

"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." -Psalm 119:32 (NIV)

The Vaguest Notion

Southern Wesleyan University

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The Vaguest Notion



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*“It’s not about the destination, it’s
about the journey.”*

~ Anonymous

Have fun traveling!

This issue of The Vaguest Notion is dedicated to Dr. David Spittal in honor of his years of faithful service to the community of Southern Wesleyan University.



“So small, yet so strong”

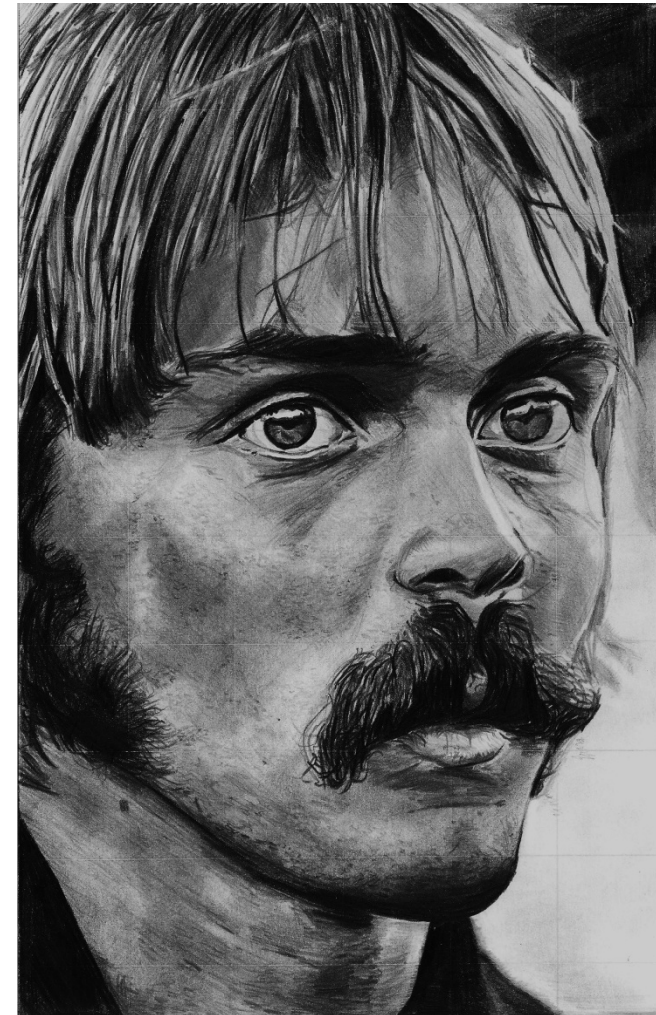
~ Moriah Sears

freedom

exfoliate my soul, oh Lord
refine my heart's desire
to be of one thought, one accord
purified through holy fire

it won't be a pleasant affair
or comfortable, or free
but my current state brings me to despair
the tension eats away at me

teach my heart to see, oh Lord,
with better sight than eyes
and teach me to lean ever toward
the life beyond the lies



Editor's Pick: "Steve Prefontaine - 1975"

~ Drew Welch

The Pianist

Such a little man...
Such a big voice
Emanating from his fingertips
Resounding through the room...
Don't speak!
Just play.
Lay your soul upon the keys
That unlock the doors of the heart-
Play on!
Sing into my ears the sorrows
Of the world,
The beauty of young love
The sweetness of reunion,
Little man with the big voice.

I cannot run
Caught in your spell
With each key stroke, key turn
Coming closer to my hiding place.
Play on!
Say on!
Give me truth wrapped in gold,
Wrapped in raindrops,
Wrapped in tears,
Wrapped in darkness,
Wrapped in joy,
Wrapped in thunder,
Wrapped in blood.
Play on!
...for I am hear...all ears...

He was but a little man
One might easily overlook
Until his hands began to speak.
There was magic in his touch.
Play on, good sir, play on!

~ Moriah Sears

Yard Sale Haiku

Sifting through your frail
unwants, I finger them
in mute sympathy.

Clingy red folds blow
French-kisses in the breeze,
Twisting to hide their bleach-stain.

Polypropylene
cracks in the corner, grinning
refusing to die.

Was pink, was blue, was
loved. Is brown, is grey, is new
arms, new lips say yes.

If you want to know
how much, you could ask how used,
how well, how needed...

~ JM



~ Leigh Turner



"Angels Revealed"
~ Nathan Day

This Is My Time To Shine

Knots in your stomach.
Your heart's beating fast.
It's about that time.
This moment won't last.
So, give 'em all you've got!
Don't hold anything back!

