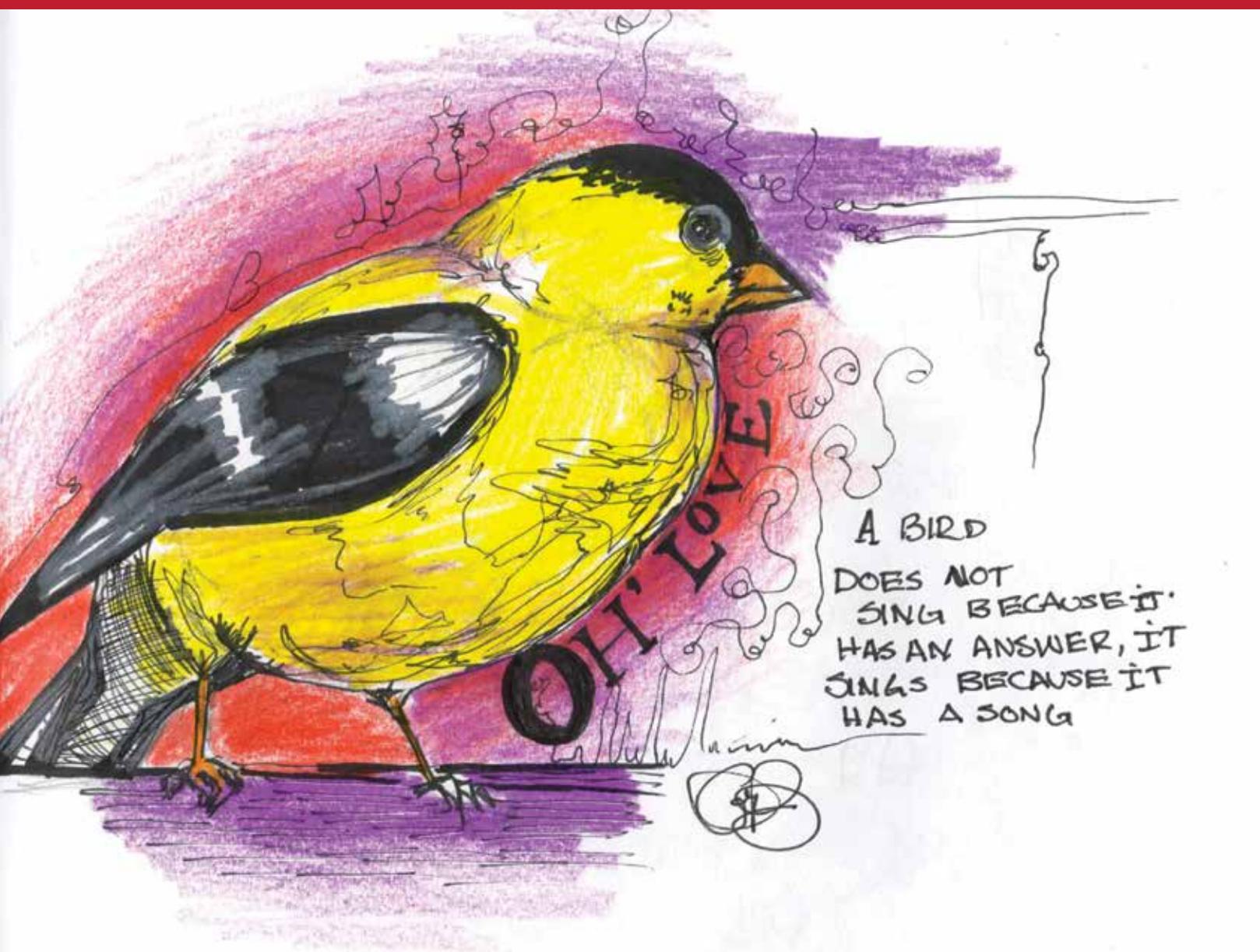
Hunted by the light of day and moonlit night,
Bringing freedom and death to those in its wake.

The righteous heart beats,
Awaiting answers from the heavens above and the tombs below.
Carving a path and piecing beautiful mortality.



Julie Newcomb





Katie Ruiz

(My) Thought BALLOONS

Nikki Olson

Everything tick tocking away
Time doesn't seem to stick or stay
In my mind thoughts begin to fray

Thought balloons on several strings
Tied together for clever means

They follow me as they conceive
Through the days and dreams I weave

Never do I tire of their antics
Stalking me like some backwards romantic



Coffee BREAK

Lisa Mahoney

He spun the coffee mug wildly on my kitchen table using the tip of his index finger to perpetuate its motion. His other hand was supporting his face. I thought for sure the breakfast blend was coming up and out.

"Dad."

He continued, unaware of his surroundings. I worked on our dinner dishes—his uneaten ketchup splattered meatloaf thumped into the garbage can. He was still spinning.

