



Black Rock & Sage

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Idaho State University

Black Rock & Sage is a journal of creative works published annually through the Department of English and Philosophy at Idaho State University with assistance from the Art and Music Departments. All artistic contributions, from design to literature to music, have been produced by graduate and undergraduate students in departments from across the university. Submissions are received from September through February. For more information about the journal, see our website at www.isu.edu/blackrock.

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Cover art: "Kinetic" by Catherine Reinhardt

Black Rock & Sage

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BR&S 2010 Selected Musical Performances

- 1 J. Curtis Thompson, Senior Guitar Performance Major.
Sonata Mexicana, No. 1, mvt. 4
Allegretto con vivace, by Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948).
- 2 Samantha Kinney Parkinson, Senior Voice Performance Major.
MiKelle Michaelson, piano.
“The Silver Aria,” from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, by Douglas Moore (1893-1969).
- 3 Kimberly Fullerton, Senior Clarinet Performance Major.
David Campbell, BM in Piano Performance, ISU, 2004.
Sonata No. 2 in E-flat major, Op. 120, No. 2, mvt. 1
Allegro appassionato, ma non troppo, by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897).
- 4 Rachel Sparrow, Senior Voice Performance and Bachelor of Music Education Major.
Allison Bangerter, piano.
“Les Oiseaux dans la charmille” (Doll Song), from *Les Contes D’Hoffman* (The Tales of Hoffman), by Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880).
- 5 Sarah Kim, Junior Piano Performance Major.
Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major, Op. 83, mvt. 3
Precipitato, by Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953).

- 6 Jared Johnson, Junior Voice Performance Major.
Sarah Kim, piano.
“O du mein holder Abendstern,” from *Tannhäuser*, by Richard Wagner (1813-1883).
- 7 Tammy Miller, Senior Piano Performance Major.
Sonata in G minor, K. 8, by Domenico Scarlatti (1675-1757).
- 8 Collette Carter Harris, Senior Piano Performance Major.
Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythms, mvts. 2 and 3, by Béla Bartók (1881-1945).
- 9 Drew Sutherland, Senior Trombone Performance Major.
David Campbell, piano.
Sonata for Trombone and Piano, mvt. 1
Allergro moderato maestoso, by Paul Hindemith (1895-1963).
- 10 Travis Shipley, guitar and vocals. Freshman Anthropology Major.
“Lo Siento” (2005).
- 11 Travis Shipley, guitar and spoken word. Freshman Anthropology Major.
“arrogant influx” (2009).

Erin Gray

Laughing

We lie there,
a few boys and girls,
tattoos, pierced limbs
carefully culled peeling 70's T-shirts
from the Goodwill.
We rode poor,
aiming for skid row,
just to James Dean our parents,
to forget them,
lying on a dirty mattress.
There was no nirvana,
no epiphany of poverty,
just childhood's
fondest
memories
of sleep overs,
cupcakes and Super Mario Bros.
graduated to breathless hysteria over
a friend's botched Slayer tattoo,
Pabst Blue Ribbon,
and a completely delusional sense of freedom.
In a utility closet in the basement of a church
we laugh hysterically.

A Small Feat

Benjamin sat in front of the open window and long brunette curls bounced around his memory. The curls refused to leave and Benjamin had no choice but to entertain them. The shiny curls persisted in their bouncing, and with each bounce he fought to remember the exact smell of her breath. He could see it clouding as words fled from her blue gum-chewing, pink-glossed mouth.

Fruity, he remembered. Her breath smelled fruity, like raspberries and summertime. He didn't know breath could smell like anything other than squirrel and mossy bark. As he thought about it, it wasn't just her breath, it was her. She smelled like raspberries and summertime. She smelled like happiness and crisp rain. Suddenly he thought of his mother. Her intruding face pushed away the bouncing curls.

Shaggy, dull waves of mangy mom hair limply hung around her face. With a new and very unfamiliar disgust, he questioned his mother's hygiene for the very first time in his life. He imagined her standing over a pot of stew, one hand on her thick hip, making up the ingredients for Tuesday's Acorn Acorn Stew. She always argued pine needles were a necessary ingredient. "It'll put hair on your chest," she would say.

A smile crept onto his hairy face. His mother was the rational one in the family. She supported his decision to come out. His father thought it was a terrible idea. He said, "No good will come from this Benjamin. Look what happened when your Uncle Kenny came out of the woods." His uncle responded to that by calling for a toast. "To long walks in the woods!" he slurred. His uncle also called for toasts when he saw a sunset, finished drying the dishes or couldn't find things.

“To lost hammers!” he would shout.

A knock on his bedroom door shook the vision of his family from his mind. He opened the door and looked down to a small pale boy, his roommate, Eddie.

“Mail for you,” Eddie said and handed over a laundry bag more robust than Eddie could ever hope to be.

“Oh, thanks,” Benjamin said.

Every week since he left home, came out of the woods, and enrolled in college, a bag of mail, full of congratulations and elations for his final emergence into society, had arrived. Long time Big Foot believers sent their stories of belief and love. And of course there were a number of angry letters too, but since the court-ordered mandate to leave him alone, the hate mail and secret midnight gatherings had lessened.

Benjamin used to turn the mail bag upside down and emphatically read the fan mail, all the sponsorship offers, each and every love letter and respond to as many as he had time for, keeping only his favorites in a blue binder. There were five letters in that blue binder. One of the five (his favorite) reads:

Dear Mr. Sasquatch,

I don't believe in Santa Claus, but I really want a Barbie car for Christmas.

Can you help????

Love and hugs,

Tilly Peaockatello.

It was letters like these that kept him out in the open.

The junk mail always pulled him in. The misspellings of his name were the highlight of this stamped barrage. He wrote down the misspellings and threw away letters. A letter addressed to Mr. Succotash from some girl named Paris, whose dad apparently owned a hotel business of some sort, was the first to warm his trashcan, quickly

followed by many others.

Just as he was about to gather the whole lot and toss them all away, the corner of a pink envelope caught his eye. This single detail wouldn't be enough to catch him on any ordinary day, but the curly swirls outlining the pink envelope pulled him in. He thought of Heather. He thought of the curly swirls outlining her face. He imagined the letter being hers, to him, and his heart ached as her fast-chatting mouth came swirling back to him.

Grabbing the letter, he quickly looked at the address. Janice Smolter. Not Heather, but still he couldn't help but picture her again. Bouncing curls and now her green eyes looking at him bombarded his thoughts. Her eyes like unripe berries—round, gleaming, interesting, demanding patience.

She told him she was from Nebraska. He had never even thought about Nebraska. Benjamin spent his lunch hour in the computer lab looking up facts about Nebraska. The Cornhusker state. Also known as the Beef state. The state motto was "Equality before the law." Also the home of the World's Biggest Swing Set (seating 25). His newest iTunes download was Nebraska's anthem, "Beautiful Nebraska."

Nebraskan Heather said she liked big boys during the conversation they had on the day they met. They were walking across campus. He was heading to his apartment. She was making him blush under his thick beard. She couldn't see it though. But, his eyes gave him away. They sparkled. She giggled and ignored the other campus wanderers.

"Where are you from, Benji?" the busty brunette piped. "Italy? Russia?"

"Oregon," he said. "Born and raised." He tried to think of questions to ask her but she was on a roll. A very comfortable,

bouncing, social roll.

“Big family?” she asked.

“Yeah, really big,” Benjamin said.

“Oh yeah? How many siblings?” she asked.

“One brother,” he said.

She laughed. “You’re funny, Benji. I have class. I’m sure I’ll see you around.”

Then the Nebraskan flurry of curls, holey jeans, and raspberry rain showers flitted away and now Benjamin Franklin Sasquatch, College Freshman, Nebraskan Enthusiast, Barrier Breaker, Controversy Creator, Shower Drain Clogger is heartsick.

He paced his room and a quiet trail of brown hairs, having nervously shed themselves, floated around the room. Benjamin sat down on his apartment-issued bed (noisy, blue, three feet too short) with a profound *whump*. Then he dropped his head into his hands, tightly clenched his fingers around massive tufts of hair, and considered ripping out the handfuls of hair in an attempt to alleviate the heartache. But ultimately he decided against it, remembering what his drunk Uncle Kenny looked like after he tripped in to a sap-covered tree and had to be yanked (unsuccessfully), yanked again (unsuccessfully), and then ripped free (amusingly successful).

He looked around his tidy room. His closet filled with wooden hangers hanging smart sweater vests (hardly worn, but his mother had insisted he take them), his dresser filled with white crew socks (elastic weakened, casual and modest), and his Costco box of Trail Mix all watched him and waited to see what he would do next.

Instead, everyone in the room turned their attention to the noise in the living room. Girlish giggles sang their way to Benjamin’s room. He emerged from his room and moved toward the noise.

And there she was.

“Hey, Benji!” Heather said and immediately pushed past nervous Eddie towards Benjamin. “Hey, I asked around and found out where you were living. I hope that’s ok.”

“Hi,” was the only word Benjamin could say.

“Which one is your room?” she asked, walking down the hall.

“This one,” he said and she bounced into his room.

They talked for two hours about everything he wasn’t expecting. Movies, sports, camping, and Acorn Acorn Stew. Then, before she left she invited him to a party being held that night. He said yes. She smiled.

After she left he hustled to his room and looked at his expectant closet of clothes. Benjamin saw no need to wear clothes. He was completely covered in thick brown hair and he had a rather fit body. He didn’t even like to wear shoes, unless they were his green Crocs, size 26 (the first shoe of its kind). But tonight he chose to wear only a jacket, dark green corduroy. “It complements your . . . texture,” a nervous, but rather perky sales girl at the mall had said.

He spent the next two hours in the bathroom. Four broken-handled brushes and three mangled combs later he was looking smart, sleek, and smooth. Looking everything he hoped Heather would pine over. If only he knew how much Heather liked roughly bearded boys, he would still have a drawer full of combs and brushes. But there were a few things he would never know about Heather.

He didn’t know that Heather was the prom queen in high school and dated the quarterback until the team lost its seventh game in a row. Unluckily for the quarterback, Michael Michaels, the school’s best chess player and the nation’s sixth best ranked player, was getting a lot of publicity and a lot of close attention from Ms. Heather. Michael still has the newspaper picture of him fanatically hugging a proudly beaming Heather after he won nationals on his bedside table. Heather

tucked the same clipping in a drawer three weeks after his victory when she started dating the local weatherman's son.

There were lots of things Benjamin didn't know about Heather. He did know she would be there any minute.

Heather finally showed up at his door at 7:30 P.M. dressed as Princess Leia.

"It's a costume party?" Benjamin asked, panicking under the pressure of new excitement and blind expectations.

"Yeah it is. Take off your jacket." He did that. "And put this on," the girl said and handed over a leather sash adorned with fake bullets, to be worn like a Miss America pageant sash. She also handed him a fake gun. "Perfect," she said.

Then a horrid array of self-conscious realities came barreling his way. *She thinks I am a Wookiee*, he thought. *She is using me. Also*, he thought, *she is less pretty with her hair in tight side buns*. But she did smell like hairspray and raspberries. Then she twisted her fingers gently into his thick arm hair, his mind emptied and the next thing he knew, they were at the party. People began staring.