I know you want to run away.
But in these times you need to say,

"This is my time to shine,
this is what I was made for.
I've come this far, worked this
hard,
I'm not about to shut this door.
And though it won't be easy,
I know that looking back,
I will be glad I gave
All that I had."
~ Ashley McGrath



To Hope, To Dream...

My world is solace
And no one knows
Just how much I can feel-
How much I can lose.
The torment inside me
It writhes and it turns.
Everything that I am
Is on fire- it burns.
I have so much passion
Locked deep inside,
It wells up and fills me
My eyes try to hide...

I look down into darkness
I fear if I try
To look up and hope-
No. I can't...but the sky...
It holds so much promise,
I can't help but dream.
In my own mind I soar
Oh, my wonderful scheme...
I have plotted my course,
But, no one believes...
So I sit quiet, and hear
My heart as it heaves...

I can't say a word.
No one seems to care.
I want to go places,
But all I get is a stare.

No one asks, no one helps.
If I tell them, they say,
"Why dream? You can't make it."
So I'm forced to stay
In my cavern that echoes
With questions and doubt,
My mind paces, imprisoned.
Not one thing brings about
A fleeting hope of freedom
From this dark, dismal cell.
These chains are too thick...
My thoughts might as well
Keep me in the throws
Of uncertainty's clutches...
I hope I can live life
Even more than as much as
I dream...
~ Katie Baumann

Prisoners of Hope (based on Zechariah 9 & 11)

Return to your fortress
O prisoners of hope
Return to your land
of mountain and slope

No more wilderness
or sun-baked plain
No more dust clouds
covering your pain

Come back to the fold
O separated one
The Shepherd will shield
from wind and sun

His Favor brings rest
His Union revives
His Hope resurrects
and redeems our lives

~ Paul Shotsberger



Editor's Pick: "Reach for the Sky"

~ Rachel Herring

Sky, you mask yourself
never the same twice
so I weep knowing
I won't recognize you after tonight

Flow down me
celestial burn and
firm the skin to
radiance.

No charity of clouds to
conceal the crime.

You press a thick price
on the prize.

congruence is choice
confinement is free
conforming is death
set forth and breathe

You cause dark worlds with
eyes that view and
light the world with
luminous fumes.

I'll wait it out
so stir yourself.

This teasing doubt
won't do a thing.

I'm all fresh out
on backing down.
Just deal it out and
show yourself.

I want the high
don't leave me low.
Come cleansing cloud
I'll hide as you look

Drop,
down and fall

Around this
thirsty ground.

It's hot as hell when
whispered winds cease.
Obey the sounds and
find release

breach the levy
burden, heavy
bathe me in it
I am ready

Come shower here for
earthly sake.

Reluctant one
we need your face.

Quit laying waste
in humid days
Reveal the rage
Let heaven rain.

Fill thy chalice to the brim
and I will drink it as you wish.
Carry me on into the winds and
seal off all the pores that bled.

~ Jason Reese

Long Lost Friend

Oh paper where have you been?
I've been yearning for your gentle ear,
You always have a way of listening to me
Even when you really don't want to hear.

Where have you been in the past year?
My life has been turning upside down,
From school, relationships, and basketball troubles
Your kind gentle ear has been nowhere to be found.

I thought you were my caring friend
The best friend I had indeed,
But when life goes down
And I frantically look around
My best friend was gone in my time of need.

My transparent paper- -
What kind of friend you have become,
Instead of helping me through tough times
I look for your insight and see you on the run.

My long lasting friend
You have slowly faded away,
When I need you most you're never there
How were you my friend to stay?
~ Ashley Cooper



"Dinner with the Enemy"

~ Tyler McGrady



Editor's Honorable Mention: "Wonderland"

~ Nathan Day

A Death and a Birthday

Celebratory faces shine
As they wander through a bannered hall.
They joke, laugh, talk, and dine,
But my mind is covered with a pall.