"Dad," I said, louder this time, wondering if he had kept the Miracle Ear appointment I had made for him the week before. Why had we not spoken in over a week?

"Hmmm?"

With my hands still occupied, I pointed with my chin. "The coffee...What're you doing?"

He stopped without answering, looking as if he wasn't sure either and slowly crossed his arms in front of him. I placed the plate in the sink and pulled out a chair across from him.

"Everything OK?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, sweetie, everything's fine." He picked up the mug and took an extra long sip. The coffee had to be cold now.

"Are you sure... 'cause you seem a little out there."

"Yeah. I was just thinking about your mother." He kept one finger looped through the mug's handle.

I watched him and waited for more. It was always a difficult topic for us. Mom had been gone for seven years but the time without her had been easier than the time with her. At least for me.

"Listen, peanut, I know how you felt about your mother—"

"It's not that, dad. It's just not that simple... just how I *felt*."

He raised his hand to motion for me to stop. A move I knew well. He was never one to raise his voice but you knew Russell meant business when the hand went up. I forced my mouth shut, shook my head slightly, and reached up to twirl the lock of hair that formed an annoying cowlick just above my temple—a childhood habit I couldn't shake.

We were father and daughter. We were Russell and Abigail. We needed each other but were determined to remain strangers. I forced the sarcasm down and decided to be supportive.

"What were you thinking about?" I hoped the twinge had left my voice.

He had been staring back into his mug when "the hand" silenced me. Hearing my voice again, he raised just his eyebrows, then his eyes met mine.

"Y'know... just... her. I miss her. They say when you lose them you tend to remember only the good stuff. But I remember it all. And it's OK. Even the bad things. They make me smile too. 'Cause that was her."

"I know, dad." I resisted the slight urge to touch him. That wasn't us.

He shook his head. "Naah. You can't know. She was your mom. That's way different than someone's wife... best friend."

"Why do you think she didn't like me?" I hadn't planned to ever ask him that but it just came out.

He slumped back in his chair, let go of his mug, and dropped both hands into his lap, interlocking his fingers, twirling one thumb around the other. After what seemed a lifetime, he raised one calloused hand, plunked the elbow on the table, and massaged his forehead with its rough heel. He took a deep breath. I waited. Finally he spoke.

"How can you think she didn't like you?" It came out in a whisper with his head still bent.

"How? You know how. She was always on me. I couldn't do anything right. Believe me, I tried. I mean... I know she loved me... I'm not playing the poor, unloved child card. But I just think she had a hard time *liking* me." Now I threw my arms across my chest—putting up the barrier. The move was slightly more forceful than this same gesture of his moments before.

His eyes welled up. He didn't cry but something happened there. Maybe he willed it away. Aside from my mother's funeral, I don't think I had ever in my thirty-one years seen him shed a tear. He was always very calm. As an adult, I wonder now if that's normal. You have to feel something. But if he did, he never let on. He didn't get upset. He never yelled. He was just calm and gentle. When I was young and had misbehaved, my mother would send him up to my room to spank me. She would actually order him to do it. He faithfully obliged—sort of. He came up but he just couldn't spank me. He would make me hold out my hands, palms down, and then he would tap the backs of them. He didn't yell. I found it hard not to laugh when he did this. He would hold up one finger to his lips to shush me. And I felt as if it were our little secret. Mom never questioned whether he spanked me or not. She may have known that he never did because she knew it just wasn't his way. But she felt the need to order him upstairs to do it just the same.

I wondered now as I watched his face, waiting for an answer, when it was that our worlds drifted so far apart.

Reaching up and tapping his thumb on the rim of the mug again, he said, "She just... she wished it could be different...that she could turn back the dial and figure it out better..."

I threw up my hands. "What does that mean? What can that possibly mean?"

"I... ah... I got a call the other day—"

"Christ, dad. Could you focus? We're talking about me and mom here."

"I know. I know. Could ya give me a chance?" The hand not on the mug went up halfway, but he stopped himself much as I had squelched my own actions the first time. He closed his fingers deliberately into a fist as if he were holding onto his answer for just a moment more.

I shrugged and chewed on the inside of my lip, watching him release the words.

"Her name is Christina. She's 34 years old. Married. Two kids. She was trying to locate her birth mother."

"OK." I reached up and pinched the bridge of my nose hoping to grasp what he was saying. My nose felt bony and I could picture my mother's same profile. My fingers crawled down farther and I squeezed the tip of my nose, digging my nails into the skin slightly, then covered my mouth and sucked in the little air that was trapped in my curled fist. My brain tried hard to untangle itself from this conversation.

"I... uh... wait. What? A woman called you looking for her birth mother?"

A nod.

"Well, OK, this... this Christina... she... she's just shooting in the dark, obviously."

"Fraid not, peanut."

Suddenly the endearment made my stomach turn.

"What are you saying?"

"You have a half-sister."

