



MONTAGE

2008-2009

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WELCOME TO THE 2008-2009 EDITION OF MONTAGE!

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I personally would like to thank the staff of Montage for their hard work and dedication that they have put into Montage this year. Another thank you needs to go out to all my friends and professors for putting up with me as I have been stressing out putting together Montage.

I hope you all enjoy reading Montage this year and if you don't, come join the staff next year or submit your own art or literary work!

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IN MY SHOES

Danyelle Hooks

If you tried to walk a mile in my shoes
You'd be wearing pink cowboy boot slippers
You would have no control over
Your mind
Your emotions
Your life
Everyone around you believes I you
Believes that you're doing great things
And going places
But you still feel empty
Not from doing good deeds
Not from being in love
Not from taking care of the animals
But empty

If you tried to walk a mile in my shoes
You'd be wearing kicks with skulls on them
Polishing those shoes everyday
Just like I try polishing my life
Making it perfect, make sense
Or something like that
The skulls remind me of my past
Of all the different people I try to be
And how truly empty I am
Living for YOU

If you tried to walk a mile in my shoes
You'd be wearing zebra high heels
You'd be sassy, single, smart, and confident
You'd smile knowing you have what they want
And that you're better than that
But who are they?
What is that?
You walk around all high and mighty
But inside, you're dying

If you tried to walk a mile in my shoes
You'd be walking barefoot
Soaking everything in life in
Tasting, smelling, gazing, feeling
Living, loving, learning
GROWING
Trying to take it easy
One day at a time

I wish I didn't have to wear shoes

HARVEST ESCAPE

Becky Sherwin

The cows and horses grazing in the meadows,

The swoosh as they pull at the fresh green grass,

Their breaths hot and sweet against the ground.

The colors of harvest, the ripe, ripe corn,

The fragrant dust of the crop wafting on the air,

The whirl of the combines silhouetted against the setting sun,

The peaceful bliss of basking in this moment,

Of becoming part of it, eyes closed, breathing it in.

Of summoning these sights and smells from the mind,

Whenever necessary to escape from another season, another time.

SLINKY

Sarah Hall

There are some things in life that we will just never know the answers to. Like, why 'abbreviation' is such a long word and why on earth God created f***'n mosquitoes. I also have asked myself what exactly is the purpose of a slinky? Hell, it's a coil of wire that can climb down stairs; and yet, it fascinates us. As kids we can spend hours just watching this stupid object move around. Life is full of unanswered questions. Yet, sometimes we get answers to questions that are actually better left unanswered.

I remember growing up and actually playing with a slinky. That was when everything was goin' right and my life wasn't so damned screwed up. Things were simple back then. A time when a slinky was all I needed to be happy. My mother bought it for me when I was really young; that's about all my mother ever did for me. A drunk and a cocaine addict from the god-damn second dad left us when I was only four years old. He was supposed to teach me how to ride a bike that very next summer. Anyways if mom were alive to see where I am today she would say, "After all the shit I've done for you and your brother, this is how you repay me? You ruin your f***'n life by getting mixed up in this shit?" Sounds like a nice lady, huh? Its ok, I didn't feel sorry for myself or my little bro; it could've been worse. Some kids got beat by their parents; at least all mom did to us was give us a nice, hard slap on our asses and yell until she lost her voice. Me and Stevie would try to leave the house early, before mom woke up and not come back home until she was too drunk to notice. Yeah, that was the simple life.

We usually would eat over at our friend's house and try to sleep there whenever we could. Stayin' away from the house was our goal each summer and it usually worked. Sometimes we had to go back home though; like on school nights. Mom would sometimes bring older guys home with her for dinner and she would tell us, "this is Todd (or Bill, Sam, Chuck, Ned, or whoever it was depending on the god-damn week), he's my good...friend." She called them all her 'good friends.' Stevie was only six years old, too young to know otherwise, but I was 12, and I knew that they were more than that. My friend, Bobby from

down the street, was my good friend but you didn't see him sleepin' over at the house each night. As much as I complain about mom's "good friends" comin' over all the damn time, those days were better; easier. Me and Stevie could get away with almost anything those days. Mom never paid any attention to us on days like that; she only had time for her f***'n flavor of the week. One time, I talked Stevie into going into mom's room and stealin' her wallet. I think that was Chuck's week... Anyways, Stevie did it of course 'cause he did everything I told him to. He thought about how it was wrong for a minute but I told him that stealin' wasn't such a bad thing if you take from people who aren't grateful for what they have. After he lifted it, we walked up to the gas station that was about a mile away and spent the only damned five dollars mom had in her wallet. Stevie got a Snickers Bar and I got Gummy Bears then we shared a Coke slurpe and a pack of those orange circus peanuts; God, I loved those damned things... We got back home and mom never once asked us about that money. She was probably too drunk to know it was even missin'.

Anyways, what was I sayin? Oh yeah, that f***'n slinky. Ya know, now to think of it, I don't even know where that damned toy went to. I'm sure the coils got bent wherever it is because that's what seems to happen to all god-damn slinkys. You play with them for a few days and then they get bent or twisted and it's all shot to hell from there. The only coil of wire I can see now doesn't bring those same happy thoughts to mind like my slinky does though. Although, I do like to stare at it sometimes because it does kind of look like that stupid-ass toy. While that slinky took me to a place where I was happy, this f***'n electric wire is holding me hostage in this hell hole. Dags tried to get past it just last week, but hell he didn't make it far. At least not far in the sense he was wanting to. He got shot down by one of the guards, Wicks we call 'em. Shot right in the side of the head, and again in the stomach. He was dead before getting half way through that damned fence. You can guess, I'm sure that the fence doesn't know if you're dead or not, so, if Dags wasn't dead from the bullets, he sure as hell was after the fence was done with him. Some of the other guys were goin' into his cell, takin' some of his shit after he was killed while the guards weren't lookin'. I decided not to take anything because Dags was my friend... ok, I did take his deck of cards, his last few cigs, and his car magazines that he hid under his mattress, but that's all. Like the rest of the guys say, "He is dead after all, he ain't usin' it." I figure Dags would want us to have it instead of giving it up to the Wicks anyways. I can picture his

face if he saw the Wicks smokin' one of his cigs. That would have been worse than burnin' in that fence and bein' shot. It actually makes me laugh a little bit thinking about what his reaction would be, ha. Dags was a good guy and now the luckiest son of a bitch in this place.

No one in this prison really deserves to be here; ok besides Jenks and maybe Roy. Everyone else, the ones who didn't kill just to kill, shouldn't really be trapped here. We did nothing wrong. I'm not going to go on with this though because no matter who ya try to tell, no one listens. You make one little f***'n mistake that wasn't your god-damn fault and you got MURDER stamped on your forehead for the rest of eternity. People can't see past that which is why I'm not in too big of a hurry to get out into the real world. I don't see the point of gettin' out of this god-forsaken place unless I take the same road that Dags did. Like I said before, all the guys think he is one lucky SOB. He's in the best place anyone could think of. You may be thinkin' that he went straight to hell, but that's where you're wrong. Unlike most of the screw ups in this place, Dags was innocent. People said he kidnapped his own son and then strangled him in the woods off of 15th street. Ya, well Dags told all of us the story about what really happened. We know he's innocent and we know he's in heaven. Even if he was in hell though, it's gotta be better than this shit because there ain't no Wicks down there to shove ya 'round. Oh, that's where they all end up alright, but they're not the ones doin' the shovin'.

You know, just the other night I was mindin' my own business in my cell when three of the f***s invited themselves in. Asshole number one said to me, "we haven't visited you in a while man, how've ya' been?" I like to play along with their little f***'n jokes just to show them that they don't get to me. I said, "Oh, I've been swell, boys; really swell. I had a great night last night with your mama, I'm surprised you didn't hear her screamin' out my name." Of course they didn't like that, but I figure if I'm goin' to get beat down, might as well go down laughin'. I think they got me pretty good that night 'cause I don't even remember anythin' happenin' until I woke up that next mornin' with the worst f***'n headache of my life. Anyways, why spend so much god-damn time talkin' about the Wicks? I'm givin' them way too much damn credit.

I've been trapped in this god-forsaken place for too damn long. It will be five years comin' up here in April. There's lots of guys in here that have been around a lot longer than I have though; guys that have wives

and families. I don't really got anyone out there missin' me, well except Stevie. At least I picture him missin' me. Hell, anyone would be missin' a criminal if they had to live with my mother. I sure think about that little shit a lot. I like to think back to those days we would sneak out of the house so that mom didn't know. Me, Stevie, and Frank, one of the neighborhood boys would go out to the field behind the old cemetery and blow things up with the firecrackers that Frank stole from his old man. Once, a damn firecracker turned straight for us and hit Stevie in the leg. That's the worst pain you think there ever was as a seven year old. Sometimes me and Stevie would go off by ourselves and just talk about how things would get better. They sure as hell couldn't get any worse. We would talk about being astronauts up in space or police officers saving the world one bullet at a time. Yeah, that's what we'd be; someone important. We'd always pretended we were super heroes flying around saving cats from trees and pretty girls from huge monsters. Kind of ironic isn't it? Growin' up thinkin' I would be the hero, when really I'm the f***'n villain.