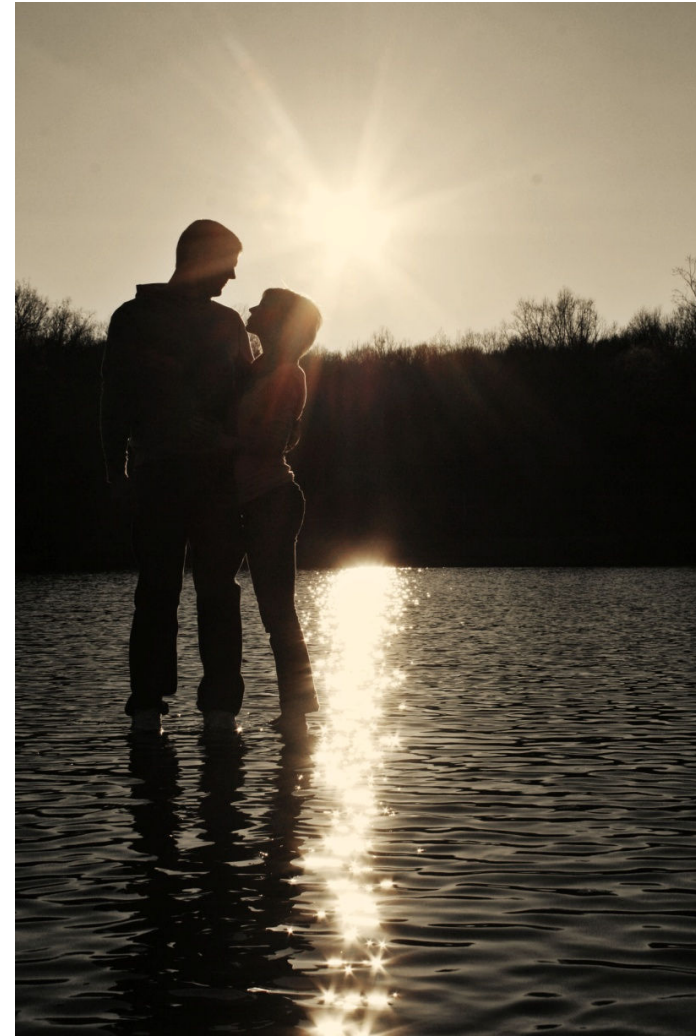
The lights illuminate the room,
Birthday cake is devoured,
But darkness continues to loom,
And my heart is soured.

One soul entered the world today;
Another soul ascended.
One group celebrates the day,
But I mourn a life ended.

~ Zachary D. Rogers

Torn

I'm torn between two loves
But my heart can't seem to choose.
If I pick one, but not the other,
What is it that I'll lose?
One love, I know so very well;
With this love, I want my heart to dwell.
The other love I know much better;
This love and I would be good together.
So many choices I could make,
But could I handle a mistake?
Which one am I supposed to choose?
With one decision, what would I lose?
~ Brandy Hanson



~ Laurin McDowell

Each Time You Tell Their Story

What happens
Each time you tell their story?
Something changes.
Time stands still.
Once again they live,
Once more they are in your arms...
Then they vanish like smoke-
Without a whimper, without a whisper.

Though they die
Yet on they live.
They are yours evermore.
Try not to cry.
They are right here
In the circle of your heart.

Don't let them go.
Don't let them go.
Make them alive
As once they were
Before you told their story.
~ Moriah Sears



~ Leigh Turner

Victory

The thrill of victory,

I love it so,

Whether it be over friend or foe,

Every time I conquer another I want more.

Always looking for the next fight,

I am the sentinel,

Whether it be physical or mental,

Every time I conquer another I want more.

Always the warrior,

I will never give in,

Because I will win,

Maybe one day it will be enough.

~ Alex Gebert



~ Nathan Day

Editor's Pick: Wild Roses

Where have you been little sister,

Where have you been?

To the field big brother,

To the field.

Why were you at the field little sister,

Why were you at the field?

To pick the wild roses big brother,

To pick the wild roses.

Where are your roses little sister,

Where are your roses?

I took them elsewhere big brother,

I took them elsewhere.

Why did you do that little sister,

Why did you do that?

Their blood stained petals didn't belong here big brother,

Their blood stained petals didn't belong here.

Where did you take them little sister,

Where did you take them?

To the graveyard big brother,

To the graveyard.

Why would you do that little sister,

Why would you do that?

For the grave needed flowers big brother,

For the grave needed flowers.

Why did it need flowers little sister,

Why did it need flowers?

It was newly dug big brother,

It was newly dug.

What happened little sister,

What happened?

He died in war big brother.