My head spun. How could this be possible? The ground beneath me fell away. I wanted to be calm. He was calm. He was always so damn calm. I wished I had been there when he got the call. Was he calm then? I did the math in my head.

"WHAT?! I feel like I've walked in on a movie here, dad. What are you talking about? Did you know about this half-sister? Did you know mom had a kid before you married her? Did she... did you ever plan on telling me?" The questions came out with barely any space in between.

He tilted his mug and peeked inside. "You got any more coffee?"

"God-damn it! No. I don't. I've got questions!" I was screaming.

"I know this has to be hard. But you've got to try to understand..."

"Understand? Understand what—that you've kept the teeny-tiny fact that I have a sibling hidden from me for 30 years? Is that what you want me to understand? Why didn't you tell me?"

"It wasn't my place. It was your mother's."

"So why didn't she tell me?" I felt my own eyes begin to burn.

"I can't answer that. You asked me if I knew. Well, barely. I knew when I met her that she had had a child and put her up for adoption at birth. But she would never speak to me about it. Ever. It was just off-limits."

"If it was so off-limits, why did she tell you in the first place?" My words came out biting.

He ignored the sting. "She wanted to be honest. But she didn't want to talk about it. She asked me to never speak of it. I promised her. And she trusted that I would keep that promise."

I found myself leaning forward now with both hands on the table, gripping the edge. "And you didn't feel that you could break that trust after she had died? You didn't see where I might like... no, not like... need.... to know something like this... having grown up without any sisters or brothers? How something like this might explain a lot of things?"

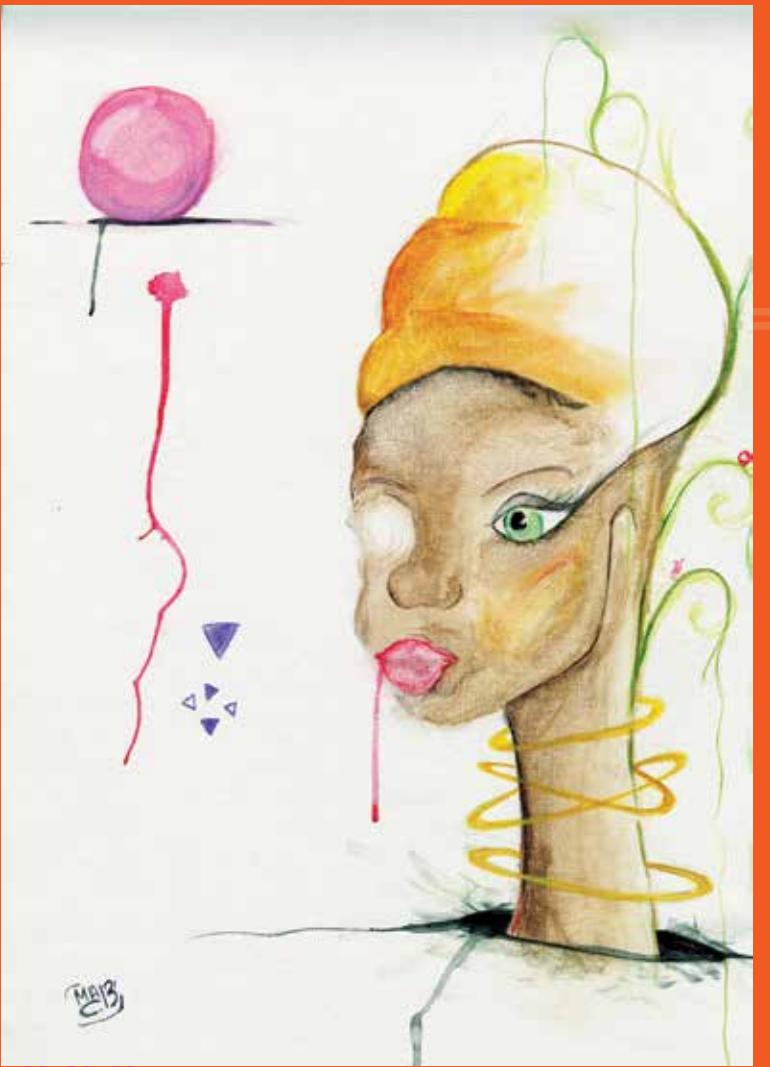
"Honestly, I had pushed it so far out of my mind that I barely thought of it over the years. Only when I saw your mother sometimes watching you with this strange look in her eyes did I imagine that she was thinking about her other daughter, too. Wishing the two of you were together. Imagining what she would be like if she were here with us... with you. Then these last seven years, I truly haven't thought of it. Until she called."

I didn't know what to think. Whether to cry, yell, or laugh. This was something you saw on those crazy soap operas: *Long lost sister resurfaces; Unknown twin emerges; Biological parent presumed dead arrives at doorstep*. I just couldn't fathom it. I wanted to know everything. But then I wasn't sure if I could handle it. But could I live without knowing? I couldn't just pretend this conversation never happened. Could I?