Anyways, I'm sure there's one question that you're wondering; what did I do to get in this shit hole? Well, you're in luck because this isn't one of those questions that I was talkin' about earlier.

I was 22 years old livin' with my brother in a run-down, piece-of-shit apartment, down in Nomaniset, what is more commonly known as 'the shitty part of town' which happens to be better than livin' with our f***'n drunk mother. I had been seein' this girl, Shawn, who was a year older than me. Real pretty face, but more importantly she had money. Me and Stevie basically lived off of my six dollar an hour pay check from BurgerJoint while he tried to stay in school. I told him that I don't want him to screw up his life like I did by not finishin' high school and going on to college. Boy, did I f*** that up for him. Anyways, Shawn helped us pay the bills when we were short and she liked bein' around me so that was kind of a plus. On Friday night, I was comin' home from my shitty-ass job and I see Shawn's car parked in front of the house. I was thinkin' maybe she stopped by to surprise me after work. I walked in the kitchen door since the front door never opened right and I see Stevie screwin' Shawn right there on the f***'n table. I didn't say one word. I walked over to the end table in the living room, took out my gun from the drawer and shot the bitch. Ain't no one goin' to treat me that way. Stevie kept apologizing and sayin' he didn't mean to, he was drunk, and yada yada yada. He's my bro and the closest family I ever



HE HAS MY EYES
Shannon Lionberger



UNTITLED
Becky Sherwin

had. I told him to move back in with mom the next day which I knew would be like living hell for him. That would be punishment enough. I didn't want him to get mixed up in the shit I just made anyways. I thought about runnin' from the cops and hidin' out somewhere but I didn't. What's the point? I had basically given up on life anyways. The cops eventually showed up to my house after people started wondering what happened to Shawn. I threw my hands up and yelled, "Take me away boys!" Easiest job they probably ever had.

Clearly, I don't really deserve to be locked up like some kind of criminal. She got what was comin' to her and she was askin' for it. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has done it, but then again, they're probably being held hostage too, huh? Anyways, prison isn't so bad compared to living with mom or workin' at BurgerJoint. We get a bed, a roof over our god-damn heads, food, a chance to get outside, no old lady tellin' us everything is our damn fault, and no need to flip mystery meat for f***n pushy customers. It's the winter months that are the toughest though. We can go outside still, but it's so damn cold. But, man, being outside when the sun is beatin' down on ya, even if we are trapped in with barbed wire, lets us be in a whole other world. When you're inside, you still get the coil wire feel by staring through the bars of your cell; that's always nice...But, the way I see it is that I would rather be starin' through f***n wire while enjoyin' the weather. We get trapped in there like god-damn monkeys in a zoo. We get fed there, we sleep there, we shit there, and every-so-often we get let out. I even picked a few bugs out of my f***n hair one day. If you can find a difference between us and them, shit, let me know. Every f***n day in this place is the same god-damn thing over and over. I would have to say that's the worst part about bein' here; bein' stuck inside and havin' no variety. The only change we get to see is f***n surprise attacks from the god-damn Wicks. I even catch myself lookin' forward to those just for a damn change of pace. But, most of the time, there is no change and we expect there never to be change; unless...we get a new inmate.

Word on the block's that his name is John Ash and he is movin' right into Dag's old place, the cell next to mine. Well, hot damn I guess change comes 'round more often than ya think! I stayed close to my cell that day 'cause I wanted to see the new guy, make sure he didn't have a f***n melt down after the Wicks gave him a nice, warm, welcome beating. It happened right after lunch so I didn't stick 'round to mess with the guys. Most of them wanted to see for themselves

who this guy was anyways. It was hard to get a good look at him 'cause the Wicks were crowded 'round him hittin' him upside the god-damn head and back with those f***'n sticks they carry 'round with them like they're hot shit. They finally laid off and turned to leave Dag's old cell. They saw all of us standin' 'round, lookin' in and one of the bastards said, "Ain't nothin' to see in here boys. We were just takin' care of some important business." Important business my ass is what I would have liked to tell that asshole, but I didn't want to end up like our new friend here so I kept my big mouth shut.

We waited for the f***'n Wicks to leave and then we moved closer to the cell. The kid had blonde hair, was about my height of six foot flat and was skinny too. He sat like he didn't have a care in the world, relaxed, and comfortable; hell, I half expected the boy to be cryin' or at least have watery eyes, but nothing. The first time was definitely the hardest and he sure as shit didn't act like it. Mike, the biggest guy out of all us, was the first one to start talkin' and he said, "Hey boy, what's your name?" The new kid jerked his head up and said, "John, John Ash."

F***'n old timer, Marty, who was about four foot nine, with grey, almost white hair, and who had little hearing left pushed his way through to the front of the pack and yelled, "Johnny Cash? F***'n Johnny Cash is in this old piece of shit with us?!" Almost in perfect unison, everyone including John, corrected him. I knew just as well as everyone else that John Ash would be known as Johnny Cash for the rest of his f***'n time in this place. At least old Marty is good for somethin'; given people nicknames and givin' the rest of us a good laugh.

I put my two cents in by tellin' Johnny that the first beating was always the worst. He just shrugged his shoulders as if the beating was a f***'n walk in the park. What the hell has this kid been through to make him act like this was nothing? Maybe he was one of those kids I was talkin' 'bout; the ones that got beat by their parents growin' up. Maybe he was just used to it by now. I asked him, "So, what did they get you for, man?" I was expectin' him to shrug his god-damn shoulders again, but no. It was like we put a god-damn quarter in him and he started rambling on and on about shit I'm not sure I really wanted to know.

"Man, it's complete bullshit! I was just a normal guy last week and now I'm stuck in this prison like I actually committed a damn crime. I was workin' at my old man's store, the night shift, 'cause no one else wants

to work those freakin' hours. It was a busy night which isn't unusual; Fridays are always busiest. We get those damn high-schoolers with their fakes and all those college students who can actually buy the booze. Then there was Nancy, oh Nancy. Nancy comes in before her night shift over at the Hospital to buy a big cup of coffee every other night. Nancy is a ten in my book." Johnny took his first breath I think since he started talkin', then looked over at Marty and said, "You know what I mean by 'a ten' old timer?" Marty just shook his head, annoyed and walked out. Me and the other guys got a big laugh outta that one. "Anyways, like I was sayin', Friday was a busy night so I wasn't payin' attention to every damn thing goin' on. I was sweet talkin' Nancy over by the register, just about to ask her if she'd maybe like to have dinner with me at BurgerJoint the next night. You guys know BurgerJoint?" I couldn't do anything but roll my eyes and wait for him to continue his story which hopefully would end with 'oh, and I found ten f***'n dollars.' "Anyways, before I could even get the word dinner out of my mouth the freakin' college kids in the back knocked over a shelf of my best booze. I yelled at them, 'you kids are goin' to have to pay for all that and clean up that mess.' They were all sittin' there laughin' so I walked over to them and made sure they knew I wasn't kiddin'. By the time I got back to the register Nancy had left and now, I'm pissed. Those damned kids cost me my best booze, a mess all over the floor which would hurt business, and a date with Nancy, damn-it. I sat behind the register waiting for the boys to pick up all the broken glass when the assholes tried to make a run for it. They each had two bottles of booze in their hands and they just tried walkin' out! Well three of 'em made it I tell ya, but one, one wasn't so lucky. I reached under the counter, grabbed my gun and shot that kid. I only meant to shoot him in the leg or arm to make him fall over but it ended up killin' the bastard. And now, I'm here with you fine boys," he finished by folding his hands behind his head and smiling.

Johnny decided to add a few more comments by tellin' us, "I probably would've gotten out of it, but it turns out the kid I shot didn't have any booze on him after all. Oh, and the freakin' video cameras haven't worked since the day I started there at age sixteen so the cops didn't have proof that the booze was even stolen. For all they knew, I took it and drank it myself."

All the guys, including me, agreed with Johnny that it was complete bullshit that he was trapped in here. He did fit in great though, mid-

twenties, good sense of humor...hell I sound like I want a date with the guy... either way, like the rest of us, Johnny Cash didn't deserve to be in this hell-hole.

Later that night, when we were all in our cells, me and Johnny stayed up for a little while and talked while the guards were makin' their rounds. He started the conversation by simply sayin', "This sucks." I said to him, 'It gets better man. It took me about a week to get used to this shit, but then I was fine. Do you have a girl outside?' He said, "Naw man, I don't really got anyone. My old man, the owner of the shop, he basically disowned me when he heard of all the crap I caused. What about you?" I told him, 'the only person I got is my little bro, but I don't even know if he's missin' me.' Johnny said, "I'm sure he is man. I always wished I had a brother that I could push around and do stupid crap with. Were you and your bro tight?" I told him all of the crazy shit we got into when we were little and how I might have screwed up his life by makin' him move back in with mom. I told him how Stevie was damn smart and had his head on straight; he was goin' to go to college. Johnny said, "You're bro seems like a really good kid. You did the right thing by not draggin' him into this crap." That made me feel good for the first time in a while. I slept good that night, let me tell you.