But it was a night to remember. Heather and Benjamin won an award for having the Best Couple costumes. Benjamin won a chubby bunny contest. Benjamin lost his voice after doing Chewbacca yells all night. Heather *apparently* passed out and some guy dressed as the Jolly Green Giant graciously gave her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Then, revived Heather walked around with a half green face the rest of the night until she pretended to pass out again.

Benjamin scooped her up and smiled. Heather was motionless in his arms. Her head raced. Unexpectedly, she'd had a really good time with the Bigfoot. She panicked when she realized her uncertainty, so she played possum.

Benjamin didn't know where she lived, so he took her to his

apartment. He walked into his quiet apartment, wandered to his room, tucked her in his bed. After staring in disbelief at the beauty that was bun-loosened Heather and calculating the possibilities of What Could Be, he decided to wait it out in a less creepy night-watcher environment. He shut the door to his room quietly. Heather's face swelled and pulled when she heard the click.

Benjamin was in the living room reading, when Keith (the other roommate, less shy, too many tanning bed sessions way past pale) walked through the front door.

Reaching for the remote, he animated the quiet television and turned up the volume. "How was the party, Chewie?" Keith immediately asked, as he flipped through the sports channels.

Benjamin felt that nickname stick itself to him like a cocklebur in thick ankle fur. "It was fun."

Keith kept his eyes on the TV, refusing to look his roommate in the eye. He flipped through channels until he landed on a man in flannel announcing the beginning of an hour-long special on mythical creatures, packed full of irrefutable evidence. Keith's smile arrogantly grew and he began flipping the remote in the air, letting it spin and tumble down towards him before catching it. "I love this crap," he said.

"Benji?" a girlishly feeble voice grogged from the other room, and curls bounced back into his mind.

Benjamin stood up and looked at a shocked, disbelieving Keith. Benjamin acknowledged the TV, then turned to loose-jawed Keith, "Let me know if they say anything good about my cousin, the Yeti," he said and hustled to his room where a Princess Leia lay, leaving Keith watching the quick clip of exhausted footage catching Ben's drunk Uncle Kenny walking in the woods.

D'Epinay's Sappho at the Metropolitan Museum of Art

I found her reclining in a chair, head down
carved in rough stone poked with sparkle
near Perseus holding up the head of Medusa.

I walked around her wanting to recite
what bits of Aphrodite's Ode I could remember
as marble dust dripped motes in sunshine.

Her hand knotted her draped dress, jumbling
robes over skin. One foot splayed cat-like,
her left half quiet: a hidden foot, an empty hand.

His hands adjusted folds of marble over thighs.
He made her a woman thinking about the cliff,
not the fall and the wind pushing up her dress.

I wanted to touch her—slacken the fingers, fix the dress.
Between us: time, translations, the guard by the wall,
and the sculptor who saw only just this shadow in stone.

He carved her empty, grouped alongside
uncircumcised men holding aloft their spoils
and Ledas clutching their swans.

free agency

storytime happens after sex:
down the forest tunnel ruts cut
the road, overturned four wheeler.

dog thinks the sword isn't for play:
blood on the grass, hole in my arm, IV,
bacteria breeds Cellulitis in my plasma.

on July 16, 1988, a birthmark
born like a watermelon seed
swallowed by my mother:

potentially cancerous decontaminated
insect passed out amongst the skin top
from the sticky sutures, undereasy.

a burst open appendix: lost appetite,
malignant juices murdering around
helicopters activate their fans at night.

fence separates the neighborhood
from the wilderness moose railroad. a casual bounce
of the barbed trip wire to my school pants.

under my hair there are other ones:
from roadrash, cut glass, self-nailed fort resulted in
Mickey Mouse hat dyed red.

to drop-in from the makeshift picnic table ramp:
the extra speed. skateboard fell from my feet
scarless black top dislocated my elbow.

she asked “is that a cleft palate scar?”
“too cold for water to stay apart,
ice knocked me down in the front yard.”

I asked about the spotted initials on her hand
“my first boyfriend and I poured salt in the form
of our initials and we pressed ice on it until it burned the skin.”

A Mini-Segment in a Book About Love and Derailment

I stared at the TV with grave concern. It showed a topographical map with a large white swirl directly over my sister's house in New Orleans. It may as well have been a bran muffin because in the west, pictures like these have no meaning. The newscaster threw around terms like "Category 3" and "levee breach" and it all seemed very technical, as if he were explaining Glaucon's Challenge by using bottle caps. All he needed to do was say it—white swirl bad. It had been two days since I'd been able to contact my sister.

She had lit out when she was seventeen and, really, who could blame her. This one horse town had very little appeal for a girl who could dream beyond the excitement of the local Bonanza 88 variety store. With seventeen dollars in her pocket, a small cache of Grateful Dead vinyls under her arm, and a fair amount of hashish working its way through her senses, she and a friend made their way to the city where she could live happily-ever-after having one night stands with dealers named Bruce *without* the interference of my parents' solicitude. Sheer. Bliss.

I had a difficult time of it. In the wake of her departure, she had left a casualty. Me. I felt betrayed and was angry that she hadn't bothered to ask my approval. But I was even angrier that she had gotten out first. I had always pictured myself going off to some fancy school, getting a degree in pretentiousness, and returning once a month to lord my success over my family while lighting Cuban cigars with twenty-dollar bills and blowing the smoke thereof in the face of my brother while laughing heartily. She *totally messed up my plan*.

I went to visit her in Salt Lake where she had an apartment with the friend she had moved down with. She worked at the Village

Inn and had a boyfriend named Roger. *Roger*, I reminded her, was a TV name. When my family would travel in the car, my sister and I would play the name game. One of us would choose a name and then we would figure out what kind of name it was. *Bertha* was the name of an old fat woman. *Tim* was a boy's name . . . one that knew priests. *Heather* was a cheerleader or part of some other annoying clique that could be associated with "bubbly" or, perhaps, "yeast infection," and *Roger* was a TV name, because, c'mon, who the hell would name their kid Roger?

"He's nice. He treats me well," she said.

"What the hell would he want with a hippie like you?" I asked.

"Well I can think of one thing. Besides, he drives a Porsche."

She said this last part as if having a Porsche somehow counterbalanced the negativity of his crummy name. "Roger with a Porsche is banging my sister," I thought. Just great.

For the fifteenth time in as many minutes, I called my sister's cell phone, house phone, and work phone in that order. The news reported winds over 150 miles per hour. Pictures on the news showed a submerged city, and somehow seeing my sister clinging to a rooftop waiting to be rescued would have given me peace of mind at that point. I told myself that she was tucked away safe in a shelter somewhere. The storm was probably the cause of her cell phone not working. She was always the fighter in the family and the one most likely to get her act together and give something back to the world.

Roger didn't last. My sister didn't have time for TV names. She worked three jobs so she could afford college, and after seven years of twenty-hour days, my sister had her degree. She found a career and simultaneously met a new man, because that's how the real world works.

His name was Evan, which I decided must be the name of a

clean-cut doctor type. I imagined him attending church on Sunday, possibly with his, or someone else's, grandma. He probably washed his hands often before shaking them off into the sink, toweling dry, flaring his chest out, squeezing his buttocks, and exiting the washroom. He probably drove a "safety blue" '08 Toyota Boring.

They met through a mutual friend and how boring is that, because in-between the Bruces and the Rogers my sister would tell me interesting stories about men she picked up in laundromats and Seven-Elevens. I couldn't very well be irritated with a chance meeting through a friend. To hell with that.

Within a month they were married and within six, divorced, and for all the reasons I mentioned. My sister was still a wild child at heart, albeit a responsible one. Through her work she had a chance to transfer to Louisiana, and, seeing it as a fresh start she seized the opportunity.

I guess I could blame Evan for my sister's milk carton potential. I could blame my parents. I could blame the levees. Maybe it's my fault. I've been watching the news for hours and I don't know what I hope to see. Like a mantra—bran muffins, levees, cell phones, and sleep.

the blessed disambiguation of sleep paralysis

I.

I'll tell you what it's like to be the featured article
on Wikipedia
to be "Sleep Paralysis."
My hand rests behind my head
like I am lounging for something.
Girlfriend doppelganger come spoon with me. Fill my body with
your unchecked roam into my room.
The door still closed
the article uncited, nearly naked.

My eyes open up like during a comatose surgery.
The light below the door the same alone as with her.
East Whitman Street windowless room with two unlit lanterns above
my bed
hanging on the side of the wall like gargoyles.
Her nightmare gown fluorescent clear.
What is there to be scared of? Mind awake body asleep,
in bed waiting to be awakened fully.

The article won't let my mouth move.
"GET OUT!" I finally erupt,
like an ADHD tantrum.
My alarm clock birds forgot to wake up,
the bed sheets icy. A short visit
and random illogirithm to decide this morning

that my mind will awake before my body
silence, except a hollow pop of my coca-cola, almost gone.

Since Wikipedia disproved the haunting,
I no longer need to bring my dad over to bless the
house with his priesthood. The source of an ever-evolving
encyclopedia, like a comforting scripture hurts
to be disproved. To find a nether-worldly solution
to a behavior like allowing a demoness to come
in my room.

II.

This story isn't over. The prologue
concludes the end of the article with a section
trimmed from the finished manuscript:
Satan follows beauty. Or is that smoke? Either
way, the deflowered room begs for sinner spirits.
The disjunctive virtue of freedom from a higher power,
but the inevitable guilt, haunting, chalice. The
accumulated knowledge versus faith battle
from now on: the two shoulders. God is standing
on my shoulder.

Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel would be my
favorite hymn to hum if I saw a ghost.
But god only exists theoretically through
gargoyle-like imagery, like a nightmare, only
on the outside of the sleeping person. For the

sake of your girlfriend becoming hellish as a
doppelganger who spoons with your unlocked body
because phantasms can walk through locked doors
god exists inside the encyclopedia internet.

But this thin, phosphorescent guest comes from the
mind of someone wishing for wetdreamesque
dreams, and who, receiving no answer for his prayers,
asks heavenly father, “please help me to have no bad dreams or night
mares tonight.” Morning will come for forever.

Hindsight is 20/20 or A Conversation to Avoid on the First Date.

In the evening, under bar light, after a few beers he thought it was going well. She said to him, tell me your dreams. He paused and took drink, a drag, and stubbed out his cigarette. Well, he said, the other night I dreamt I was in my kitchen. It was my kitchen but not my kitchen. And I was tonguing one of my molars. It came loose and my mouth filled with warm blood. I reached in and pulled out the tooth and put it in my palm. And the tooth transformed into a tiny foal smeared in blood and afterbirth. It was trying to stand, to gallop away but its legs were weak spindles. And it kept slipping in the placenta and the blood. So what does that mean, you think? She said, no. Like, what are your goals? What are your plans for the future? He paid for her drinks and they didn't see each other again.

To Be a Clown

My great grandfather
Fred
made his living
as a circus clown
during the Great Depression.
I think that's
what must have made him
funny.

I hated visiting him
when I was young.
It was nothing against
that hell of a man.
It wasn't my fear of clowns.
In his late years, I assumed
he must have run out of face paint.
It was the smell of his apartment,
the furniture heavy with
an aura of
burnt tobacco.