"I want to meet her."

He pushed his coffee mug forward so that it almost touched the vase with daisies in the center of the table. He stood slowly, put one hand in his pocket, and pulled out a piece of folded up paper. It was yellow, from a legal pad. I knew the pad well—it sat next to the phone on their kitchen counter. Picking up the mug, he slipped the paper under it, put one hand on my shoulder and said, "I thought you might, peanut."

I barely heard the click of the door behind me as he left.

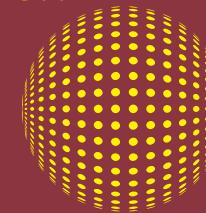


Megan Cheney

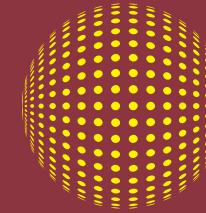


Katie Pazzanese

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Michele Simon

The four sisters ceased
weeping and stretched out
giant limbs towards
the sun. Decayed leaves
rustled softly on
creaky outstretched arms.
Ice topped drifts of snow
seized their rooted feet.
From frozen farrow
hands a silent plea
escaped on the wind.



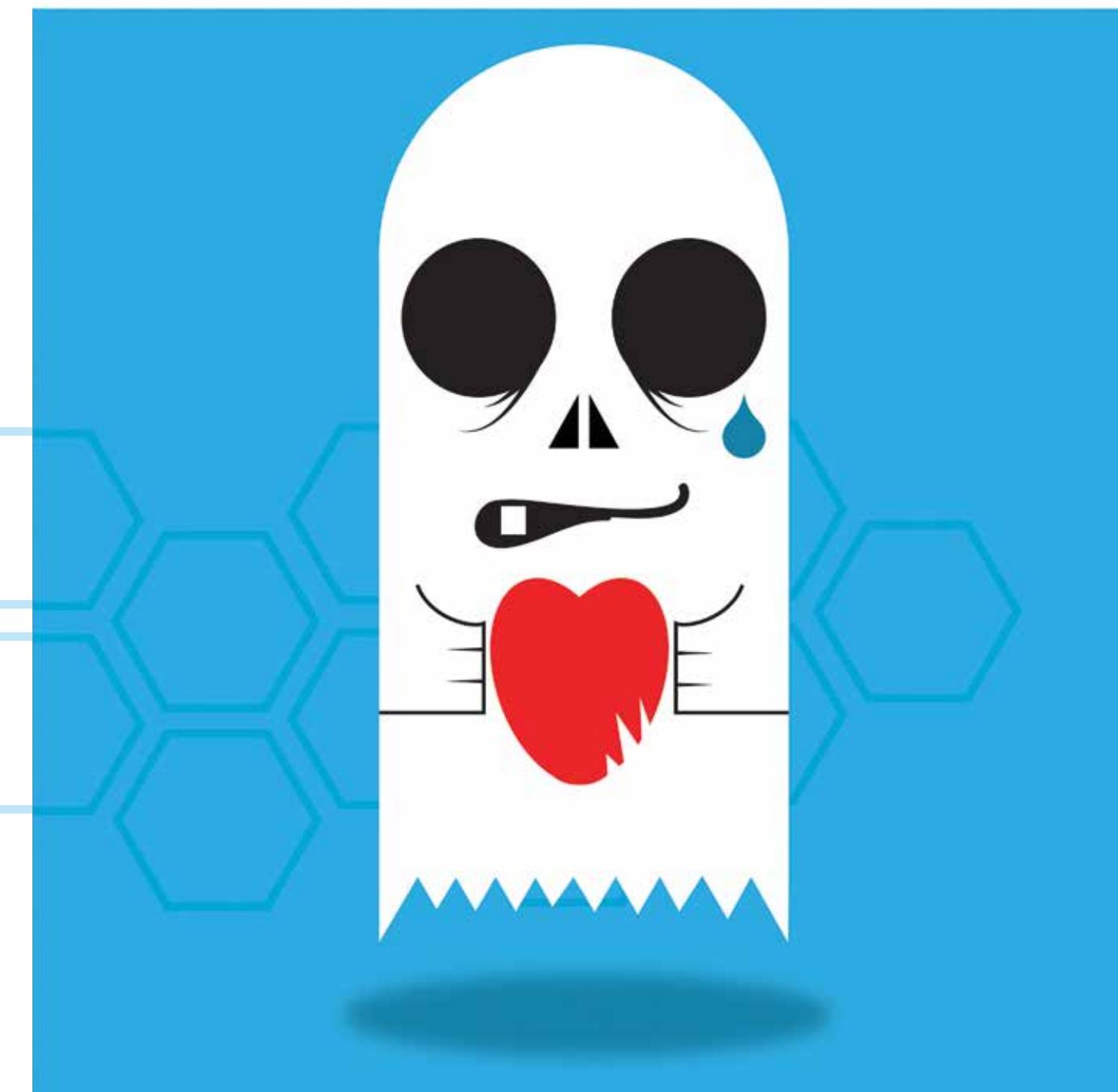
WATER WOMAN

Molly Bagley

One day I woke up and I was water. I slid off my bed and took a bath between the rocks and leaves and branches. All the impurities ran down the hallway, out the door, and into the gutter. "I will not go to work," my soul said. "I will dance instead." I danced through the aqua morning, navy afternoon, and turquoise evening, and did not feel blue.