As the days went on, me and Johnny made it a habit to have our nightly talks when the Wicks weren't 'round. We talked about anything and everything and Johnny soon replaced Dags as my right hand man. We would talk about the cars in Dag's old magazines, girls we considered to be 'tens', the foods we would kill for just to eat one more time, and what do ya know, orange circus peanuts were in Johnny's top five too. We talked about what we would be doing if we weren't trapped in here like animals and where we would be livin', and stuff like that; we even talked about stupid-ass slinkys once. But, one night Johnny brought up a topic I never really considered before. He said to me, "Have you ever thought about runnin'?" I asked, 'Runnin'? Runnin' how?' Johnny said, "Ya know, gettin' outta here; bein' free again."

I laid on my bed in silence for a long ass time just thinkin' about what he was sayin'. I heard Johnny say, "You still awake, man?" I just mumbled, 'Ya, just thinking.' Well, I must have been thinkin' real hard 'cause I dozed off without even realizin' it. I woke up thinkin' that conversation was all a dream 'cause me and Johnny haven't talked about it since and it's been over a week already. Hell, maybe it really

was a dream.

Three months passed since Johnny's been here which meant it was finally warm enough to tolerate the weather; thank God for that. Me and him got damn close over those long months; he reminds me of myself a lot and we get along great. I think he's kinda rubbin' off on me too 'cause I realize I'm swearin' less. And I guess that's f***'n alright.

Me and Johnny spent most of our time outside then. Every chance the Wicks gave us to be out there, we were. My favorite thing to do out there is just look at the clouds. Ya know, pick out the animals and the other shapes they make. Big Mike saw me doin' it once or twice and you can bet he sure as hell got a kick out of it. It's kind of funny though 'cause I caught that asshole lookin' at them too on more than one occasion. Most of the time Johnny skips the cloud games and just sits lookin' past the fence, or at the fence, I'm not sure which. When I ask him what he's lookin' at or what's on his mind he just says that he's just lookin'. I think to myself, just lookin', huh? Well alright, but I don't believe it.

One night, when the Wicks yelled, "Lights off," me and Johnny started up a conversation like usual, but this night was a little different. Johnny brought up the topic of runnin' again. He said to me, "I'm thinking about doin' it. I'm going to get out of here." I was a little shocked 'cause he knew what happened to Dags and all the guys before him who tried it, so the first question I asked him was, 'when?' He only answered with, "soon." Soon, great. Soon could be tomorrow, next week, two months; what the hell is soon? I asked him, 'why'? He said, "I'm so sick and tired of bein' treated like I'm a bad guy. The little jerks ruined my store and I thought he was runnin' off with my booze, I did the only thing I could think of." He was cryin' by this point. He didn't shed one tear when he got beat down by the Wicks, but man, was he cryin' now. "I'm not a bad guy. I'm getting' outta here and I think you should come with me." There was a long pause then, 'cause honestly I didn't have anything to say. Johnny said, "You in, man?"

Am I in? Am I in? Shit, I don't know! This place sucks and all, but I've already made it past the five year mark, what's the rest of my life? I would like to catch up with Stevie though... and I wouldn't mind buyin' a bag of them circus peanuts. Circus peanuts?! I'm going to break out of prison for a bag of circus peanuts?! They probably don't even taste that good anymore! No, I will just tell Johnny that I'm not interested. I

could actually make something of my life out there though. Get a job, a good girl, and be somebody. Hey, maybe I could find that slinky that seemed to have walked away on me. Circus peanuts and a slinky?! What the hell is wrong with me? I finally shook myself out of that mess and said to Johnny, 'It's not worth it man. You'll get caught and end up dead.' He then said something to me that I couldn't just ignore and put off to the side, "Better to be dead than trapped in living hell." I thought of how Dags went out with a bang, actually two bangs if ya want to be exact. Sure, he was lucky to be outta here, but when it came down to it I was scared shitless to take that same path. Johnny said, "Think about it. No matter what, we don't come back here. We either get killed tryin' or we make it out." I was thinkin' to myself, ya, then what? We will get caught sooner or later. Johnny seemed to know exactly what I was thinking and answered, "We stick together and we just get outta town. We keep runnin' and hidin', they're not going to find us." Runnin' and hidin'...what a life, huh? But, who am I kidding; I was damn willing to try it. After all, 'better to be dead then trapped in living hell', right?

Over the next few weeks our nightly chit-chats changed a hell of a lot. We didn't talk about silly things anymore; we moved on to the more important stuff. Each night and every second of the day we had, without the Wicks on our asses, we would plan our escape. We figured we couldn't just go around yellin' 'ESCAPE PLAN' for everyone to hear so we called it 'Flight 754659'. Ya, that lasted a whole two hours. It eventually just turned into 'Flight 754' which then changed to 'Flight... uh...uh...' and finally we just ended up callin' it the 'escape plan' and made sure no one was around to hear us.

Johnny Cash decided that our first task was to figure out when we would get the heck outta dodge. We finally f**...freakin' agreed that we were going to do this exactly one week from today as long as everything went as planned. I said we should run for it at night, but Johnny had other plans. He said, "There ain't no way to get out of our cells at night, man. We gotta go during the day." Once again, all I could picture was Dags crawlin' through that damned death trap. How the hell were we going to pull this off? One of the Wicks was walkin' by and heard Johnny sayin' something and told him 'to shut the hell up else he would come in there and make him shut up.' On that note, we ended for the night; there's no f***'n way we would be ready in a week.

I woke up to a friendly visit from one of the Wicks and his sidekick,

beating device. It was for talkin' after 'lights out' was called and I later found out that Johnny got a nice licking too. Right after breakfast I was told that I had a visitor. A visitor? Me? Hell, I don't even know anyone. I thought it could be Stevie for a split second, but he hasn't visited me in the whole five and half years my sorry ass has been locked in here; why would he come now? I started walkin' over to the window where I would be meetin' my mystery visitor. Guess who was behind window number f***'n one; my god-damn, no good, rotten, drunk-ass mother. And damn, she looked like hell. She didn't look at me, not even once. She kept her old, sunken in, grey eyes on the floor and didn't even give me a chance to sit down and say 'hi-ya mama! How've ya been? Oh, I've been great, rottin' away in this piece of shit', before sayin', "Steve is dead."

Now you know those people who have supposedly seen death and they say their lives flash before their eyes? I have basically been planning my own death walk for the past few weeks with Johnny and I never felt a damn thing. Hearin' that my only brother, my only family really, and my closest bud growin' up was dead; that sure as shit got some images of my life runnin' through my head. I didn't see any bright light at the end of a tunnel, but hell I was lookin'. I tried to hold myself together best I could 'cause if any of the f***'n guards saw me cryin', man, I wouldn't hear the end of it. I asked my mother, 'when?' She said, "Oh a few months ago." A few...f***'n...months... ago?! I yelled at her, 'were you just too f***'n drunk to come out any sooner and tell me or just too high?!' She made up some shit for an excuse about how she was too busy and didn't think I would really care anyways. Bullshit, I wouldn't care! All I could manage to say to her was, 'how?'

"After you left your brother got mixed up in the wrong crowd. He started college and made some friends there who were just, just not good for him." Like she even paid attention to who he was with; it was probably her own damn fault this happened. She continued, "He went out one night with these kids and they were all plannin' on gettin' drunk. They all went up to the store by that shit hole burger place you used to call a job and decided to steal some alcohol. Your brother didn't think it was a good idea; he was such a smart boy." She started cryin' a little bit and I shook my head at her 'cause she didn't know one damn thing about him.

She started talkin' again, but I was only catchin' part of her sentences

'cause it hit me. It f***'n hit me hard.

Stevie was the kid who didn't steal the alcohol. Stevie was the one who got shot down in the shop while the other assholes got away. Stevie was the one who was killed by Johnny f***'n Cash. And Stevie was the one who got mixed up in all the wrong shit because his big brother screwed everything up for him.