I can't say much more
for my apartment now.
Maybe it runs in
the family.
I'm the descendent of
a punch line,

there's irony in my DNA.
I hope, least of all,
I inherited whatever it takes

to be a clown,
when no one's laughing. Or,
a kiss
with no smile to meet it.

Bike into an Understanding – A Children’s Story for College Students

There once was a . . . never mind, weak start.

I had made it to class like a good student does—bright and early and fired up for some education. Actually, it was 11 a.m. (I was in college—slack please). Other people not in college were eating roast beef sandwiches while I fought off a hangover with stewed South American lentils. The teacher told us, towards the end of a whirlwind creative writing lesson that registered with and rattled my brain simultaneously, that she would appreciate a mid-semester review of the class. It seemed like a productive, progressive, and innocent request. Turns out it forever changed human understanding of the space-time continuum.

That may be too bold—the whole space-time continuum just mentioned. But I’m telling you, shit got crazy—at least for me.
(fade to black)

• • •

(this is not a play)

Class was over, and I biked down the mellow slope towards the most reclusive computer lab on campus to write my review. It was a warm fall day. Burnt orange diplomas fell from the trees, but the kids didn’t bother to pick them up. A piece of sub-par but functional pizza was forefront in my mind. A greasy wash of my stomach lining was in order to rise above the jeers of cheap beer gathering in my bowels. They were insurgents, and I was a patriot (this was the parlance of our time).

As I approached a red light at the base of the hill, I saw a blinding fold of light emerge from . . . somewhere. It rose to six feet and spread to three feet on the corner to which I was headed. I hit the brakes and the bike shuddered but came to no halt—damn you college student apathy, those should have been fixed. I swerved, but the chasm shadowed and enveloped me, Schwinn and all.

(fade to black)

• • •

(knock that shit off)

I pedaled in free-time, falling at a steady but comfortable pace (E.T. style) towards a lush planet a few millennia away (I have no idea how long a millennia is, let's just go with it). With my naked eye I could see floating trees leeching nourishment from nothing and a hybrid animal—a black lab armadillo—milling about. He was conducting some sort of business I couldn't discern. Bobbing all around me, with no concerns of gravity and backed by infinite black, were the creative monuments of my life.

Multicultural G.I. Joes infiltrated a Lego castle that was well-guarded by stocky, identical plastic soldiers. I thought back to the hours on end I would lock myself in my room, coordinating battles fit for the paper-cutter action flicks we are inundated with today. I, however, never needed anyone else to watch—the intensity was my own, and my theater only had room for one.

Thousands of ripped-out notebook papers, scrawled with notes in the middle and infinite doodles of exaggerated faces and geometric musings on the sides, flipped and juttred around and into me—searching for a binder that no longer existed. Looking back, those doodles were a manifestation of what I really wanted to do: to draw, to

create.

Luke's unfinished basement, where we performed one-scene plays for the parents on Christmas Eves, wafted by. I was He-Man and he was Santa, and we kicked a lot of ass that night. Luke excelled at convincing me others would be interested in our art, and he was always right. There were many more, too many to register it all. I just kept on peddling towards that planet, wondering if I was really *that* hung-over.

A big red button emerged from the neck of my Schwinn. The words "Pusha da red button" were engraved into the plastic with Helvetica—a horribly overused font. If this was a fantasy realm my mind had any control over, I certainly would not have gone with Helvetica. I pushed the red button and kept pedaling, dodging the memory of a wood burning project I had done in 7th grade craft class—it was two guys sitting in a duck blind as the sun rose over the lake, and I wondered where that thing had ended up.

The Schwinn suddenly jerked to a stop, and I heard the sound of a pressurized cotter pin popping out of something important. My seat had been sneakily rigged with powerful springs by parties unknown, and the pin holding them back fell into deep space. The pin went tinging off of a recollection about coming up with and using my own pickup line in the 10th grade—a text message that read "U be bangin, so I'd like 2 be hangin with U." I'm not sure how that one made it into the collection—apparently I am proud of it somewhere deep.

Back to the seat. Pin fell, springs exploded, and I was violently ejected towards the planet. My speed increased steadily until my limbs began to stretch—it felt damn good. I embraced the moment and went into a Superman pose that lasted until I came crashing into the canopy of a massive willow tree. I slinkied through the branches, slid down

the trunk, and grasped a root oozing with marmalade, my favorite condiment up until I hit 14 and ketchup took over. Suspended in air for only a moment, my grip failed, and I fell.

It was a manageable fall to a sandy beach. I looked up to the root system from which I had come and opened my mouth to secure a few of the perpetual marmalade drips. It was not pizza by any means, but it would do. The beach was populated with haystack rocks lumbering about like mammoths. I've seen a lot of rocks in my day, but this was a new deal. They ambled between the floating willows and took bits of root along their way with their cavernous mouths and lichen-chapped lips. They had worn game trails in the sand on a strictly marmalade diet. It looked a lot like Cannon Beach, Oregon—except the rocks don't move there. Built in the sand was every castle, hole and mound I had made as a young one on yearly vacations to the beach with my mom, dad, and brother. There was no ocean, but that had never been my focus on those trips. The ocean was too big to understand, but the sand I got. And the mammoths.

At that point, I had decided the planet was mine. One of the sand castles was slowly disappearing, small clumps at a time. I knew, although I could not see myself, that I was there. I loved to eat sand and mud as a kid, and I was devouring a castle my friend Luke had just proudly finished. I'm not sure he ever forgave me for it.

My floating willow trees were breathing with my wind, and warm sand was squishing between my toes (my shoes had disappeared) as I started a trek towards a nearby dune ridge. I couldn't see more than 150 yards in any direction—it just turned to black. My lighting was three half-moons, weaving in and out of one another's way, leaving tracers of one of my geocentric doodles done in Sharpie on the back of the school bus seat ahead of me. It was the last day of school after all, and my actions were tame in relation to the bottle

rockets whizzing by from somewhere in the back. You know, the trouble seats.

I walked over the ridge and came upon a massive rift, god knows how wide and several hundred feet deep. It stretched left and right as far as I could see, possibly running the entire diameter of the planet. The damage looked as if it had been caused by a slow but destructive force. I could not see the other side or a feasible way to get there. No flora or fauna lived in the chasm, and its features were jagged and random enough to present a bouldering impossibility. A mist slowly rose from the base, and it smelled of old, dry dish rags.

“Psst,” came the sound.

I swallowed an involuntary breath of fear, searching left and right for its source as my chest tingled with the slow dispersion of adrenaline. Nothing, then I looked down. It was that hybrid black lab armadillo I had seen on my flight in. He was trying to pick some pamphlets off the ground and attempting to shell pistachios with the other hand or paw or whatever it was. He was having a hell of a time, no opposable thumbs and all. I bent down to help.

“Hello there little guy, can you tell me about this chasm?” I asked.

“Of course I can, Jim. Why do you think I’ve been waiting here my entire life, traipsing back and forth along the ridge of this damned hole you keep widening and deepening?” he asked.

“Whoa now buddy, I just got here. Really though, what are the repercussions? Is this not just an elaborate dream fueled by hunger and a hangover?” I asked.

“Jim, I am a hybrid class of your two favorite animals growing up, so I know what I’m talking about—accept it. We are all concerned with your dearth of creativity the past eight years. It’s like you decided part of growing up was to turn off your creative side and settle down

to mundane adult tasks,” the labadillo said, peering at me with big lab eyes, shoving a pistachio into his snout.

“That is a horrible idea,” he continued, “and we are here to tell you the bullshit will not stand—it’s time to write, draw, make music and cook new things every chance you get. Don’t be a pansy about this, Jim—you have the time. We all have the time. Shit, I’ve been walking back and forth along this damn eyesore you’ve been working so hard on for so long, that I’ve written eight novels,” the hybrid said, obviously well versed in the speech he was performing.

“What are they about—.”

“Doesn’t concern you—they are very epic and you’ll see them on the bestseller list soon, under the pen name Michael Crichton. Just to be honest, we’d all like to get to the other side and see who and what’s over there. The dating scene over here just sucks, and we haven’t seen a new variation on marmalade in years. So really, I don’t have anything else left to say, other than you, we, want to get to that other side (trust me).”

“Ya, yes—ok.” I mustered, all I had for a guy who really just needed to eat something greasy.

“Here, take this damn thing. I’ve been working on it for eight years. Try to find a typo, I dare ya,” the hybrid barked as he handed me a pamphlet (why did he have 20?).

The pamphlet was entitled “10 Ways for Jim to Heal His Planet of the Chasm His Dumbass Created.” I picked up my Schwinn, conveniently laying by my side, and hopped on (the seat was back). I started pedaling back to earth and secured the information in my chest pocket. First order of business: pizza. Then to read my rules, write that review, and realize my creative writing class was a pretty good start.

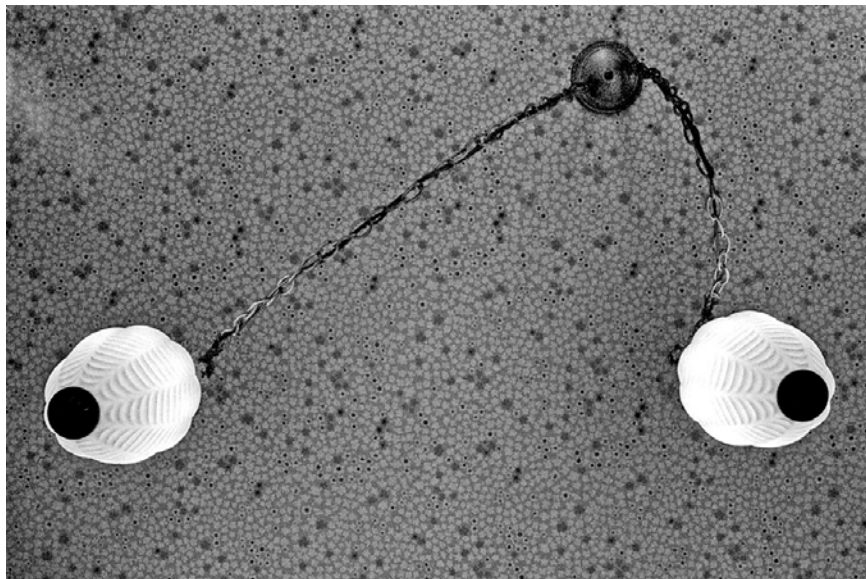
Offshore

March in Iowa
too early for spring
the fields frozen in black rows
still holding winter
and night coming early
when my father called from home
and told me you were dead
I was sitting next to my girlfriend
on an old black leather sofa
in a rented and tilting house
in another town
my father kept his voice
until the end
when it cracked
and he told me you were gone
they'd flown you up from Texas
in an air ambulance
to die in Iowa
my father said
come home now
arrangements were made
I said to her please
please drive me to the store
I'd like a bottle of bourbon
I thought of rowing a boat
the oars in their locks
pulling against

the weight of the water
making and leaving
tiny whirlpools
I drank the bourbon
in her purple Ford
taking gulps
getting ready