My mind was liquid, flowing dreams and thoughts and words and music. My phone rang and the tone was all around me, a speaker phone like a shower head drizzle. "Hello, I am not available, leave a message," my brain thought. Thought was reality so they must have heard me. At dinner time I was not hungry because the luscious serum of crystal was my nourishment.

When the blue moon was setting, I kept dancing. This is no time for sleep. I dance and dance, my brain and soul quiet for once, fluidly spinning in slow steps. Arms, legs, torso, fingers, toes, smoothly to the rhythm of myself. I never know what I will wake up as tomorrow.



Patrick Curley



Mary Ellen D'Angelo Lombardi

Kid held the door for Gent, who grabbed it for Toad, who jacked it open with his foot for Jolly, who bent in half and shouldered it back like a football sled. Jolly rubbed his shoulder.

"Ahhh, don't remember those doors being so heavy," said Jolly, wondering if he would need an Advil when he got home.

"Jolly, they don't make those doors like they used to. They're twenty pounds heavier, and the springs are double-cranked before they turn them out," said Gent, thinking he was glad he had not tried that himself.

"Yeah, twenty years ago I would have taken that door right off its hinges. Took 'em twenty years to develop something that would stop me from tearing up their property," said Jolly. And in the last twenty years Advil has made an appearance, making this little stunt survivable today.

"Now you're tearing the door down with your chapbook selections," said Gent. He really does have a powerful voice.

"Oh, that we might dance alone:

I'd feel what only wind is shown,

And make you feel like leaves

And as the wind, require no pardon," I recited. Speaking his words, she could feel the power in his poem.

"You can let the wind blow the door down," said Toad, who loved tying phrases together with a key word.

"That's another book," said Kid, who thought this was one of Jolly's best poems.

"And they huffed, and they puffed, and they blew the door down," said Toad. That should make them laugh.

"Hey, don't laugh. Halliwell-Phillips probably made some money from that before it went to public domain," said Jolly. Probably more than I'll ever see.

At that they all laughed. They looked up as the cars whizzed past the sign, shining their headlights on the illuminated letters: "Poetry Hoot, Tonight, 7-9, featured readers followed by an open mic." They could smell cigarette smoke.

"I'll take half of what he made from that little tale," said Kid. I'll probably never make a penny from my writing. Jolly might though. He is really good.

A cigarette butt came out of the alley. They had to stop short to keep from hitting it.

A black doo-rag stepped out of the alley following the cigarette butt. These snow look like they carried some cash with them.

Two more doo-rags followed him, blocking their access to the sidewalk. They glanced at each other. They both knew this bunch was easy pickings.

Blazing Ciliations of Ember

Trish Malone Shade

Donna pulled the threadbare blanket on her shoulders closer together around her thin neck. It had been a cold day, turned dark too soon. The soup from the shelter was the only thing she had eaten, and she was waiting for her newest friend to return with the bourbon, something to warm her insides, something that burned going down and made her feel alive again. He was late and she was feeling shaky and weak. She remembered the fireflies of her childhood just then, as the sparks from the fire in the dented trash can flew up into the still cold night air, empty promises that gave off too little light and no heat. They whirled about as if calling for a mate, in a desperate dance, wafting up and turning, blinking against the black January sky. She could almost smell the pickles, so immediate was the memory of catching fireflies in pickle jars. For years after she had thought it was fireflies who smelled like the dilly vinegar tang of pickles. She could just see her father's large meaty knuckles grasping the rim of the pickle jar to place the plastic wrap over it and hold it in place with a rubber band. She had the toothpick ready to poke holes in it so the little fireflies could breathe. During the day they looked like ordinary black bugs, but at night, they fascinated her, dancing like embers in the jars, looking for mates they would never find, dying of thirst and exhaustion.

VAUGHN ABBOTT is very grateful to all, both faculty and fellow classmates, who challenged his mind at NECC. Being given the opportunity to revitalize his dormant, artistic self is a gift of immeasurable value, and as he moves forward, beyond the walls of this institution, the lessons learned here will be the tools to build his new life.

MOLLY BAGLEY is just another girl who wants to rule the world or any time or place.

ELISABETH BEVERAGE is a devout Christian and an English geek. She explains all her weirdness by saying, "I'm in Education."