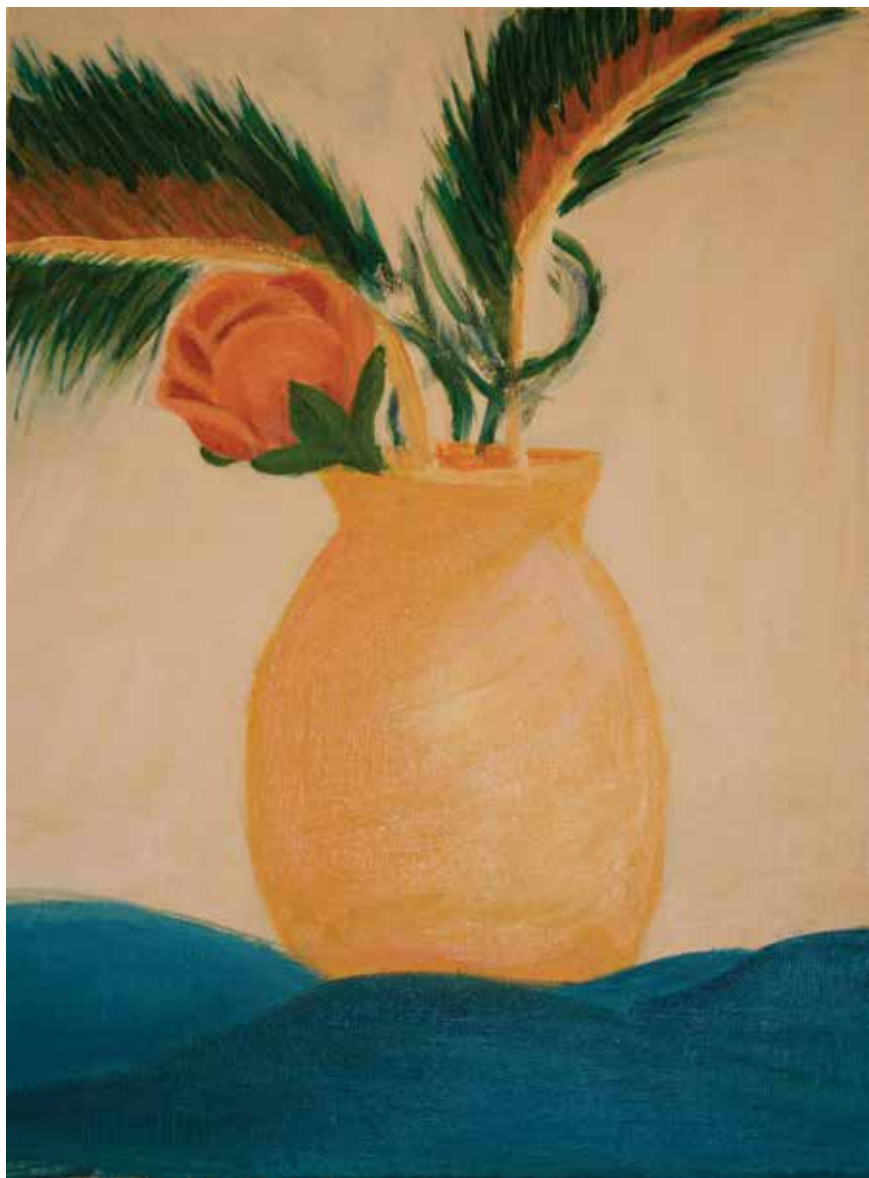
Damn.

Ya know what? I'm done.

Now, I can't change what I did or what I caused because that would be impossible. But, I can't just sit around thinkin' about all the damn shit I caused. I have to do something. I'm goin' to start flight 7... aw f*** it, I'm goin' through with the new and improved escape plan; today. I'm going to walk up to that damned fence just like Dags did and just pretend like I'm goin' through. The god-damn Wicks will shoot me down before I will even realize I'm in any pain. Then, it will all be over and I'll be f***'n free.

I'm not tellin' Johnny 'cause he will realize it's not worth it when I'm done with it. Ya, he was the one who actually pulled the trigger on my brother, but it was my god-damn fault he's actually dead. I might as well have been the one holdin' the gun. It's all my own god-damn fault. I screwed up so many people's lives, Shawn's, her families, Stevie's, and my own. My mother would say her's too, but that's pushin' it.

My life was like one big slinky goin' down the damned staircase. I started out smooth, without a care in the world, just goin' through life best I could. As time went on I got a few more bent springs and twisted coils causin' me to act all wrong and soon enough I became busted forever. Now, I'm a good-for-nothin' criminal that can't stand to bring another person's life crashing down with me. But, God, I sure hope they have those damned circus peanuts wherever I'm goin'.



RETIREMENT HOME
Rachel Riggle



DEYORE'S ADVENTURE

James Backstein

GROWING UP

Andy Davis

I watch the boys play
And then I think
My mind starts to wander
And I start to shrink

I'm 4 feet 3 inches
With a sword in my hand
I'm fighting a dragon
In a far away land

I scale the wall
And kiss the girl
I fight the trolls
And save the world

I ride off into the sunset
And snap out of my dream
I am 24 years old
Things are not as they seem
I'm growing up.

BREAKUPS: A HOW-TO

Rachel Riggle

Life, Love and all the other shit that happens.

Broken down into chapters and steps,
for your convenience and entertainment.

Also titled: "Breakups: a how-to guide to getting through."

Chapter 1: The Breakup

Step One: Die... (Figuratively)

Note that actual death, though it may seem a likely escape, is rather unnecessary and not effective considering there is no proof that you will be able to haunt the shit out of the SOB.

Step Two: WTF?

Questions generally go as follows:

What happened to us?

Who is at fault?

...and the ever popular, why me?

Step Three: Anger

This is the part where you look back and find that you are not only able to answer the questions above but you are able to pinpoint exactly when and where and whose fault it was that the relationship ended. This is where you say things like, "I should have seen this coming." (Look for new note entitled "You know it's time to break up when..." also titled "Warning signs: a how-to in avoiding relationship crash and burn).

Inevitably this leads to a great anger directed toward the ex-partner. It is generally taken out on everyone and everything for no good reason. This is often overlooked by friends because they "know what you are going through."

(Side effects include: headache, nausea, uncontrollable sobbing, numbness, and an affinity toward men. Some serious

but rare side effects include: vomiting, chest pain, losing the will to get out of bed, hysteria, and in rare cases a change in sexual preference.)

Chapter 2: Life After Death

So you have survived. It is unfair but such is life.

Step One:

Accepting the clichés such as:

You are too good for him.

Be thankful you got out when you did.

Don't worry, things will get better

...and the most used and completely useless:

There are other fish in the sea.

Because obviously you are concerned that this one "fish" is the only fish and there will never be any other fish besides the one you caught, even though you feel like you were the one who fell "hook, line, and sinker"- another fishing cliché. What if you don't even like fish? And what's the one about in for a penny in for a pound? Last time I checked the currency rate a pound is worth a lot more than a penny. And the one about when it rains it pours.... It doesn't matter you still get wet! OOF! End of chapter - clichés piss me off.

Chapter 3: Finding One's Self (A dialog)

"Hello? Me? Are you there?"

"Where did you go?"

"Okay, let's think, where did I have myself last?"

"Over there? Yes... no... wait. That's not me. Damn almost had me."

"Wait, wait there I am! Hey Me, come back ..."

"That's only half of me... well, half is better than nothing."

Chapter 4: Being Single

It's lonely... it's called Single. Avoid things like romantic comedies, love songs, sad songs, the number one, the

discovery channel when they show nature shows because there are always animals mating, sitcoms, hanging out with friends who have boyfriends/ girlfriends, and sitting alone on the weekends.

The only step: Find the six most irreplaceable men on the planet and have an "orgy" of sorts- Jack, Jim, Jose, Johnny Walker, and of course Ben and Jerry.

Chapter 5: Moving On (in two parts)

Pay attention because this can be complicated.

Here are the rules, Step one can be skipped and a person can move straight to option two. Option two is inevitable but a person can stay on option one for a long, long while. While playing this game, especially option one; do not pass go, do not collect \$200. Any persons who collects money for option one will be sent to jail.

Option One: Playing the Field.

Step One: Pick subject/ subjects.

Step Two: Over analyze every action made in the presence of the subject/ subjects.

Step Three: Ask friends' advice, even if their track record is worse than yours because they have had to do this before.

Or on the chance that you trust the friends that are in a relationship for their advice you do it because they seem to have it all figured out. HA.

Step Four: Take friends' advice about not being ready for a serious relationship but decide that single life is too lonely so remind yourself that not all relationships have to be "Serious."

Step Five: Carry out sexual acts with some or many subjects who are all more than willing to do this "no strings attached."

Step Six: Move on to option two, feeling a little more like a slut.

Option Two: New Relationship.

Step One: Pick subject.

Step Two: Over analyze every action made in the presence of subject.

Step Three: Ask friends' advice.

Step Four: Ignore friends' advice about being on the rebound and begin to flirt ridiculously with subject.

Step Five: Providing step four went well, begin to date subject.

(Side effects include: giddiness, heart palpitations, false sense of euphoria, increase in sex drive, and dry mouth).

Step Six: See Chapter one. Rinse and repeat.

Chapter 6: The Way Out.

There really is no chapter six. There are a few options including being a bitter spinster, cat lady, joining a commune (good weed) or a convent (good God), and celibacy otherwise known as marriage.

(Side effects include: A sense of hopelessness, thoughts of suicide, binge drinking, drug use (prescription and recreational), and a good laugh at life and the cruel irony that infests everyday life).

TRAPPED

Jacqueline Landin

Confined in a world unbeknownst to me
Ensnared in a case of conformity
Descending deeper into the bleak abyss
I sometimes wonder if I'll ever be missed.
Nobody seems to know my pain—
My mind even questions if I'm crazy or sane.
My thoughts travel fast, I can't really tell
If I'm just in a maze or if I'm really in hell.

FOREVER GONE

Jacqueline Landin

An empty shell
Encased in tears;
No more life—
No more fears.

SPORK

Marissa Meloy

Spork, son of spoon and fork

In the eye blood flows quick

Stabbed in the ear

Can't hear

Screams of death

Poke from the throat

Can't protest

Killed in the heart

Death comes quick

Spork kills in blood tonight

BULLET WOUND

Brett Aguirre

I couldn't help but feel that loss of breath.

I want it back and I want it now.

This isn't a game; it's my soul.

I gave you everything and you took it like the stabs at Caesar.

I am no Czar but I did nothing to deserve this from you.

The world fades and I drift.