Jen Hawkins

Untitled



Catherine Reinhardt

Kinetic



Brittany Bowden

Junk



Paul Dodez

Shaman dreams on broken wings find their healing
in autumn's crimson leaves

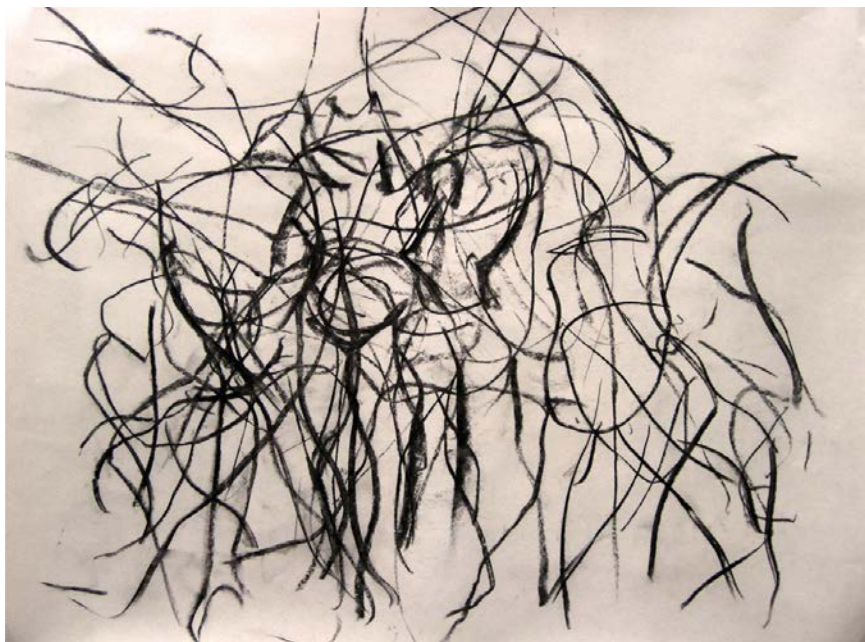


Mike Adams

Heil dir, Sonne

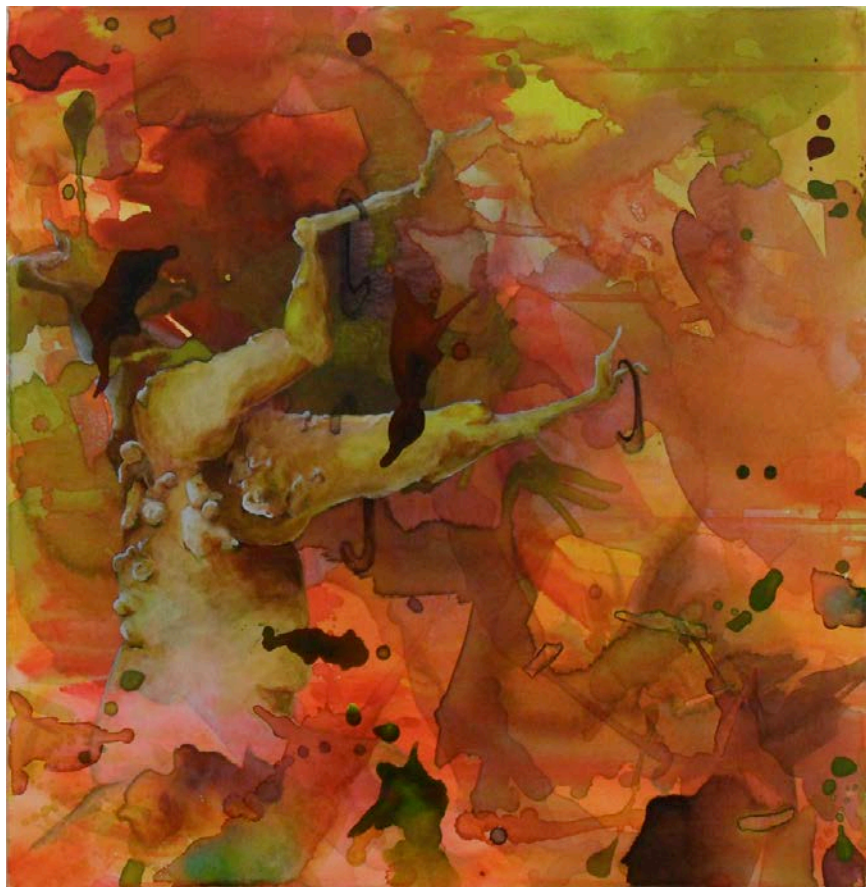


Figure Study



Lyndsey Barnes

The C Word



Jen Hawkins

Untitled



Laura Cutler

Pipes



Jennifer Ford

On the Way Home



Leda

I have changed at least six times this morning and parted my hair in so many different places that my scalp hurts. Today is probably the most important day of my high school career and could prove to be the pinnacle of my life and today is the day that the black swim suit makes me look like a nun and the circumference of my thighs is increasing as we speak. Boating has got to be one of *the* worst events to get ready for. It would be *way* more simple to get ready if I could just wear my hair down, but point five seconds of wearing my hair down on a boat is going to result in me looking like a walking bird's nest, and walking bird's nests do not get asked to Homecoming at all, ever, let alone by the hottest guy in school.

And Tim Swan may be the most important person to impress today, but he is not the only one. First off, a girl should always have backups. Otherwise, I am going to end up with the class creeper's sweaty hands around my waist while we do the penguin to what could have been a magical moment. Secondly, I have a reputation. If I don't rock there are plenty of girls perfectly willing to step into the limelight, and boom, that's it, I will go from most popular girl in school to eating lunch behind the band room lockers and people who eat behind the band room lockers will never marry Tim, just saying.

And assuming I can manage to not look like a fat nun or a home for birds, *and* I can keep my cool, marrying Tim is really the only possible conclusion. That *is* what girls do, right?—get married? And I *am* the most popular girl in school, and he *is* the hottest guy in school, and I know this story and I am perfectly aware that it ends in happily ever after. Which is why I have decided to wear the blue and white striped bikini and that cute towel-ie sun dress thing because,

duh, totally sailor cute, which is perfect for boating and I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner. I will rock it with red flip-flops and who am I kidding, my thighs are awesome! Thank you Pilates. And with a little bit of waterproof mascara and a chignon . . .

Oh my god, I freaking love my ring tone not only because "Oh my God, Becky, look at her butt . . ." just totally makes my day every time I hear it, but particularly because right now it means Amy, my bestie for life, is calling, and it is time for fate to begin.

"Aims! I am on my way down; you are going to be *so* jealous of my outfit. Eek! I can't wait!"

I hopped into Amy's yellow jeep, which, can I just say, seriously rocks so much because our parents don't have to drive us anywhere anymore, and I started to get way pumped. It does not get any better than today. It is literally the perfect weather for boating, I am rockin' to some awesome tunes with my friend in her super cute jeep, and there is no way that the hottest guy in school isn't going to ask me to Homecoming tonight.

Unless, he doesn't. I mean, there are like a million ways he could *not* ask me to go to Homecoming. First of all, there is the major factor that hot boys somehow give control of my body to a bad puppeteer. It is going to take every ounce of my concentration to not trip and face plant into the water or talk constantly. Which, I am totally going to do. When I get nervous I can't help it, incessant talking just comes out. I know I am going to mention something that Tim doesn't get, because he really isn't exactly in the running for genius . . . and oh my god, what if I tell him that? Seriously, telling the guy you have a total crush on, that he is not in the running for genius is basically like dying, only with the painful process of continuing to live. Seriously, where does this stuff come from and how do I make it stop? *Basically like dying only with the painful process of continuing to live?* What is

that even supposed to mean? And if I don't know what it means, there is no way Tim is going to know what it means. It came out of my head, and it is totally whack. I am screwed. I know it. There is no way that I can *not* totally screw everything up.

"Aims, let's just blow this off and have a totally awesome girls' day," I said trying to make it sound like I had just thought of something super totally awesome for just Aims and I and *not* like I was chickening out.

"I knew you were too quiet," Amy responded.

Aims totally gets me backwards and forwards. She knows my brain is out of control and that I talk myself either out of or into everything. I can hardly remember any instances where I just "did it." So, she knows when I get too quiet, it means I am thinking. More often than not, I talk myself out of things.

"Mya, remember this day is part of the plan to get Tim to ask you to Homecoming and if we don't go, then you don't go to Homecoming. You are just psyching yourself out. Just listen to the music. Chill. Don't think. It's going to be fine."

"Yeah, but what if I babble? What if I trip and face plant? What if . . ." Amy cut me off.

"You won't. It is not that bad. Promise. It *is* going to be fine."

"Okay, you're right Aim, you are the best bestie ever," I said, trying to talk myself into her mentality.

For me, not thinking is like not breathing. It's totally impossible. Even when I try, I just have to think "don't think." I can't get it to just stop. So, I am counting on the lake and the sand to keep me sane or if that isn't possible, at least calm, so I can make it through today without my mouth or my limbs taking over and doing something stupid.

I was staring out the window and trying to make myself

remember how long we had been driving through the pine trees. Coming to the pine trees meant we were close, but I couldn't remember anything but there being trees there all of the sudden.

As we came around a bend, I saw the glassy lake begin to grow and spread beyond the dashboard and I breathed in that tranquility. I love the water. It's the opposite of me. Water is what I wish I could be.

We parked the car and I saw all the people. My tranquility vanished. Being honest, I really don't like big groups of people. Am I the only one that finds these situations totally awkward? People think that being popular makes you a natural at being cool in front of big groups, but let me tell you, I don't think I am that great at it. Amy always says my babbling comes off as bubbly, but I don't believe it. And the thing is, when I don't talk people think I am just a stuck up brat. Which I really don't think I am, I just don't talk so that I don't spew insanity. Sometimes, once I get going and get comfortable, I can do *mostly* okay, but I think that it's a fashion miracle that I am not nerd of the month. Not to say that my fashion ability is a miracle. Actually, I mean the opposite of that, my ability to rock even a plain white tee saves me every time. At least, I think so, because I never know what to say without sounding totally awkward. Aims tells me I am wrong, that it isn't awkward, but she is wrong. It is awkward.

"Mya! Oh my freaking god, you are finally here," I heard Lana say. I couldn't decide if she sounded excited that I was here or irritated. Probably irritated. She was one of those who would be perfectly happy for the limelight.

"Tim is being dumb and says we have to wait for everyone before we can get out on the lake and now we just have to wait . . ." As Lana talked Tim walked up and I stopped listening. I was totally caught up in like this perfect beach moment, my hair blowing, him

smiling and tan . . .

“Nah, Mya is here, let’s get on the lake,” Tim said.

I did my best to mask the gasp that just escaped without permission; was Tim waiting just for me to get here? It seemed like he was totally just waiting for me, but there is also a total chance that I am just making that up and still caught up in my beach vision of Tim. But if he was waiting for me, then I am totally going to get asked to Homecoming. I know it. And next thing you know . . . happily ever rockin’ after! Unless, I have to talk, at all. When I talk, it’s like that record scratch sound that totally blows the moment.

Amy gave me a little nudge. Everyone was staring at me, *possibly* because I look sailor chic, but *probably* because I was totally making a huge awkward pause.

“Yeah . . . boating, let’s rock!”