DAVID BOWIE tried his hand at a few separate bios but quickly came to the realization that they all became a deep and cheesy chasm of feelings. And as poetic as that may sound, he does not really like talking about himself that directly. So he decided to keep it simple and not really say anything about himself in his own bio. However, he published a book last year called *Little Pieces of Life*. He hopes the great people at Parnassus do not mind the plug.

MEGAN CHENEY is a graduating illustration and Graphic Design major, who has a tenacious passion for art and nature... oh, and cats. "Wish me luck in the 'Real World'... I've heard horrible things about it..."

CRAIG CORSARO has been building a collection of unusual thoughts and ideas inside of his head since the age of nine. Before then, he used his head for more practical purposes, such as a paperweight, a hammer-like tool, a first defense against blunt trauma and as a means of keeping boats anchored to the shore. Nowadays though, he spends the majority of his time arranging his unusual collection of thoughts and ideas into something called "self expression." Sometimes, he loves it. Sometimes, he hates it. Sometimes, he wonders how normal people spend their time. Sometimes, he ponders deeply about what consciousness really is. Sometimes, he ponders deeply about how "pickle" is an underrated word. Sometimes, he shares his "self expression" with other people. Every time, they give him funny looks.

PATRICK CURLEY is a graphic design major looking to go into professional freelance graphic design after obtaining his Bachelor's degree. He currently is doing some minor freelance work for friends and family. Patrick was first introduced to art at a young age through the world of graffiti but decided to focus his passion into a more constructive field. He became aware of his passion as a graphic designer while working in the maintenance department for a company that had an extensive marketing/graphic design department. After building relationships with individuals from that department, he decided to leave the company and attend NECC for graphic design. It wasn't until he enrolled in college that became serious about his artwork, four years after graduating from high school. He is currently planning on earning his certificate in web design in order to build a website for his art persona "King Creepy" from scratch.

MARY ELLEN D'ANGELO-LOMBARI has won the 2025 Nobel Prize for literature for her novel, *Shannon*. She will emcee the 125th anniversary of the Nobel Prize awards in 2025 at the re-opening of the World Trade Towers in New York. D'Angelo-Lombari plans to donate the two million dollar prize money to the New York Children's Pace, in memory of her lifelong friend Dr. Jeffrey William Granada, who founded the organization in 2013. D'Angelo-Lombari will initiate the Pre-schoolers Tell project for NYCP, to encourage the pursuit of writing in children through the use of technology, teaching them to create and record stories before they learn read or write. Research done by several leading universities has shown that children who learn to create stories as pre-literates learn to read and write at an earlier age and go on to post-secondary education at a two to one ratio than children who do not.

LISA MAHONEY teaches Basic Writing, Composition I and II here at NECC, and The Horror Story online for UMASS Lowell. Her first short story was published in the literary magazine Voices in 1997. She will graduate from the low-residency Solstice MFA in Creative Writing program at Pine Manor College in January 2014. She is working on a novel and continues to write short stories and flash fiction.

JUSTIN MERCED was born and raised in Lawrence, MA. He graduated from Lawrence High School with what he believes to have been at least an "F" average, but still maintained hope for being accepted into Harvard Medical School. Justin strongly believed that becoming a doctor was the only path he would take in life. At age nineteen, Justin joined the U.S. Army, ultimately serving two combat tours overseas—one to Iraq and the other to Afghanistan. Justin is now currently a student at NECC and holds great hope of earning his Associate's degree in Paramedic Technology. Justin is extraordinarily sarcastic and has always found joy in writing about himself and the countless ways in which he openly interprets his passion of doing so and his love for competition and his fiery passion for run-on sentences. He is always motivated and would like to be remembered as such.

MARY HANEWICH found her life meaningful when she had children. Throughout her life, she met others, just like herself, all destined to find a love that would be unlike any other. Every emotional moment secretly hid the destiny to a bond she would only reveal. Her impatience of curiosity in such an untidy world encouraged her points of view, assumptions, and the final direction she would make in the most ambiguous times. The colors of the season she wrapped herself within; she painted, felt the textures amongst the leaves, dreamed under the trees, listened to the ocean shores, and on quite nights, rested before the patient ripples under the stars and birds that flocked to the sea. Seasons quaintly unfolded, new family roots appeared, and she found herself amongst branches that built a family tree.

TRISH MALONE SCHADE is an Associate Professor of Academic Preparation at NECC. She loves writing poetry and dabbling in fiction, too. She grew up in Gloucester, MA; both grandfathers were fishermen. She has travelled extensively around the world, but five years ago she landed back here in Massachusetts. You can ask her students for confirmation on this: she loves to laugh and have fun in class, but she's dead serious about learning and about words.

JULIE NEWCOMB is a Graphic Design major - which is pretty darn nifty! She enjoys drawing cute little animals and loves to create creatures of her very own. She has a unique sense of style and a vast imagination. When Julie is not doing art related things, she is doing awesome related things. In her spare time she likes to venture to random places and fill her noggin with music.