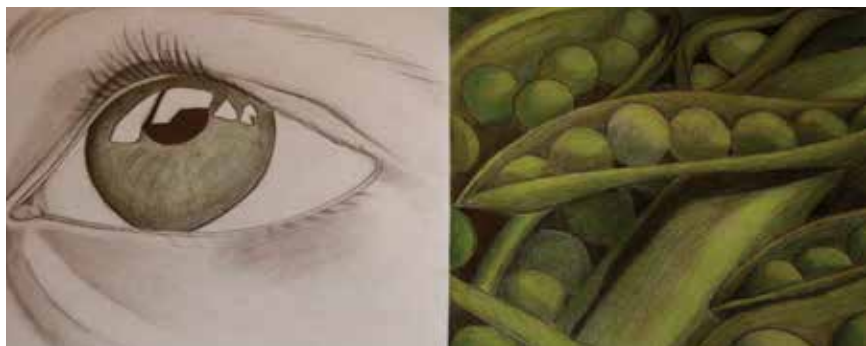
This was where my love for you died.

Its last mark was a chalk outline.



KILMAINHAM GAOL

Liesel Reinersmann



POD

Rachel Riggle



LIFE WHIZZES BY

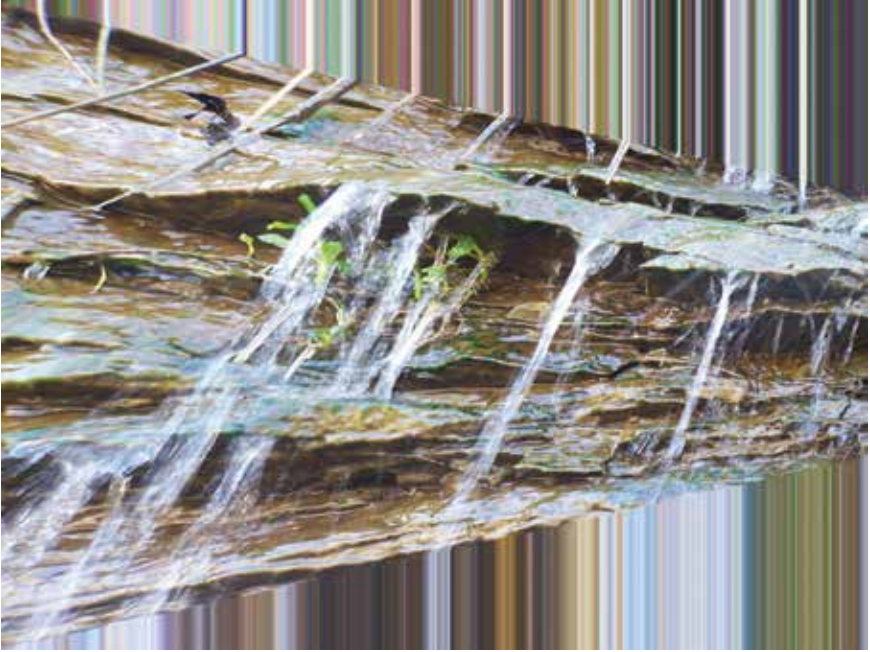
Becky Sherwin



UNTITLED
Audra Glenn



UNTITLED
Audra Glenn



UNTITLED
Audra Glenn



IAN=WANDERING + ENERGY

Courtney Taylor



UNTITLED
Kelsey Smith

DEATH BE GOLD

Rachel Riggle

Death is unseen to thy naked eye;

Elusive and untamed by man's

Desire for understanding.

Death; feared by many

Yet not itself claiming

Thy territorial soul.

Fear not thy death,

Though thou knowest not the hour of thy fate

Death is only truth disguised.

Creeping, omnipotent death simply waits,

Though all too often we are surprised.

Tis fear that takes the soul from this earthy mold.

Fear not, befriend malevolent death

For it shall bring thee nearer to Gold.

A MESSAGE

Liesel Reinersmann

Darkness. Of all the religious afterlives I'd heard of in my lifetime, nothing that had passed my ears had ever come close to the truth. The emptiness presses on you from every direction, even from within. Every moment is an eternity of loneliness; just you and the black. I shouldn't be telling you any of this. Honestly, I'm not sure how I am, but I got out – I escaped. I know it won't be long. The darkness will find me; it is only a matter of time. Time – how strange it is for that to exist for me again. I never thought to appreciate the passage of time while I was alive. No – I need to focus. I'm here for a purpose. I need to get my message out. I need to tell everyone: you are wrong. You all have it wrong. I spent my life worrying what God would think of my decisions – not that I was devout by any means, but that thought was always there pushing me in one direction or another. When I think back I might have done things differently. That's what I need to tell you: stop. Stop this pointless worship of deities that don't exist. It may have made me a slightly better person during my life but those empty beliefs have been haunting my death. We fill our lives with such glorious hope for the afterlife; reuniting with loved ones, going to a place of endless bliss, a forgiving God that has been watching over us. It is a great thought but such a horrible disappointment because that is not at all how it is. I never knew emptiness could be so overwhelming. No hint of anyone else – ever. At first you try in vain to find someone else – reach out with your mind in the hopes it'll work and someone will find you and save you. It's like being constantly aware you no longer exist. You have no body in death and ever though no physical mind you feel permanently trapped in it. It is a curse to still have the ability to think and feel emotions. It just isn't fair. I over thought things during my life when I had plenty of distractions and now...now it is torture. I cannot think of a physical pain that could be worse than this agonizing pain of...thought. Constant unending thought – I get no reprieve! There is no uneasy rest for me to fall into or a book to distract myself with. There is...nothing. I implore you – stop hoping for a bright happy afterlife. Yes, it is a sobering thought and I tell you this not to dampen your spirits but to improve your death. To expect...anything and receive this all-encompassing

emptiness felt like the ultimate deception. It is agonizing. Make the most of your lives for your memories will be all you have to cling to in the darkness. That darkness...it consumes you. I never did like the dark, especially as a child. Maybe the fear of the dark is natural in children because on some innate level we all knew. We all knew what was coming but wanted to block it out. Dark: that doesn't even describe it. No one has seen this kind of dark. It is nothing – just...nothing. My time has run out; I am being pulled back. These are my last words of advice: Never hold back love and always try to just be nice. The memories of the horrible things you've said and done will haunt you in death. I can't fight the black any longer; it's my time to go. I hope you will remember my words.

POPULATION 303

Angela Marsaglia

These city walls are caving in,
I can't get far enough away.
I'm heading back to my hometown
Somewhere down this ol' highway.

There ain't nothin' like the sun shining
To make me think of you
And that town we talked of leaving
That I just wanna get back to.

It was population 303
Sneaking out at night
Just you and me.
We were young and love was new
Had our first kiss
Behind the school.

We were skipping class
Driving out to the creek
And making out
Beneath the bridge.
In our world
It was only you and me
And that little town
Population 303.

I was a small town girl
With big city dreams.
You a farmin' boy
And my first everything
And we thought we owned the town
But I don't know anyone there now.

We had no bar,
No place to eat,
The fields we worked
Are now a street
And I just wish I could go back.
I never thought I'd ever want that!

I miss population 303
Being young and wild
When living was free,
Hitchin' rides to the Elizabethtown,
Grabbing ice cream cones
And walking around.

We were storm watchin'
On my Daddy's porch
Playing hide 'n' seek
Complaining we were bored.
Back then, I didn't know what it'd mean to me
Growing up in a town population 303.

I wonder if you're still around
And if you ever think about me.
Back then I never thought I'd miss this town
When it was population 303.

But I miss population 303
Sneaking out at night
Just you and me.
We were young
And love was new
Had our first kiss
Behind the school.

We were skipping class
Driving out to the creek
And making out
Beneath the bridge.
Now I know what it means to me
Having grown up in a town
With a population 303.

LIGHT FALLS DOWN

Tiffany Pitman

Light falls down

Breaks like brittle bones

I rise from my night long meditation

At side

I am the ever-faithful priestess

Never leaving from my makeshift prayer mat

I worship in my beautiful robes

Letting my adoration fall upon your skin

Like leaves from a tree

I pray at this temple everyday

But my soul is never filled

Light falls down

Breaks like brittle bones

It lights up my room and shows me

That I am alone...Well not quite there

Is the light that falls down like brittle

Bones.

Light cracks through making fissures on

The walls that look like old breaks in old bones

As the room brightens I look around and realize

I am alone...Well not quite...Not quite.

Light cracks and breaks through
Forcing its way into my pitch black room
Showing me the blood dripping from my hands
Shoving, pushing, never ceasing the light
Makes its way into my room pushing back
The dark, breaking my sleep, slaughtering
My dreams

-Dawn Dawn

The blood drips down and hits the ground
and

No one ever knows...I will never know.

Yellow bright bold, soft delicate precious and fragile
Sweet and lovely

Even with Jaundice you are beautiful.