I really hope that nobody noticed my voice go up on rock and that it sounded confident because I am pretty sure my voice went up on rock, and it sounded more like a question, and that is why I would prefer to not have to talk. On the bright side, though, I was totally about to make a really lame joke about the boat and the waves rocking, and that would have been the worst. My dad always makes really lame jokes like that and somehow I got that curse, and it seriously takes a lot of concentration to keep them in. I could totally just see it though if I did, it would pretty much be one step away from glasses and chem club or something and I really don’t like chem enough to be in chem club and those white coats are not as cute as I think scientists must think they are.

I am so lucky to have Aims, otherwise I would probably end up standing on the beach forever, totally lost in a chem club, white lab coat nightmare. Thank God, she knows me well enough just to grab my hand and pull me onto the boat. People probably would have

thought I didn't know how to swim or something, and I can just hear the jokes that I should be careful not to drown in my water bottle already. For the record, I *do* know how to swim. Of course I know how to swim. I mean anyone who has ever met me knows that there is nothing I love more than being on a boat all day long. Literally, I would rather just be on the boat all day. I hate the cold. It's the worst but the hot, it's the best, and seriously I can never get enough of it. I like to sit in my car on a hot day with the air conditioner off and just feel the heat waves soak into my skin. I always end up getting forced to at least do a little bit of tubing, which is okay, but if I could, I would just lie in the heat all day long and bake. Except, I do really want to be on a tube with Tim at one point. I mean, seriously, that would be the highlight of my day just to be on the tube with him. Just feel that electricity you get when you are that close to the person you are totally crushing on. It's the best rush. Except, I hope I don't get totally distracted and end up drowning. Actually, tubing with Tim might also be the most dangerous part of my day but probably worth it.

• • •

We had gone boating for most of the day and now I was sitting on the beach. The day was totally rockin' because Tim had held my hand. Only, I thought Tim holding my hand might make my mind stop, but it actually just made it go faster. I was totally getting worry lines on my forehead from worrying that I was going to fall off the boat or have sweaty hands but I made it through the whole day predominantly clutz free. However, I am still convinced that being off the boat is probably best for my health.

New problem though. Now that Tim had held my hand I really want to hold his hand again but I am not totally sure how to approach

it without him being like *whoa back off* or thinking I am clingy or neurotic or something, but if I don't do something he might think that I don't like him and that I am not okay with him holding my hand and I am *very* okay with the hand holding. How is a girl supposed to know this stuff? I mean not that Tim is my first boyfriend ever, but he is probably the most important and I really don't remember any of this being any easier last time. Anyways, I can't decide what to do so I am just trying to look hot, and, like, I want him to come sit by me, here, on the edge of the beach looking out into the water. I mean that seems like a pretty iconic image right? But, what if Tim thinks I am mad at him and then gets afraid to ask me to . . .

"Can I sit by you?"

I think my heart totally stopped from hearing Tim say that and maybe that is cliché, but aren't all crushes cliché?

"Su-ure," I said. I seriously am praying he didn't hear that pause in my "sure" because pauses in "sure" make them sound not all that sure.

The silence has only been like point two seconds but it feels like an eternity, and I don't know what to say next. I should have stayed around people. At least then, there is noise to fill the gaps.

Crap he is standing up. What if he did notice the pause? You could have fit an elephant in that awkward pause. He probably thinks I don't want him here and . . .

"Wanna go for a walk?"

"Oh. Yeah."

I hope that didn't sound like "oh yeah" like all together because I meant "Oh" pause "Yeah" pause. I could not be any more socially inept, and yet somehow, all these years I have managed to fake it, and so now he probably expects me to be all super cool but news flash I am pretty sure I am faking it. I mean, there are practically tiny

light bulbs flashing that very thing across my face right now. It's that obvious.

Walking was probably not the best idea because it's starting to get dark, especially the further into the trees we get and I can't see where I am going, and I feel a little wobbly from being on the boat all day, and this is probably it right here: the moment where I ruin everything because I didn't say no to the walk.

"Hey Tim, could we sit down?" I heard myself say.

Crap, what did I just do? What if he was taking me somewhere awesome, and I just ruined it, and what am I doing calling the shots anyways; I am more than a basket case here and . . .

"Sure. It's cool."

Okay, maybe this is a good thing. It's kind of, sort of, romantic here, perfect for asking me to Homecoming. Is it okay for me to hold his hand? I mean I am pretty sure on the boat he started it so that has to mean he is okay with holding hands so it should be okay . . . Holy frick, how far away is his hand? I mean I was hoping to make it kind of a casual slide—*oops, I bumped your hand—too late we're holding hands* sort of a gesture but this isn't going to pass as that, but if I back out now it would be totally obvious. Wait is that his hand on my hip or is that a branch or a rodent or . . . whoa nope that is definitely his hand and he is definitely pulling me towards him. Seriously, this has to be a dream, there is no way he is going to kiss me. It would be totally too good to be true. Okay Mya, focus. Don't screw this up.

• • •

When we got back to camp it was dark, but luckily I saw Amy right away.

"Hey, I am a little sea sick let's get out of here," I said.

“Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah, you know, just been on the boat all day and I can still feel the waves thrashing me, ya know?”

“You’ve got dirt smeared across your face.”

“Oh you know me, I started thinking and tripped and fell on my face. No big deal. It was bound to happen eventually today. Right?”

“Were you with Tim?”

“Yeah.”

“Did he ask you?”

“Uh. Yeah. We are going. I will tell you about it later, but let’s head out before I puke, k?”

“Yeah, sure thing,” she said.

Amy and I didn’t talk the whole way home. I pretended to fall asleep right away but I didn’t sleep.

I was glad to be home when I started to feel the turns of the city as Amy drove to my house.

“Hey, do you want me to stay tonight?” She asked when we pulled up to my house.

“Oh. Thanks, but nah, I still feel like puking. I wouldn’t be any fun, maybe tomorrow though. I’ll call you.”

Amy looked at me worried but I gave her my most convincing everything was fine smile before shutting the door and heading inside. I went straight to my bathroom to wash off everything from the day and the pine needles slivered in my ass. I let the water cascade through my hair and onto the floor and willed my brain to start again but it wouldn’t go. What I wouldn’t give for my brain’s endless stream of thoughts now. I could only think: could I have said no? Should I have said no? Did I say no? I pushed my mind to take those questions apart. I couldn’t have said no. I mean, I would be lying to say I haven’t contemplated it myself and I should be ecstatic. Besides, I would have

become a social pariah to say no to Tim Swan. I mean he is Tim. Every girl wants him. I am expected to be with him. When would I even have said no, even if I had definitely wanted to? I mean by the time I realized what was happening or realized this isn't what I had in mind; by the time I said no to the pine needles being thrust in my ass I had an end of the bargain to keep up. It would have been rude. I couldn't have said no, I shouldn't have said no. I allowed my mind to stop there and crawled into bed. I can't remember if I slept or not.

In Transit

on the plane home from Idaho
to Iowa
to bury
my grandfather
I said a small prayer
for alcohol
and nicotine
and books
and dogs
and kind women
and distractions
my own memories
are unreliable assholes
we took our seats
did as we were told

we were pointing east
if the sun was rising
our pilot would've known

I wanted to say to the
businessman seated next to me
don't you know
my family keeps
 shrinking
 keeps going
 away for good
but I said

nothing
 in the air
 I reclined my seat
 and admitted my mile wide
sentimental streak
I attempted grief
and ordered a triple vodka

my childhood
 an Irish setter
stretching in the grass
how the sun
warmed his red fur
how he blinked and yawned
and finally settled
 I'm sure they were all there

Things You Could Tell About Roger

1.

Miriam Kearney was meant to save Roger from the mess he'd made down at the furniture store. He could tell by how nicely she'd smiled when he asked for some help finding a book. Her smile wasn't as cute as that first gal's he'd asked. That young one, in her short-skirted business suit, had reminded him a lot of Coleen as she'd lead him over to the public computers and assured him that even someone who hadn't grown up using them could easily navigate the electronic library catalogue.

This Miriam, though, was nice. *No problem at all*, she'd said while she clicked away at her computer, only pausing to tuck back a curl that had sprung loose from the frizzy pile of hair on top of her head. And now she was looking over the very same shelf he'd been staring at earlier, honing in on his book.

"Ah. Here it is." Miriam slid *Forensic Accounting: Uncooking the Books* off the shelf and handed it to him with a satisfied smile. "Be sure and let me know if there is *anything* else with which I might help you."

Roger thought about telling her what else she might help him with. He thought about telling her that since Coleen had left, his head had finally cleared, and he'd realized what a mistake it had been to go for beauty over brains. That he could use a nice sensible gal to keep him in line, even if she was a little frumpy. That he'd only really meant to pull a fast one once down at the furniture store, but after that first time the situation had gotten bigger and harder than he knew how to fix. And that he couldn't eat one more dinner of canned chili alone in that house that was too expensive anyway now that he had the alimony

payments.

But Roger was getting ahead of himself. He always seemed to get ahead of himself, and that's when things screwed themselves up. Roger resolved to wait until he brought the book back to ask Miriam out.

2.

Winning Miriam's affections was going to be easier than Roger thought. He could tell by the cages filled with small chirping birds that sat in the corner of her tiny apartment's living room. A lady needing that many birds to keep her company didn't get asked out a lot.

She sure did have nice taste in furniture, though. Roger turned from the cages to size up her sofa. Now this was a nice piece. He just didn't see sofas like this down at the store anymore. Yeah, the upholstery was dated and a little worn, but the bones were good. Roger knew that if he peeled back that old fabric, he'd find kiln-dried hardwood and no shortage of batting. This was a sofa with some substance.

Roger plopped happily down to wait for his date only to stand and turn to see the small lump he'd felt crack under his right cheek. He hadn't noticed the escaped finch in the busy brown and orange floral pattern of Miriam's thrift store sofa. Now it lay still in the center of a giant brown rose—its little breast feathers ruffled and its head turned back disconcertingly.

"Son-of-a-bitch." The caged birds went silent, and Roger winced at his slip. Miriam was the best prospect he'd had in months, even if she did have more birds than he could count. Now look at this mess he'd made.

"What's that, Roger?" Miriam peeked her head out of the bathroom at the far end of the hallway.

“Oh, nothing. I thought I forgot my wallet, but it’s right here.” Roger patted his right back pocket, brushing off any feathers that may have stuck.

“Okay. I’ll just be a minute more. Aren’t I a feminine stereotype, making my date wait?” Miriam smiled before disappearing back into the bathroom, and Roger chuckled weakly.

Roger looked around the room. Surely a woman like Miriam would have a few cats. She was a librarian, after all. He grabbed the limp, feathered evidence of his crime and stepped into the kitchen to look for a kibble dish. Nothing.

“Roger, I think I’m finally ready.” Miriam chirped, her voice growing louder as she moved down the hall and across the living room towards him.

In a panic, Roger grabbed the teapot, jammed down the lever, and slipped the little corpse down the spout. He returned the pot to its burner just before Miriam peeked into the kitchen looking for him.

“Oh, there you are. I thought maybe you’d gotten tired of waiting and left.” Miriam giggled with the expert quiet of a woman in her profession.

“No, no.” Roger tried to laugh quietly back but only managed a nervous cough. “I was just looking for a glass of water.”

3.

Roger felt sure he wouldn’t be going on any more dates with Miriam after tonight. He could tell by the way her face had dropped when he’d turned down her invitation to come up for tea. He was pretty sure even a gal as lonely as her wouldn’t overlook the dead bird in her teapot.