NIKKI OLSON, also known as Nolson, enjoys the arts and writing poetry. She is also a Little Lebowski Urban Achiever.

CONTRIBUTORS

KATIE PAZZANESE is a sophomore at NECC. She has been drawing for as long as she can remember. She knew all her life that she wanted art to become more than a hobby. Katie is pursuing an Associate's Degree in Graphic Design and anticipates graduating in May 2013. Her dream job is to be an animator for Walt Disney Studios. Katie presently awaits word from two state colleges for acceptance to their art programs in the fall. She wants to experience college life, living on her own away from her parents to get an understanding of the "real world". Katie is conscientious yet free spirited, but also stubborn. Katie hates being thought of as a victim. She is very independent but doesn't like being alone. She takes life seriously while having fun with it and learned to not let anyone stand in the way of her dreams.

ELI PORTUHONDO is a spiritual entity having a human experience on planet earth. In this dimension, Eli is a young upcoming artist that lives in Methuen, MA and studies graphic design at NECC. Eli is best known for his beautiful illustrations done with Prismacolors, his exquisite ability to blend colors, and his clothing line DRYLQD, which will be on the market this summer.

Seeing things as they can be, not just as they are, has given **MICHELE SIMON** a lot of inspiration in both her work and life. Graduating in 2013 from NECC, she has enjoyed working on *Parnassus* for three years, and two years as a Features Editor and Photojournalist for the student newspaper, the *NECC Observer*. These learning opportunities have been an invaluable experience equal to or greater than the best class ever offered.

VICTORIA PHAM is a former student at Roger Williams University, where she started as an architecture student. At only twenty-one years old, she is the youngest of six and an aunt of six. Victoria loves to travel and has visited over eight countries and fourteen states, with Vietnam and Phoenix, AZ as recent trips within the past year. She has been a lacto-vegetarian since 2006 because of her love of animals. Along with her love of animals, she also loves volunteering and drawing. Victoria has won an award from the National Scholastic Arts and Writing Awards as well as smaller regional recognitions and scholastic distinctions. Currently she is working on a Liberal Arts degree here at NECC, due this Spring, and is hoping to get back on track with her future in architecture and design. If you happen to meet her, don't mention that you read this. She likes surprises.

KATHERINE RUIZ's piece was made from her heart, as a gift to her boyfriend's sister. "Oh Love" is something her boyfriend's sister frequently said, and the passage is very personal and meaningful between them. She chose a Golden Finch, because she has been surrounded by them her whole life growing up. Birds inspire Katherine. Her boyfriend's sister is supposed to get it as a tattoo, but Katherine hasn't gotten around to mailing it to her yet! She will just have to send her a *Parnassus* copy as well! Happy Reading!

Believe it or not **DAVID SHEELEY** isn't at home. Please leave a message at the beep. He must be out or he'd pick up the phone. Where could he be? Believe it or not, he's not home. Beep. David dedicates this issue to his mother Mary Gail because she is his angel.

CLARE THOMPSON-OSTRANDER has been teaching at NECC since 2000. She teaches Basic Writing, English Composition I and II, and the College Success Seminar. Clare loves being a teacher at NECC. She feels privileged to work with the students she meets each semester. She is also a mom to a beautiful almost seven-year-old little girl. She is the reason Clare writes. Clare made a promise to her when she was an infant that she would work harder to reach her goals so maybe someday her daughter will do the same. The other day Clare's colleague asked her to write a six word memoir: Write, breathe, write: Again, tomorrow, breathe. That is Clare in one sentence.

VILAVY VILA was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts on March 28th, 1990. She is a very insightful person with a great work ethic, and she is always interested in learning new things. She started her life at NECC in the fall of 2010. Growing up, Vilavy always demonstrated her love and passion for the arts, being involved in theater, classic/modern dance, talent shows, event planning, food decoration, photography, and basic media. Vilavy's artistic side and creativity is reflected in everything she touches, and after two plus years of hard work, this summer she will graduate with an Associate's degree in Graphic Design from NECC. Presently, Vilavy lives at home with her family in Greenland, NH. In 2014, she is planning to transfer to a four year college in North Carolina, where she will pursue her Bachelor's degree in the arts.

TIM VERMETTE is a psychology major and a sophomore at NECC. From Methuen, he enjoys the works of Vonnegut, Poe, Dumas, Stoker, and Wilde. His main interests are poetry and music, to which he is an avid listener and singer to classic rock. He is a big fan of the bands Rush, Linkin Park, The Doors, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, The Cars, and The Ramones.

AMANDA TEMPESTA is a new student to the NECC campus. She is a graduate of the Marion County Center for the Arts from West Port High School. Through the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, she received a Gold Key Scholastic Award upon graduation from high school, among many other awards. She works hard maintaining a balance between work and higher education so she can pursue a career best suited for her endless creativity.