MERE MORTALS

Danyelle Hooks

'Tis thine words strike me like a dagger

Murderous vice against mine soul

And thine soul is black as night

Teeming forth from sanguine blood

Ravaging like a river upon sharp rocks

Nay, I fear not mere mortals

For 'tis only for the gods to judge mine mind and my heart

Men continue in their evil plots

But I, I of Hercules' breath and Hero's gentle love

Shall rise up against thine words and cold heart

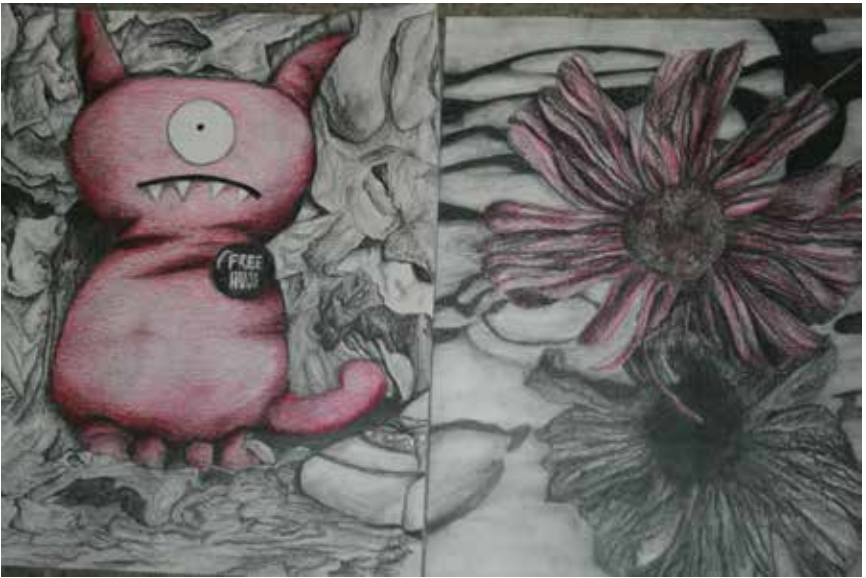
And separate mineself from thine great deception

Bear me virtuous fruits and amorous wines

That I and my love flee this place entirely,

Rebuke thine and thy

And race into the morrow



MY LITTLE GUY

Rachel Ozog



GOLD LEADER! CHECK IN!

Matt Duncan

MY DAD

Thomas Wayne VanDusen

I want to dedicate this to my father. In case some of you don't know, I lost my dad about ten years ago this July. I was only eleven years old, but I want to share with you the person my dad really was. My dad was like a big kid. He would always welcome me and my brothers' friends into our home like they were his own kids. My dad grew up in Florida until he moved here when he was about sixteen or seventeen and soon after that he met my mom. He raised my brothers and me to be the kind of man he was: always one to lend a helping hand and do for others as best he could. In my opinion, he was the best kind of person: respectful to women, honest, and hardworking. Of course everyone has flaws, but my dad was always there for anyone that needed him. We used to go camping a lot when I was little and when my brothers would pick on me he would wait until they were asleep and help me get them back. We didn't have a lot of money when I was growing up but the memories I shared with my dad were ones I wouldn't trade for anything in this world. He was the type to always put my brothers' and my wellbeing before his own. I was told that when he had his accident and was lying there dying on the ground, the only thing he was concerned about was that my brothers and I would be taken care of. The morning of the accident before he left for work, my dad did something that, as far as I knew, he hadn't really done before. I had a friend sleep over the night before and he told me that before my dad left for work he had kissed me on the forehead and told me he loved me and that he always would. My only regret is that I didn't get to say it back. After he passed away, every single one of the people he worked with at Black Hawk College wrote a special memory they shared with him and put them all together to give to us. The one that sticks out the most to me is when a female co-worker of his told me of the time they had a horse show at the college and they made special t-shirts to remember that event. My dad loved animals and really wanted one of those shirts. Unfortunately they ran out of them before he could get his. The lady teased my dad that she got one and he didn't. Soon after we received her letter we received a package with her shirt from that day because she knew my dad had wanted one and that had meant a lot to me. My dad was loved by so many people and I hope he knew that. He was a special guy and in my opinion the best dad a kid could want, so I dedicate this to his memory. May you rest in peace and know that I love you and that I always will. I love you Dad and I miss you more than a stupid letter could ever explain.

COFFEE CREAMERS

Danyelle Hooks

I spent my days with a man counting coffee creamers. I had nothing better to do – and, quite frankly, neither did he. He would sit and count them one by one and I would watch him from across the room. Every day this man would do the same thing. He would count them and upon finishing he would build. What he would build, I could never tell before it was finished. Some days a castle, others an animal, and still others, well, let's just say they were quite abstract. It was like he was building something out of a deck of cards. The skill, the concentration, the will-power, the patience. Every day. He sat there quietly with his coffee, which he never drank. The newspaper, which he always asked for and never read. And the creamers. The sculptures seemed to appear so suddenly, without thought, like that of a child prodigy and I was astounded by his skill, if that's what you would call it.

This went on for years. My daily routine now always included watching the man build his masterpieces with coffee creamers . . . and leave them every day for the waitress to absent-mindedly destroy after he left. My mind never left that man. What did he do for a living? Why did he do this? And, God only knows, what went on in that man's head every day as he counted and molded his works.

Nine hundred and eighty two days later, I approached the man. I sat down in the seat across from him and watched him like I always did. I remember this day exactly. He said nothing, didn't even acknowledge my presence, but I knew he was aware I was there. He kept on building without regard to me at all.

I sat with the man for precisely 13 weeks. I never said anything and, well, neither did he. I guess we both just accepted the beauty in silence and quietly enjoyed each other's company. But one day, the man spoke.

By this time, I was nearly thirty-two years old. I had a wife, a daughter, a great job, but something kept drawing me back to this man every morning for something. A glimpse of imagination, a silent trust, a perfect truth. There was something to him that I never could understand, but lured me back. When he spoke, he whispered softly so that no one else could hear what he had to say. The man said to me: "Stop counting your life away and let the masterpiece unfold by

itself.”

That was the first day I left the old man before he did. This statement startled me. The only thing he had ever said to me seemed so redundant. For a man that counted coffee creamers every morning and apparently had nothing better to do than create things out of them. I mean, he had to realize that the waitress cared less as she demolished his works every day and threw the creamers back in the refrigerator with the others. “Stop counting,” he had said. Ha. What did this man know about that? His entire life was spent counting, and counting. He counted. He created a work. He had to be doing some sort of crazy, genius math in his head before he began to layer the creamers one by one to paint his pictures. How in God’s name was the “masterpiece” going to “unfold by itself?!”

I thought this man was crazy. That was the last day I saw that man. I stopped going to the coffee shop in the mornings and rushed through the drive thru at Starbucks instead and forgot about the man for a while. He seemed to disappear from my life altogether. I had work, my wife, and my now teenage daughter, who, dear God, was going to get the best of me. But I stumbled through my life and did all right.

I thought about the man the other day. Now, I’m a rough sixty-four years old with a balding head living with my wife and two cats and beginning my retirement. I went in to that coffee shop looking for the man. Of course he wasn’t there. He had to have been long gone by now, but that wouldn’t stop me. So I took a seat where the man used to sit. And ordered a coffee and a newspaper. As I stared down into my coffee, I thought about what the old man had said. I had spent too much time thinking, planning, making sure everything went so right that I had forgotten to let myself enjoy life. Now, it was too late. But it wasn’t too late. Sure, I may had disregarded the man’s advice and regretted it, but there was one thing I could do.

I sat there and didn’t drink my coffee. I didn’t look at the newspaper. And I counted the creamers. One by one. And then I started to build. It wasn’t easy at first, but after I let myself go, my creations began to unfold just as magically as he let them. And every day, from the corner of my eye, I saw a little boy, no older than ten staring at me from across the room. I knew that someday, the boy would venture over to me and I would tell him the same thing the old man told me. And with a smile on my face, I knew this time, someone would listen.

A RECURRING NIGHTMARE

Becky Sherwin

My feet quickly carry me in one straight direction.
Across the distance, I cannot see, but feel what's to come.
I dare not turn; I know what's following,
The three shadowy figures coming after me.
Though they stay the same distance behind,
I'll never slow or stop, for I know they'll kill me.
Exhausted, I must go on.
My adrenaline is rising.
Time seems to slow, but yet I still move quickly.
There it is in my view: The edge of my life.
I cannot slow; my feet will not break the pace.
I'm trapped now, the figures breathing heavily on my back.
There's no escape.
Then it happens, in one fluid motion.
Over the edge,
 Down,
 Down,
 Down.
My breath is caught in my throat.
I feel weightless, nothing but the sickening fear.
I know the bottom is coming; the end is so near...

The bed shakes violently as I awake in a sweat.
My heart is beating out of my chest.
My mind clears and then I realize,
Another nightmare, another message.
It hits me, now I know what it's telling me.
A friendship needs to end, for it is no longer that.
I am under a spell, too much control and fear.
How did I get this way? It's killing me inside.
I need to be me again, not trapped in this way.
I would rather jump over the edge than live like this from day to day.

THE GREAT PINE

Jacqueline Landin

The sun was beginning to emerge over the eastern horizon with its opaque shafts of light brightening the land at a leisurely rate. It would have been best if the sun had never come up that day. It would have been best if the sun never came up again. The warm yellow rays began to unveil the death all around. There were no graceful birds coasting on the breeze; there were no land animals scurrying about; and the only form of vegetation was that of the Great Pine. It stood amid the waste land of what once was a thriving ecosystem. Disaster had swept through the land and damaged whatever it encountered. This disaster was Man.