Sitting alone in his car outside her apartment, Roger felt his phone buzz from his pocket to remind him he had a message. He’d

gotten three different calls while he was out with Miriam, and he had a good idea who they were from. That Ethan kid from work was the one who had scared Roger into the library in the first place. Mr. Lancaster had hired him to keep the books. The old man couldn't do it himself anymore, especially after they'd added the second store.

The second store was really what messed things up. Roger was in charge of it because he was the only guy making a career out of his job at Lancaster Furniture and Mattress. All the other guys either moved on to bigger and better or preferred unemployment and came in late enough to get canned.

Roger had liked running the second store alright. It hadn't been bad. It'd been when Coleen left and the alimony started that he'd felt the pinch from those house payments. Being in charge of the second store had given him room to skim just a little cream off the top. Just until he could sort things out with Coleen. But Roger knew that wasn't going to work out when she'd switched over to an unlisted number. Besides, by the time she'd done that he'd skimmed quite a lot and wasn't sure how to stop. And now Ethan had figured it out. Roger could tell by the way he was so excessively cordial whenever he called to check in from the main office.

Roger pulled his phone from his pocket and dialed in his password.

Roger. It's Ethan. From work. So sorry to bother you on a Friday night. You remember tomorrow is Dave's wedding. Dave who works in delivery. Well, you know Dave. But you remember tomorrow is Dave's wedding. Of course, you remember that because we spoke about it at work. I'm just calling to see if you'd still like to meet Mrs. Harding from secretarial and myself at the main office to carpool to the wedding. I'd be so glad if you could let me know. Sorry again to bother you.

4.

Roger knew Ethan had told Mr. Lancaster about his skimming off the second store. He could tell by the way Mr. Lancaster hadn't stopped by his table at the reception yet. Roger squirmed in the tiny white folding chair. He sipped at his sixth, or was it seventh, drink. He always preferred scotch, neat. Lucky for him, Dave's new father-in-law had sprung for an open bar. In a haze of the old man's generosity, Roger could hear Miriam chatting up the young couple they'd been stuck with at a table next to the dance floor.

Right after he'd listened to Ethan's message the night before, Roger had called Miriam to see if she'd mind a last minute invite to a wedding. She'd happily accepted, but when he'd showed up a little early to grab a minute alone with that teapot, Miriam had been ready. *I didn't want to keep you waiting a second time*, she'd told him, proudly patting her trademark pile of curls.

Now Roger studied the crowd of uninhibited, if not graceful, guests doing their best to cut a rug. He spotted Dave's delivery partner, Anthony, doing what looked like Tai Chi to the rhythm of that "Celebration" song. Dave had mentioned something about this guy being a karate master. Roger snorted into his glass.

As the song wound down, the sea of well-dressed bad dancers parted to make way for Dave and his new bride. Roger could never remember that girl's name, just how the high pitch of her voice rang in his ears when she dropped off Dave's lunch. Tonight she was adorned to the point of absurdity. The skirt of her dress was a meringue of ruffles, as Miriam had put it when she'd walked past them in the church. Besides that she wore long gloves, a bracelet on each wrist, a necklace, earrings, and a tiara. To top it all off, she wore a veil that stretched all the way to the floor and that she refused to take

off in spite of the fact that every other time Roger saw her someone was stepping on it.

She reminded Roger of the store bought cupcakes Mrs. Harding brought into the office around the holidays. They always looked like they would be delicious, with their unnaturally bright frosting, sprinkles, and a plastic decoration stuck on top. But when it came down to the cupcake itself, they were bland and disappointing. As a matter-of-fact, Dave's new missus reminded him a lot of Coleen.

"Roger. I figured I'd see you here." Mr. Lancaster surprised Roger with a hearty slap on the back. "I always tell people down at the store that we're a family, and you're the big brother."

"Yes. I've heard you say it before." Roger shook his head chummily as Mr. Lancaster pulled up a chair beside him.

"You know, Roger, the big brother is an essential part of the family." Roger's boss lowered his voice. "The family takes care of the big brother, and the big brother takes care of the family. That's how it's gotta work, isn't it, Roger?" Mr. Lancaster shook his head affirmatively at his own clasped hands.

"Oh, yes, sir. That sure sounds right to me." Roger's stomach tightened and he felt like some of that free booze might come back up. Mr. Lancaster looked sad.

"I was wondering, Roger, if you might be able to stop into the main office Monday morning. There's a minor issue I'd like to sort out. Ethan, of course, will sit in. Can you make it?"

"Monday. Well, yes, Mondays are usually open for me." The tables and dance floors started spinning around Roger.

"Good, then. Enough with business. Let's get back to this celebration." Mr. Lancaster was drunk on the thrill of toying with Roger. Roger could tell by the way he tottered back over to his table and sat down next to his wife.

5.

Miriam was able to see past the messes people made of their lives. Roger could tell by the nice way she'd knelt down over him when he'd passed out at the wedding. *Oh Roger, are you alright*, she'd wondered while she tamped a damp napkin against his forehead. In that condition, he'd not been able to give her a ride home and definitely hadn't gone up to take care of that bird.

Besides that, tomorrow was Monday, and what was the point of trying to cover the messes he'd made? What was the point of keeping the house that was too big and expensive for him now anyway? What was the point of uncooking the books, of putting back the cream when Ethan and Mr. Lancaster already knew he'd skimmed it and fattened himself right up?

Roger knew that he was caught. He just wanted to tell someone who could see past his screw-ups. Someone as nice as Miriam would be good at forgiveness, especially if it meant she'd have more than birds for company. So he crawled out of bed to his desk and found a sheet of paper to write it all down. Roger wrote down the mess he'd made at work and the mess he'd made with Coleen. He wrote down the mess he'd made in Miriam's teapot and that he'd only done it because he knew how one little bird might mean so much to a lady in her situation. Roger sealed it up in an envelope and wrote *Miriam Kearney* across the front, and still in his clothes from the night before, drove across town where he slipped it into the book return slot next to the library door.

6.

Mr. Lancaster was about to fire Roger. Roger could tell by the way his boss was shaking his head at his hands again.

“There’s just no easy way to say this.” Mr. Lancaster paused and looked at Ethan.

“What Mr. Lancaster means to say. Of course, Mr. Lancaster knows what he means to say. But what Mr. Lancaster has difficulty saying. No, not difficulty, because Mr. Lancaster is very well-spoken. What Mr. Lancaster would prefer not to say himself is that there is a problem with the second store.” Ethan looked at Roger as if he might know where this was going. Roger knew where it was going.

“Mr. Lancaster and I both feel terrible to tell you that the problem at the second store involves you.” Roger slumped as best he could in the stiff-backed office chair facing Mr. Lancaster’s desk and waited for Ethan to continue.

“You see, when Mr. Lancaster first opened the second store he was in a bit of a pinch with the bank, and unfortunately, well fortunately then, but unfortunately now, the only cash reserve available to get the second store up and running was your retirement fund.” Roger looked up to see Mr. Lancaster still shaking his down-turned head. “As you know, the second store has been struggling, and, well, it looks as though your retirement fund may be unrecoverable.” Ethan let out a long sigh. “Sorry, Roger.”

Roger sat up in his chair. This was not what he’d expected. This was not at all what he thought he’d hear. This was someone else’s mess. Someone else had skimmed off some cream. Some of Roger’s cream as a matter-of-fact. Roger didn’t like the idea of his cream getting skimmed.

“So much for family here at Lancaster Furniture and Mattress.” Roger straightened up to muster his indignation. “So much for taking care of each other, huh, Mr. Lancaster?” Roger stood now, free of the weight of his fear. “What do you suppose I’ll do with a house I can’t afford and alimony to pay and now no retirement?”

"Now, Roger, we're still a family." Mr. Lancaster spoke, his eyes fixed on Ethan's encouraging nodding. "It's just sometimes people can't help but make mistakes. It's not whether you make mistakes, it's how you handle them that makes you a family." Roger gave Mr. Lancaster a look that said he wasn't buying it. "Well, I thought if I worked a few more years than I'd planned and you worked a few more years than you'd planned, I might be able to make it back ..."

"Excuse me, Mr. Lancaster." Mrs. Harding's voice buzzed from the phone on Mr. Lancaster's desk. "I'm sorry to interrupt, but there is a Ms. Kearney on the phone for you. She insists that it's urgent."

"Ms. Kearney? Isn't that the lady you brought with you to Dave's wedding?" Mr. Lancaster blinked at Roger, confused. "Is everything alright, Roger?"

Roger shrugged back at him, just as dazed as he was.

"Send her through, Betty. Send her through." Mr. Lancaster picked up his phone. "Hello, dear. Yes, yes, I remember you from the wedding. Well, yes, go ahead if it's very important. Um-hmm. A bird in the teapot? I'm not sure I understand. There's more? Okay then." Mr. Lancaster went silent looking up at Roger then back down to the phone.

Roger realized he'd been wrong all along. Miriam Kearney wasn't meant to save him from the mess he'd made down here at the furniture store. He could tell by the look on Mr. Lancaster's face.

Jeffrey Matthews

A Lesson in Natural History

my father has always known
more than me
the names to things
the way they fit together

when I was a little boy
in the autumn
we drove north
from high prairie
into lake country

in the driver's seat
my father explained
epochs
an ice age

how the glaciers carved
all of it out
made lakes
and plains rich
with black topsoil
plow blades turned up arrowheads
Ojibwa, Winnebago, Iowa

in the fenced
rolling fields stood
ruminants, ungulates

four stomachs he said
cud, methane, fertilizer

or powerful haunches
horses with necks bent
and fragile legs
graceful and skittish
a peculiar design

by the lake shore
my father pointed
to a black V in the sky

now see that
Branta canadensis
Canadian Geese
heading south

migration
so they don't get too cold
to breed

in the blue void
an avian wedge against
cirrus, cumulus, stratus

later at night
they all rotate
around the pole star
ursa major ursa minor

he said we can hardly
understand it
but some of that light
has been dead for *eons*

Dad, I can't give a name
to any of this
my fingers are stained
yellow from smoking

and just the other day
there were small miracles
is that the word?

at the bar I found a twenty
on the ground
by the brass foot rail
my wife smiled
none of us hungry

and I woke up
in the morning
to remember

Mile Marker 42

Ford Swetnam Prize Winner—Selected by Rick Ardinger

In a freeway ditch I found
a flashing hubcap, but couldn't
free it from the roots of a
spiteful sagebrush. Behind me,
a dozen bags bulged in a line
like pumpkins on the roadside,
fat with maps and toys and other junk
whisked out of car windows at dusk,
ready for pick up, ready to
merge with other human scatterings
dug from hillsides now braided with
concrete and soaring private estates.
On a clear day, if the sun falls right,
the sharp contours of human expansion
can be seen from space: a glittering
mesh tightens around a sphere,
living color bleeds into the
surrounding vastness, rarities like
soil and ocean dissolve into grayness.
Somewhere in the patchwork,
a truck collects me and twelve
tiny, orange bags. Nearby, a green
sign marks an angry sagebrush
with a shiny victim to squeeze
at blind passing traffic.