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HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

Submissions to *Parnassus* are limited to NECC students, staff, and faculty, with two deadlines per year. We accept submissions in the areas of art, photography, fiction, poetry, and creative non fiction. If your own particular creative inclinations fit these areas, we want to see what you've got. Entries are reviewed and chosen democratically each semester by the staff and faculty advisor. Deadlines are announced online and around campus, and *Parnassus* is published each spring, when students are drunk on finals preparation and the promise of summer proclivities.

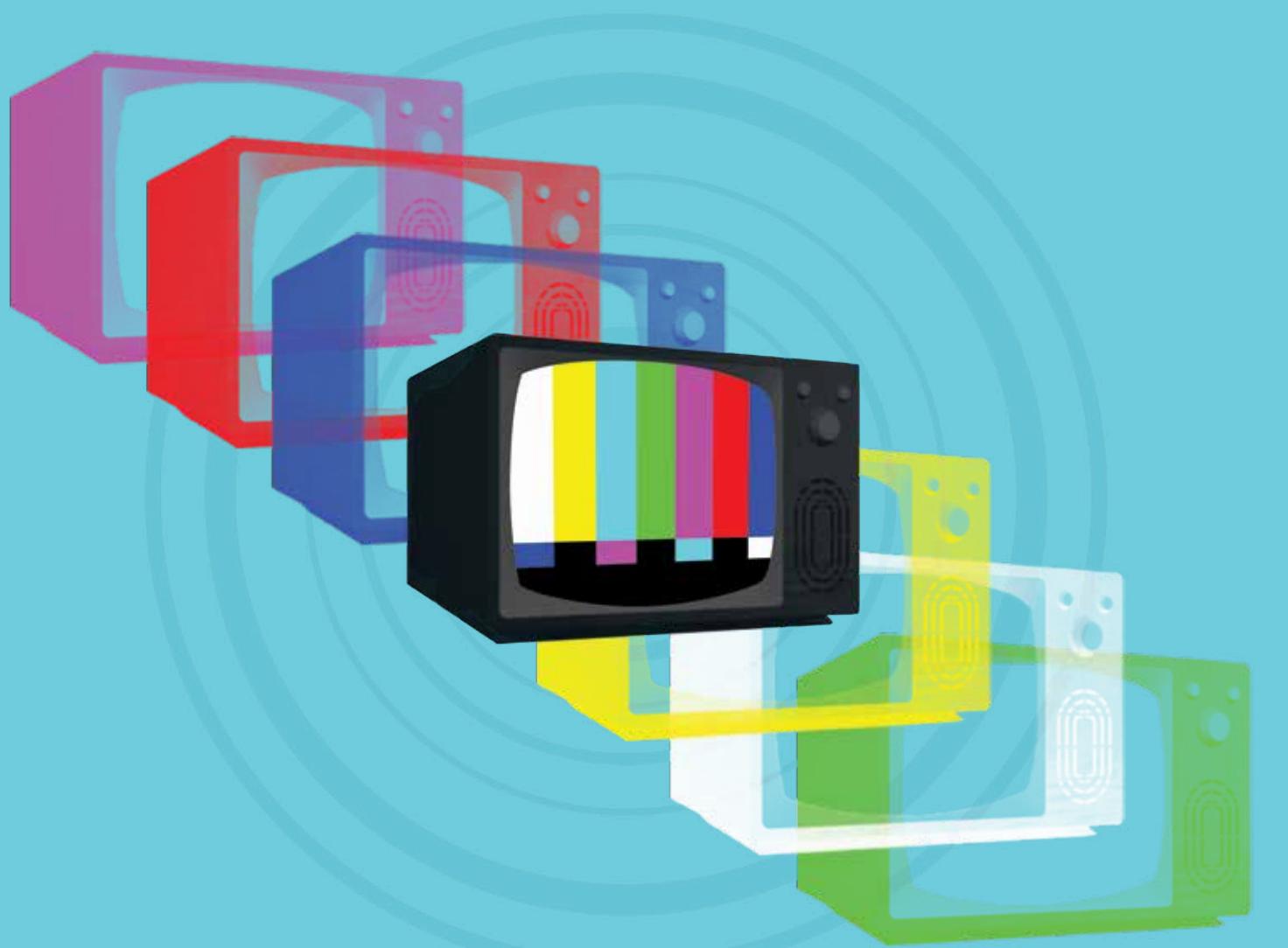
Full information on how to submit your potentially famous work can be found in our shiny, manicured, and über-operational website:

www.parnassuslitmag.com

It's the only website that is all *Parnassus*, all the time. We look forward to reading and viewing what you send us! Any questions or comments are encouraged - please send them along to faculty advisor Patrick Lochelt: plochelt@necc.mass.edu

We'd like to once again extend a special thanks to Vice President of Academic Affairs Bill Heineman and his office for their generous contribution to this issue. Many thanks as well to all of our supporters, submitters, and readers for another great year.

We couldn't do this without you!



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