Three weeks was all it took to devour the lush forest. Man had rushed in with his huge steel machinery and without hesitation began uprooting the terrain. So many plants had been trampled. So many innocent creatures had been crushed by the large heavy rubber wheels, which strewed the blood from their unlawful death upon the soil. The mighty pine could do nothing to help his friends. He was anchored to the earth by his bulky roots and could only remain stationary lest he was cut down. But to the tree's dismay, stationary he remained. The animals fortunate enough not to be crushed by Man's steel beasts were unfortunate to die of cave-ins. As they scurried to the safety of their underground burrows, it was only time until a steel beast rumbled overhead, causing the burrows to collapse and cave in. Even birds were slaughtered. Some gave up hope and flew from their nests in fright leaving their unborn young contained in the speckled eggs, while others stayed by their eggs to the end. As the trees toppled left and right, the eggs plummeted to the ground and smashed among the rubble, leaving broken egg shells and yellow yoke soaking into the soil. The blood of the forest creatures and the chips of wood of the fellow pines covered the ground in a blanket of carnage. Only a solitary pine was spared in the hellish ordeal. Nothing else survived.

As quickly as Man had come, Man left. The giant pine was thankful for Man's retreat from his habitat but was left with the reality of the aftermath. Everything the tree knew and loved was gone. He was no longer protected from the western winds which blew in from the Rockies and his companions had been brutally slaughtered. Days came and went and the tree remembered a time before Man invaded his world. Families of squirrels had once scampered across his strong limbs, owls had taken refuge in the darkest parts of his upper cavity, and black bears had sharpened their claws on his sturdy trunk. None of his fellow forest

dwellers were a threat to him. He provided food and shelter for them and in return they provided company for him.

Now that the Great Pine was the one of the only things left standing in what used to be his home, his spirit was diminishing. He hadn't felt Man's presence for over a month now and was beginning to wonder if Man would return to complete the task he had left unfinished. The sun's rays were blocked by the thick cumulus clouds rolling in from the west and darkening the sky. The gloomy atmosphere only worsened the Great Pine's soul. With the pine's heart so low and heavy, he yearned for Man to return and cut him down. What was a life without friends? It was only loneliness, no life and no hope, just pure loneliness.

Lightning was etched across the sky in wild zigzags as rain began to pour down from the heavens. Thunder rumbled in the distance and the wind picked up and began to sway the top of the Great Pine. The needles held securely as the wind blew across the pine's limbs. It continued to rain throughout the night and into the next morning. The rain finally stopped and the clouds dispersed to reveal the brilliant sun and its warm rays beaming down upon the Great Pine.

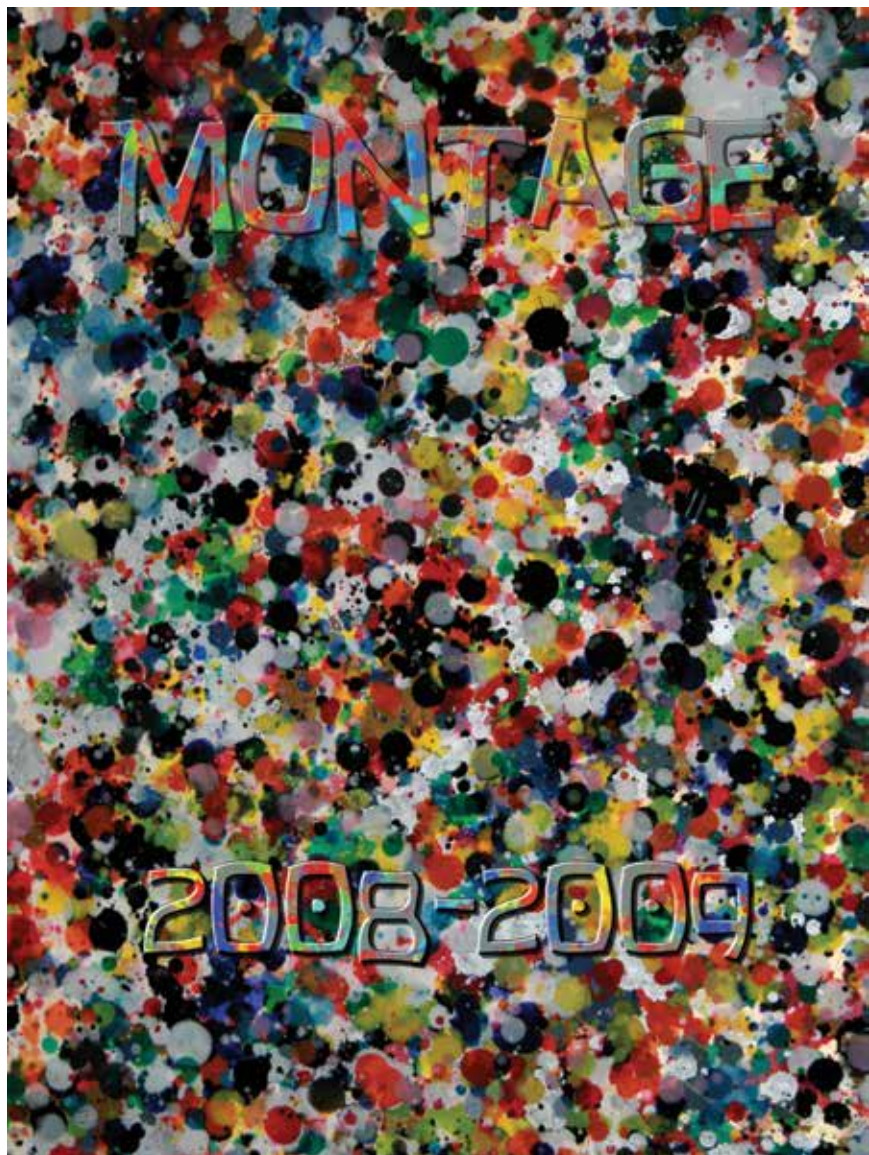
He wondered what it would be like to die. To be struck with the cold saw blade Man had used on his brethren and to fall to the earth and shake the very ground Man stands upon. And that thought didn't even frighten the Great Pine. He was ready to give up. He didn't want to live anymore without his companions. The Great Pine's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a screech from above. A majestic bald eagle had landed on the top branches of the Great Pine. The bald eagle's strong black talons dug into the Great Pine for support. Its white feathered head was tipped towards the orange sinking sun in the west. The yellow beak was perfectly curved and incredibly sharp, and the black lustrous feathers swayed as the breeze blew by. A few minutes went by and another bald eagle swooped in and perched next to the first. The Great Pine was overcome with immense honor and respect to be chosen by one of nature's finest winged predators.

As the day turned into dusk and the eagles were still perched on the top branches, the Great Pine was finally able to understand the eagles' presence. The bald eagle's habitat was being destroyed by Man. This pair had flown away from danger and had at last come across the Great Pine. He realized that for the time being he was sanctuary to them. As the bald eagles rested atop the crown of the Great Pine, the Great Pine was overcome with a grateful feeling of accomplishment, something he thought he would never feel again.

FEELINGS OF SHAME

Tom Donnan

Consumed by Fear
Blinded by pain
Nothing to offer
But this feeling of blame
Many things were said
And few were done
Trusted by all
Misguided by one
Alone is this world
As the people pass by
With the look of agony
And tears in their eyes
Swallowed by hate
Forgotten by love
Paying this debt
While you rest above
Something hearing
What sounds like your voice
A constant reminder
It was always my choice
Days pass me by
As the pain grows strong
Still your love is here
Life seems not so wrong
Devoted by fear
Shaded by pain
Nothing to offer
Not even shame



BUSTLING
Tina Arnold



PAGODA
James Grable

[YOURS]

Andy Davis

A war is waged
And I am thrown
Into the Abyss
Of the unknown
I open my eyes
To another day
I lose my soul
To a mystical way
I step outside myself
To see my heart
I look back at myself
To see the part
The part with the scar
I know it well
That part seems so far
I face a war
The war is me
The time is now
For me to be
Yours.

A KITTEN'S TALE

Becky Sherwin

Everything was so bright. Too bright, she thought, squeezing her eyes shut again against the blazing sun. She longed for the darkness of the old run-down shed where she was born; Longed for her mother's warmth and the company of her brothers and sisters. The dream from which she had just awakened had seemed so real, and she began to cry out as the realization hit her once again. She was alone. The days of her early life seemed so far away now. Though she had only been born about a month ago, she was now thrust out into the enormous outdoors, away from the comfort of the shed and separated from her family by death. If only that ugly creature had not taken away the lives of her mother and siblings. If only he'd taken her too. Then they would all still be together: a happy family.

Sniffing, she rose from a spot beneath the dumpster in the alley, which had been her bed for the past two nights. She stretched and yawned, then began to wander the streets of the much too-large neighborhood. She kept an eye out for the monster wherever she went. She couldn't help but wonder if he would come back to finish her off too. She stopped to lick the small gash on her left paw. It was evidence of where the groundhog's teeth had nicked her leg before she'd outsmarted him.

It all happened one night, when all five kittens and their mother had been in a deep, peaceful sleep. All, except for her, the solid gray one with the big round eyes. She remembered it all so clearly: the soft scratching coming from just outside the small building where they slept. The fear in the pit of her stomach as she realized something was digging from underneath the wooden walls and pushing itself inside, right where they all slept. Oh, now she felt it was all her fault it had happened. She had tried to wake them, really she had. She meowed loudly and pulled on her mother's ear with her teeth. But it hadn't been enough. She'd even kicked at her siblings, but they would not budge. Being the runt of the litter was not an advantage. Her voice was so tiny it seemed barely above a whisper, and her strength was very limited.