The Romance Story

BR&S Prose Contest Winner

It was early May when Charlie stepped out of his car and looked up at the streetlight. The raindrops ignited like fireflies as they passed in front of the light. Inside the thrift store Charlie walked over to the book section. Bianca was running her hand along a four-foot section of used romance novels when Charlie saw her. She was the only woman he had ever seen shopping for books with a grocery cart. Bianca was beautiful, and her wide blue eyes almost did too much work animating her face. He slid his shoes in an attempt to sneak by her in the narrow aisle.

“Just one book? I’m sure they’ll let you buy two, maybe three.”

Charlie looked down at the rare green colored paperback in his hand and thought he could be satisfied with just one. He turned to face her and bumped his thigh against her cart.

“How long does it take you to read all of those?”

“A couple weeks.”

He watched Bianca throw another two romance novels onto the pile, and for a moment it looked to Charlie like she had a plan to burn them. There had to be at least thirty books in the basket. Charlie glanced over the pink spines looking for any rare editions she may have accidentally picked up.

“Does your boyfriend mind you reading all the time?” Charlie ran his hand along the edge of the shelf, embarrassed at the horrible line he’d just coughed out. “Sorry.”

“What are you sorry for? I don’t have a boyfriend.” She turned her head toward the front of the store. “What about you? Does your girlfriend mind you spending all your time reading only one book?”

“No. I’m alone too.”

“Would you like to be alone together?”

Charlie imagined her reading this line to herself verbatim from one of her novels and then tearing up.

On one of the last warm nights in September Charlie and Bianca started the chore of moving her boxes of books and clothes into his apartment. Charlie lived on the second floor of a converted, salmon colored motel that overlooked the bay. They celebrated their new living arrangement with a box of White Zinfandel Charlie had taken from the grocery store he worked at, being allowed to take things that were damaged. They got drunk and Charlie chased Bianca through the halls of the apartment, tickling her when he caught her. Once the running had tired them out, Charlie watched Bianca eat two slices of cold Hawaiian pizza. Later Bianca chose the left side of the bed, which was Charlie’s favorite because of the draft from the window, but he was too drunk to care and slept beside her.

The next morning Charlie woke up and turned to adjust his pillows into a sensible order and saw paragraphs and sentences freshly typed on the pillowcases. On one pillow Charlie’s sweat had smeared some of the words away. He began reading the paragraphs, carefully lifting up the blankets and sheets on the bed trying not to wake Bianca. Words were printed on every sheet and pillowcase, and across Bianca’s neck and back. He stopped reading and sat up at the edge of the mattress. Looking over his body Charlie started reading a paragraph on his forearm in whispers:

Am I already bored with her? I wish she wouldn’t say please so much when we’re fucking.

“Is everything alright? Come back to bed,” Bianca rolled flat

over onto her back and Charlie felt her hand pull at the elastic of his boxer shorts. He clapped his hand over the paragraph on his arm.

"I need to pee," he said as he jumped up. Bianca's hand was still holding his boxer shorts and he stepped out of them and ran into the bathroom.

In the bathroom mirror Charlie noticed that his hair was no longer brown, but tar black. He ran his hand through his hair, and on his palm was the word "shit" typed in a perfect twelve-point Times New Roman font. Charlie looked back in the mirror. The tips of his hair were swaying back and forth, and when he moved closer to the mirror they tapped the hard surface. Little typewriter keys were formed on the ends of each strand of hair. His hair typed: *Are these my thoughts?* on the reflective surface. *What the hell? No!*

Panicked Charlie reached up to the top shelf of the medicine cabinet and took down a pair of scissors. He slid the cold blades along his temple and squeezed the handles together. The pain of the scissors crimping his hair shot starbursts of light in front of his eyes and he fell to the floor before he could completely cut through the strands.

He woke up, what he thought was a few minutes later, opened the bathroom door, and walked over to wake Bianca. Moving her shoulder back and forth he saw sentences stamped on her shoulders and down the slope of her breasts. The secrecy of his thoughts had inked free and printed on the last person he wanted reading his thoughts, Bianca. *I wonder what Julie is up to? Maybe I made a mistake having Bianca move in.* Charlie followed the words as they snaked around Bianca's nipples and along her flat stomach until they disappeared underneath the edge of the comforter. Quickly Charlie lifted his white undershirt off of the floor with his toes and brought it up to his hand. He dipped the corner into a glass of water on the

nightstand, and began wiping away the evidence.

“What are you doing?” Bianca awoke and Charlie gave her a smile as he washed her breasts.

Bianca learned more about Charlie than she ever would have asked him or expected to discover. As the weeks went on, Charlie’s hair never stopped typing. All through his sleep his hair clicked on every surface and Bianca would listen with her eyes closed pretending that she was sleeping. She read and reread the paragraphs she found staining the sheets and clothes she now had to wash daily with bleach. *She has the nicest ass. I hope she doesn’t sleep with that asshole in the produce department. She is naked and you are in a movie theater. The screen is pure white light and you can’t make out the actors. Julie has her face in your lap and you slide your hand down along the arch in her back.*

Bianca felt sorry for Charlie as she read the thoughts that betrayed his character, and hinted at a dissolving interest with her. Bianca’s first boyfriend had attempted suicide after they argued about his cheating, and she figured it was easier to hide her emotions than be alone again. For now they were just his thoughts, he hadn’t acted on them, and they weren’t all about this girl Julie.

Some of Charlie’s thoughts read like romance novels and Bianca suggested he try writing them down as a way to calm his frustration. At a craft shop Bianca purchased a large roll of paper and a stand that she placed on the kitchen table. Charlie would come home from work and sit down and start typing, and while she turned a crank that moved the paper along, she would read over his shoulder. Bianca read everything that Charlie wrote, and, like an addict, she couldn’t

get enough. Charlie was writing stories about how he had met Bianca, over and over. He changed the names and places to fit the romance novel formula she loved so much, and she often read them looking for secret messages to her. Bianca hoarded away the daily scrolls, and they eventually made their way into every room in the house. There were even a few stashed in the magazine rack in the bathroom. At night when they had sex, Bianca would run her fingers through his hair with her palm stretched flat trying to grab what thoughts she might be inspiring. Bianca read: *Baseball* and *Bea Arthur taking a bubble bath* on her hand.

Contrary to the stories Bianca read on the scrolls, the sentences she found on her naked body in the morning made her cry with increasing intensity. The paragraphs mentioned Julie more and more and Bianca couldn't read about herself anywhere in his dreams. One morning Bianca opened her eyes and saw Charlie lying beside her in bed as he used a scratchy rag to wipe the ink off her back.

"Stop washing me!" Bianca yelled.

"I'm going to shave my head. It hurts more than anything I've ever felt, but it is the only way to get my life back, our life back, to the way it used to be."

"Do you think that's a good idea? What if the pain kills you? I don't think it's a good idea. We will find some other way," Bianca said as she pulled the blanket back over her damp shoulders. She shivered as she thought about what it would take for her to leave.

Two weeks before Christmas, Charlie woke up earlier than Bianca and looked out through the frost on the bedroom window. He turned toward her and read the words he had typed on her body.

Charlie always woke up first; he wanted time to formulate his counter arguments to the fights they always had at breakfast. Sipping a cup of coffee he waited and rehearsed until she had finished reading them too. This morning under her left shoulder blade Charlie saw the words *I love you, Julie*. He wanted to wash these words off more than any of the others, but Bianca was tired of waking up to the feeling of him smearing a rag across her body.

When he stepped out of the shower Charlie toweled off his neck and face and watched Bianca glance through the mirror at him as she brushed her teeth. The strands of Charlie's hair began to tangle and twist themselves up in the damp towel as they typed.

"Maybe I should start wrapping my hair in a turban. That would stop them at least."

His hair was now completely wrapped in the towel and he twisted it around his head, tucking the end into the top. Bianca turned and opened her mouth about to speak through a rabid looking toothpaste goatee and he watched her spit drip down her neck.

"Come on, honey, you would never hide your hair. Julie still thinks your hair is cute. And you love her," she said through her sea foam smile.

Charlie tugged at the towel. Bianca watched him struggle as he tried to untangle the mess his hair had created. Finally she threw her toothbrush in the sink and reached up to help. Bianca was wiping her mouth and neck when she said:

"I can't live like this anymore. I'm leaving."

At the start of the New Year, Bianca hadn't left. She decided that she would get to know Julie, and find out how much Charlie

was in love with her before she moved out. She needed to know. She stripped the bed one morning after Charlie had left for work and read the sheets and pillowcases before she shoved them into the washing machine. She saw the word *Julie* and *love* typed over and over, cresting the ridges of the crumpled sheet like ants ruining a picnic. She tried to tell herself that she was reading one of her old romance novels and Julie was just another character, but it didn't work. She even tried imagining the sections about Julie were hidden messages to her. Bianca was used to seeing Julie's name typed on a pillowcase or a towel from time to time, but now it was repeated everywhere. She pulled the sheet back out of the washing machine and dragged it through the hallway into the bedroom.

In the middle of the room the blue floral mattress lay alone stripped and bare, showing spots where they had tried to scrub the puddles of ink. She lay down and held the sheet up in her arms, stretching it flat against the light coming through the window. Bianca read and reread one paragraph until she fell asleep: *Julie runs up to you while you are outside smoking a cigarette and she rambles on about a party she went to the night before. You embrace her and kiss her while she slips in words about how she fucked the guy in the produce department. You call Bianca and tell her that you are going to be home late because you are going to kill the produce guy. You see the produce guy's eyes bulge and he starts laughing. "She had leg spasms! She said she never had a dick that big." You look down and your hands are around his throat. You squeeze as hard as you can and his head explodes. Starting to wipe the blood off of the floor with an old black rag you see Bianca's shoulder blade. You wipe at the words: I love her . . . What have I done? . . . Bianca, I love her.*

That evening Charlie walked into the dark house and wondered if Bianca had left because all of the lights were turned off. He dashed from room to room flipping the light switches until he found her asleep on the bare mattress. He knelt beside her and was about to rock her shoulder to wake her when he noticed the dirty sheet wrapped around her. Charlie read the paragraph from his dream, and how he had dreamt of coming home late after killing the produce guy who slept with the girl he had thought about cheating on Bianca with. He read the words to himself in whispers and then got up and walked into the kitchen, shutting off the light so Bianca could sleep.

In the junk drawer amidst the phone books, broken colored pencils, and Halloween candy Charlie found a pair of wire cutters. He picked up the cutters, and looked at the candy, as he thought about their Halloween costumes a few months before. Bianca had the idea to go out as a romance novel cover. He had worn a ripped open white dress shirt, and Bianca had worn a silk dress and a bra that pushed her breasts up. When people had asked them what they were dressed as, Charlie would dip Bianca and they froze in that position with intense lustful faces and passionately raised eyebrows. Bianca heaved her breasts and held an oriental paper fan, Charlie's hair swayed while his thoughts simulated wind. He squeezed the handles of the wire cutters and closed the drawer.

Charlie walked to the hallway and looked in a mirror. He slid the cutters along his forehead and trapped four strands in the tool's pinch. He squeezed the handles together until he screamed. Ink ran down his face freely as the clipped stalks poured. He was fainting as Bianca opened the bedroom door.

"Charlie. Are you ok?" Bianca ran toward him and slapped the wire cutters from his hands. He fell toward her and felt her arms wrap

around him as he fainted.

“I can’t take this anymore,” Charlie said as he woke up. He wiped ink from his eyebrow before it had a chance to drip into his eye.

Charlie watched Bianca reach up and touch the clipped patch of his hair, and the frayed ends cut her hand deep while the others typed on the back of her hand. She recoiled and ran into the bathroom for the first aid kit. He followed her in and reached out for her hand. She gave it to him and he washed the ink from her cut. He wrapped a bandage around her hand, and they looked at each other for awhile, and said nothing.

“I need a cigarette,” he said.

“Me too,” she said.

They stepped out onto the patio of their apartment and looked out at the scattered lights outlining the bay. Charlie sat on his camping chair and pulled two cigarettes from the box in the cup holder. He lit them together and handed one to Bianca. He watched Bianca smoke as she stood watching the sea like an unconfirmed widow. He leaned back deeper in the chair, and reaching up, he wiped some more ink onto his shirt. Bianca dropped her cigarette into an old coffee can and slid the patio door open.

“Please don’t leave,” he said.

“I’m not leaving. I’m just cold.” She walked into the apartment, and came out wearing his coat.

“I think the Julie story is over,” he said.

“Please don’t talk about her. I don’t want to fight.”

She walked over and picked up one of Charlie’s hands.

“C’mon,” she said. “Let’s go to bed.”

“I’m sorry,” he said and dropped his cigarette into the can.

Bianca didn’t say anything. She took both of Charlie’s hands in her own and pulled him up out of the camping chair. She hugged him and then turned and pulled the sliding glass door open. They walked slowly through the house holding hands, shutting off each light on the way to the bedroom. They lay down on the bare mattress and she could feel the static charge lift the fine hairs on her arms. Bianca slid in close to Charlie’s side and placed her cold arm across his warm chest. When Charlie left for work in the morning she was going to call her mom and leave him. She knew she couldn’t wake up to another name tattooed on her shoulder, and a man with a dirty rag trying to wash it off. As they fell asleep, they listened to the soft tap of Charlie’s hair hitting the mattress.

Editor's Note

I signed on with *Black Rock & Sage* three years ago, first as Poetry Editor and then as Editor-in-Chief, without really knowing what to expect. What I should have expected, it turns out, was sleep deprivation and a caffeine-fueled ride featuring late night proofreading sessions, constant e-mail vigilance, and large inboxes worth of submissions milliseconds before the deadline. Somehow, it always seems to work out like we hope it will, despite the best efforts of fate, accident, and human error. Most of our success during my time has been the result of the talented student body of Idaho State University, whose contributions of fiction, poetry, photography, art, music, cartography, and other creative pieces have always inspired us to rise to the level of presentation concomitant with the quality of the content. As the magazine heads, once again, off to press, I thank contributors, staff, faculty advisors, advertisers, and friends for all of their work and support. I'm proud to say that over the course of my editorship the scope of the magazine has expanded to include more genres and more segments of our varied campus population. I look forward to seeing how the magazine will continue to evolve in the future.

Rick Ardinger

Judge—Ford Swetnam Prize

Rick Ardinger is the Director of the Idaho Humanities Council and a editor/publisher of Limberlost Press, a small press that has published books and chapbooks of poetry since 1976, including works by such poets as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Judith Root, Edward Dorn, Sherman Alexie, Edward Sanders, Hayden Carruth, Martin Vest, Margaret Aho, William Studebaker, and Ford Swetnam. Limberlost is devoted to fine letterpress printing, using Old World methods.

Colophon

Black Rock & Sage was set in Dutch 766 BT. The software used was Adobe InDesign CS3. Printing was done at DMI Printing.

Contributors' Notes

Mike Adams is a graduate student specializing in sculpture. His recent work explores Norse myth and the Viking ship, and how a vessel serves as a carrier of ideas. He will study the Norwegian language and visit the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo this summer. *"Heil dir, Sonne"*: cast bronze, wood.

Lyndsey Barnes graduated from Hillcrest High School. She always enjoyed doodling and drawing on all her assignments. She lived in Boise for a year and loved it. In 2001 Lyndsey enrolled at ISU where she enrolled in every art class available. Painting and weaving became her passion. *"The C Word"*: acrylic on canvas.

Griffin Birdsong is a student, making a point to try doing student stuff. Other than that, he's a nerdy introvert, who works as a man-nurse at an assisted living facility, and who skipped sociology one day in February to send his poems at the very last minute. Also, he's afraid of clowns.

Brittany Bowden has been at Idaho State University since 2004. She will soon be graduating with a Bachelor in Mass Communications. She is married and has a beautiful daughter. Her husband works in the heavy machinery business. He inspired her work.

Breein Bryant lives in Pocatello with her husband and their two dogs. She takes courses at ISU and hopes to pursue an MFA in creative writing.

Laura Cutler is a second year art student and has recently transferred from UNLV where she was majoring in graphic design and photography. She enjoys all mediums within the art world, and is continuing to explore and research new techniques. Laura loves to explore subjects and depict images that tell stories on their own. Laura finds it more interesting to let the viewer decide for him or herself what the work means.

Karee Garvin Dixon is a junior at ISU. She is currently pursuing an English major with an emphasis in creative writing and a minor in both Russian and linguistics. Karee prefers to write on paper rather than on the computer to prohibit the convenient use of the delete button. Among those who are familiar with her, she is known for her signature orange pea coat.

Paul Dodez is a graduate student pursuing an MFA in painting and drawing at ISU. He hails from Alabama by way of Tennessee. He exited MTSU with a BFA in Studio Art and then fell into stained glass and started to cut his teeth in writing. He pretends to be antisocial, but is a poor pretender. “Shaman dreams . . .”: graphite on paper.

Jennifer Ford is a fan of zombies and Disneyland and often wonders what would happen if zombies ran Disneyland. She is a senior majoring in visual communications with a minor in studio art. She is also the mother of two of the world’s most beautiful children, Aiden and Adeline.

Kimberly Fullerton is currently in her fourth year as a music performance major, studies with Dr. Shandra Helman, and has been awarded many prizes in the Pocatello Music Club Scholarship

Competition. After graduating in May, she will continue studies as a masters student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Keith Goettsch studies education and English and has a tendency to write fiction.

Erin Gray works for KISU 91.1 and teaches one section of English 102. Erin also wrote, produced, directed, and acted in *Record City Killers*, a 32 episode Pulp Noir radio program. He's also written an unpublished novel, and is currently writing a second novel for his Master's thesis.

Collette Carter Harris began taking piano at the age of eight. She is a senior performance major and mathematics minor and studies piano with Dr. Kori Bond. Her prizes include twice winning the PMC scholarship competition for ISU music majors. Collette also enjoys teaching music, participating in various school and community ensembles, and playing the harp and organ.

Jen Hawkins is a recovering masochist and English/philosophy major and art minor at ISU. She aims to write with a scalpel and paint like a savant. She loves her birth-son Joe with all her bleeding heart.

Stephen Hunt is a freshman at ISU and his major is undecided. He thinks the university is pretty swell and so are his classes. He works at Budget Tapes & Records and thinks that is pretty swell as well. He loves being outside and playing video games, but feels that playing video games outside is hands down the best.

Jared Johnson was born near Atlanta, Georgia and moved with his

family to Twin Falls Idaho at age seven. His introduction to music began when he auditioned for the musical *Hello Dolly* at age 14. At ISU, he studies with Dr. Scott Anderson and has been featured in major roles in *Pippin* and *The Three Penny Opera*. Last summer he attended and performed at a summer music festival in Italy.

Sarah Kim was born in Dallas, Texas and grew up in South Korea. She began taking piano lessons at age five and graduated from Kaywon High School of the Arts as a piano major. She is currently a junior piano performance major under Dr. Kori Bond at Idaho State University. She has won several competition prizes, including first place in the Idaho MTNA competition in 2008. Sarah is sought after as a collaborator with singers and instrumentalists.

Rebecca Myria Mandoka has moved back to Idaho and is attending Idaho State University to complete her teaching certification. She graduated from Western Michigan University in 2005 with a degree in English with an emphasis on creative writing.

Jeffrey Ian Matthews was born and raised in Iowa. He is an undergraduate student at ISU. He lives with his wife and hound dog in Pocatello.

Joshua Mayes is finishing his undergraduate degree in English literature with a minor in creative writing. He has recently been drying his clothes on hangers in front of a fan because his dryer broke. He is currently living among those clothes.

Tammy Miller is a piano performance student of Dr. Kori Bond and is also majoring in voice under Dr. Diana Livingston Friedley. Her

prizes include several awards in the Pocatello Music Club Scholarship Competition in voice and piano and from the Idaho Falls Music Club Competition in Piano and the Musicians West Piano Festival and Competition.

Samantha Kinney Parkinson attended Virginia Commonwealth University before transferring to ISU, where she studies with Kathleen Lane. While in Virginia, she was a soloist in *Mass of the Children* under the direction of conductor and composer John Rutter. Other notable performances include being the soprano soloist in *Carmina Burana* in China. During high school she won many awards as a singer, pianist, and composer.

Jeff Pearson recently moved into an old town 3rd floor apartment where he can watch and listen to the trains or pigeons any day, any hour. He supports the local poetry scene and loves KISU college radio.

Catherine Reinhardt moved to Pocatello last June in order for her husband to complete a post-doc in biology. She feels very fortunate to have had the opportunity to begin the MFA program this January, 12+ years after receiving her BFA. She paints and draws the things around her as an excuse to have fun making marks on paper. “Kinetic”: charcoal on paper; “Figure Study”: pencil and ink on paper.

Travis Shipley was born on a whiskey-freezing night during a blinding whiteout in North Dakota. He says he wants to major in anthro, but he hasn’t ruled out fireman or astronaut just quite yet. Travis stays out late, skateboards faster than you, swears too much, does too little, wastes enormous amounts of time, and loses touch with old friends easily.

Rachel Sparrow, soprano, student of Dr. Diana Livingston Friedley, is currently portraying the role of Polly, in *The Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill. Rachel won first place in the Pocatello Music Club Competition in spring 2008. A member of the concert choir and chamber choir, Rachel has soloed numerous times with both ensembles under the direction of Dr. Scott Anderson.

Drew Sutherland strives to become a trombonist in a major symphony or to become a university music professor. Sutherland also likes to play jazz, and set up his own jazz combo with his brother called The Brothers Sutherland. His teacher is Dr. Patrick Brooks.

Ty Swenson is working towards a degree in print journalism at ISU. He was born in Helena, MT and moved to Idaho Falls at the age of ten. He considers himself a dual citizen of Idaho and Montana and has no burning desire to live anywhere else—because this is as good as it gets. Ty is excited to make it through our next proposed “end times” and build a career in writing.

J. Curtis Thompson began teaching himself guitar at age ten. After learning a large body of rock music, he began composing his own pieces in middle school. He is now a senior performance student of Bill O'Brien, and will also graduate with a minor in art history.

Nancy Drue Tolman goes by her middle name, Drue. She's from a small, small town called Murtaugh, ID. She's a junior at ISU and went to Utah State University for two years where she majored in journalism. After a year sabbatical she came here to ISU where she is majoring in English with an emphasis in creative writing.

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