Right before her eyes, the groundhog had shoved himself through the small hole he had dug, and murdered her family. They did not even have time to stir in their sleep when he killed each one with a single

bite on the throat. She remembered she had been horrified; frozen in fear. The terrible monster fixed his eyes on her with his evil glare and bared his teeth. Just as she was about to run, he lunged, nipping at her paw.

She climbed onto the old workbench in the corner, and then jumped onto the high shelf above it. Although she was the runt, she had learned to climb skillfully. By then the groundhog was advancing on her. She spotted a tiny hole in the highest point of the roof of the shed where the moonlight was streaming inside. She pushed out her claws as far as they could possibly extend, and braced herself, straddling one of the narrow boards that braced the roof. Dangling upside-down, she climbed diagonally to the very top of the ceiling. Leaning her head all the way backward, she caught a glimpse of the floor below. The thought of falling immediately took hold of her mind, and she faltered, but soon regained her grip on the board. The groundhog, she noticed, remained on the shelf. Only a few more inches to go. As soon as she reached the opening, she wiggled her small furry body through, and pulled herself up onto the shingled roof outside. Sighing with relief, she plopped down and stared up at the moon wondering what she would do now. Her family was gone, all she had known, and she felt so lost, frightened, just as she did now.

Shaking herself from the memory, she pulled herself up off the pavement at the edge of the road. It had been almost three days since the nightmare had taken place, and she did not know where to go. "I don't belong out here," She decided. "I don't belong anywhere now."

She had seen the occasional stray cat wander past, and once even thought for a fleeting second, that one of them was her mother, back from the dead. But when she called out, mewling, and tried to approach it, the cat had hissed threateningly at her. She hurried away quickly, running right toward a boy wearing large shoes with wheels, whizzing down the street and narrowly missing her.

Her little heart had thudded against her chest as she crouched down, making herself as small as she possibly could. She thought her heart would surely burst. Then there had been the angry dog with the hideous wrinkled face who had chased her up a tree. She remained in the tree for several hours watching the dog leaping up clumsily down below. "Is he that dumb?" she wondered, cocking her head from side to side as she observed the mutt. Finally the dog had worn himself out

and lumbered home. "Finally!" she spat, watching him go. "Took him long enough to realize he wasn't making it up this tree. Ha!"

Now she wandered aimlessly, hoping that there would be no conflict today. She was very hungry, and her stomach rumbled loudly as a reminder. She had lapped at the dirty puddles of water along the streets and scrounged for scraps in tipped-over-trashcans. But that was not enough. She could feel herself growing weaker.

She spotted two young boys leaning on their two wheeled contraptions eating burgers. She had seen people ride down the streets on the two-wheelers before, and didn't care for them much. They went too fast. Still not as fast as the huge four-wheeled things that roared passed almost every second on the streets. Since the boys were not riding their two-wheelers just then, and their food looked inviting, she decided to act cute and approach them.

"Me-ow," She pleaded, rubbing against the first one's leg. The boys stopped chatting and looked down.

"Get off my leg," the first one yelled, kicking her away.

"Yeah, I hate cats!" said the other.

She cocked her head to one side, listening. She did not understand how they could be so cruel.

"Go on! Get out of here!" shouted the first boy. He picked up a handful of rocks and aimed them her way. She began to run, but not fast enough. Helplessly, she stumbled and fell as a shower of rocks hit her hard on her back, stinging her to the skin. She regained her balance and took off as fast as she could, not seeing the car heading toward her as the boys continued to throw rocks her direction, laughing all the while.

"HONK! SCREEEEEEEECH!" the giant four wheeled object squealed its tires as it came barreling her way. Her head was pounding and she was frozen with fear. The loud monster halted just inches from her nose. No matter how hard she tried she could not will her tiny legs to move.

"Get out of the way, you stupid varmint!" screamed an angry voice from

inside the four-wheeled object. The man stuck his ugly head out the window and shook his fist.

"I'm warning you, I'll run you right over!"

Finally she managed to regain her breath again and she scurried out of the road, diving under a bush on a big open lawn.

"What is wrong with the world?" she asked herself. "Why are people so hostile and cruel?" She tried her best to be brave, really she did, but she was completely overwhelmed by the events of the previous days. All she could do was curl up in a tight ball under the bush and weep.

The kitten had no idea how long she had been lying there, but when she looked up, she could hear someone singing. Peering out from behind some leaves she could see a small girl playing on a swing set. The soft melody filled her ears:

"A-tisket a-tasket, a green and yellow basket, I wrote a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it..."

As she listened, she could feel herself moving forward, wanting to seek comfort in the sweet-looking girl. Then, suddenly the child stopped singing. She looked toward the bush. "Uh oh," the kitten thought, pulling back into hiding. "She saw me."

The girl began walking curiously to the bush. "Hello?" She called. "Is somebody in there?"

The little kitten stayed quiet, not sure if she should come out or run away. She had had such horrible experiences with humans that she was not sure she wanted to cross paths with another one again. It was too late. The girl parted the bushes and gasped at what she saw.

"It's a kitty!" she exclaimed. "Come here, little one. I won't hurt you."

"That girl seemed okay," the kitten said to herself. She began slowly inching her way out, but before she could go much further, the girl picked her up, cradling her in her arms. She began to rub the little kitten behind the ears and on her belly, all the while singing her song again.

When she was finished she set the kitty down and laid down on the grass beside her. "My name's Sandy," she told the kitten, laughing as she rubbed her face on the girl's nose. "We should think of a name for you."

The kitten almost forgot her hunger and her fear as the girl played with her the rest of the afternoon. She loved the attention and the companionship, and hoped that she could stay here forever and never have to wander the scary streets again. She felt as though she had

finally found a new home.

No sooner than the kitten had begun to get comfortable, curling up in the child's lap, did a woman slide open the glass door of the house yelling out, "Sandy! Dinner's ready!"

"Mom!" She hollered back as the door slammed shut again. "Wait!"

She picked up the kitten and half skipped, half ran to the back door of her house.

"Mom, look," She began, coming through the door, kitten in hands.

"Where did you get that thing, Sandy?" But her mother would not let her explain. "You march your little hinny right back through that door and get rid of it!"

"But mom-!"

"Don't you 'But mom' me young lady. You heard me, and you know I'm allergic to cats."

"She's homeless! And scared!" The little girl cried at the top of her voice.

"READ MY LIPS: ABSOLUTELY NO CATS!"

The girl began wailing, and by now the kitten was squirming out of her grasp, trying to escape the chaos. The girl opened the door and stepped outside, gently setting the kitten on the grass.

"I'm sorry," She whispered, tears streaming down her face. She stroked the kitten, trying to calm her down. "This wouldn't be much of a home for you anyway, I'm afraid," She explained. "Mama's too mean. You would be scared of her."

As she said this the door opened once more and the girl was dragged into the house by her mother's violent grasp. Then she slammed the door shut in the kitten's face. The kitten lingered at the glass for a few moments, watching the girl's sad face pressed up against the window. She realized that she shouldn't have gotten her hopes up about making this place her home. She longed for the girl's comfort, but knew that the time they had shared together was now over. The kitten's hopes of finding a home now had vanished. She had decided she would give up.

It was getting late and beginning to rain as she lumbered down the sidewalk of a dead-end side street. It seemed quieter on this side of town. She had been walking for at least an hour since she had left the

girl. Spotting a small house that looked inviting, she wandered up the front steps of the porch. She looked around and noticed a somewhat large empty box in the corner. She jumped in, moved into one corner and began licking her toes. As she washed herself she felt her tummy rumble. "At least I'm dry," She thought, peering out from under the shelter of the porch roof. The rain was pouring down now.

When the kitten awoke, it was morning. She had only been awake for a few moments before a man walked up the steps of the porch. She crouched down, trying not to be noticed. The man opened the lid of a plastic box by the stairs, shoved some papers in, and then headed back down the stairs. The kitten watched him go and suddenly heard another noise. The front door of the house was creaking open. A short, thin lady with curly graying hair stepped out and walked right past the cardboard box without spotting the kitten. She took the papers out of the plastic box, and turned to go back inside.

"Oh, my," she said suddenly. "Where did you come from?"

The kitten shrank back tighter into the corner.

"Don't be afraid," said the woman, lifting the kitten into her arms, "You must be starved." The woman could feel the kitten's ribs beneath her fur. She took her into the house and poured her a bowl of warm milk.

The kitten drank it gratefully to the last drop. After she had finished, the woman fed her some meat. "There, that should fatten you up a bit," she told her.

That night the woman let the kitten stay close to her. When she sat down to watch the television, the kitten crawled up onto her lap and fell asleep. The woman stroked her dark gray fur. "You're so purdy," she said aloud. "That's the perfect name for you... Purdy."

Over the next several days Purdy ate, slept, and played. She enjoyed the comfort of her new home. Although she did get scolded a few times for jumping up on the counters and tabletops and knocking picture frames on to the floor, the woman was very kind to her. She realized the woman must be ill, because people were always dropping by and checking up on her. Purdy felt it was her duty to keep the lady company and make her feel better. She had come to realize that the lady needed her just as much as she needed the lady.

Purdy closed her eyes and basked in the comfort of her new companion. She was finally home.

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BAND GEEK ON HOLD

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