He died in war.
Were you close little sister,
Were you close?
We were very close big brother,
We were very close.
Why did you go to the field little sister,
Why did you go to the field?
To pick roses big brother,
To pick roses.
Why did you pick roses little sister,
Why did you pick roses?
To lay upon your grave big brother,
To lay upon your grave.
~ Cassy Fisher

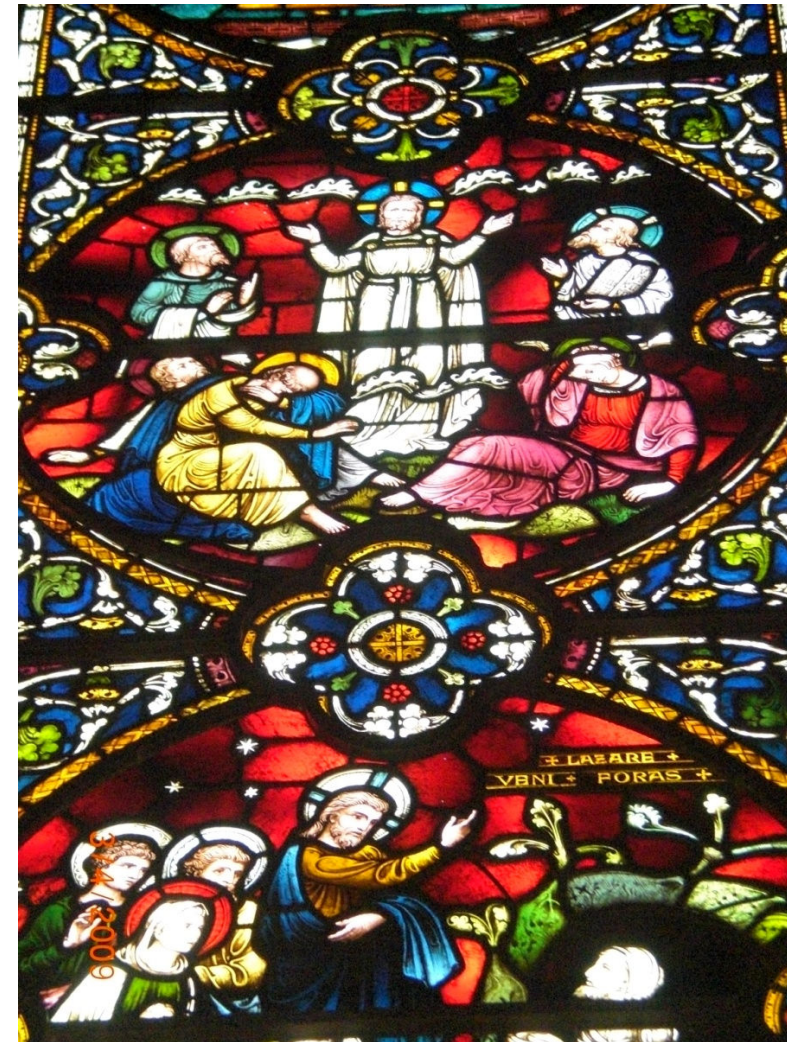


“Hiding Fawn”
~Jonathan Catron

In Celebration of Our Coming Together

How does it occur that a goddess born
Upon this earth does not realize her worth?
She is more valuable than pearls worn,
Yet she was beaten and cast down at birth.
She lived like pearls cast among the swine,
Trampled on and pressed into the black grime,
Yet she did not let her value decline
Though her divinity was forgotten with time.
Until a faithful day when a young man
Looked upon her face and saw divinity
Within her eyes, pureness within her ran
Like rivers, and love became a reality.
Now the goddess looks forward to being his wife,
And love has fused a mortal's and a goddess' life.

~ Zachary D. Rogers



~ Leigh Turner

The Girl in the Corner of Java City

She sits in the corner doing homework.

But is that her true intention?

Why sit in a crowded room

Instead of finding solitude in the dorms?

Is she longing for attention?

Is she a lonely one

Trying to find peace in others?

Interrupt her silence,

Listen to what she has to say.

Then leave her be

Until another comes to break the silence

And keep her company.

~ Brandy Hanson



“Hope-filled Eyes”

~ Ashley McGrath

World Peace?

How shallow has the world become
To have us talk about our own kind,
To make fun, to entertain, to be rude
All negativity will do is corrupt young minds.

Why not teach your kids a lesson
A lesson that has been generationally passed down,
Not a lesson of hate but a lesson of love
So that nobody on earth will have the right to frown.

All smiles and love filled hearts

Grins from ear to ear,

No tears falling on any pillows

Children knowing they have nothing to fear.

Will the world ever become a place of peace

A place with no wars and no brutality,

No kids starving or running the streets

Will it ever happen during mortality?

~ Ashley Cooper



Editor's Pick: "Shattered"

~Tyler McGrady

The Fortures Perks of Being an Aunt

Screaming babies, temper tantrums all day long;
The "Monkeydoos" and "Dora?" I know EVERY song.
He goes pee-pee in the potty; she goes pee-pee on the floor.
Baby proof covers on the knob of every door;
Sticky hands, sticky feet,
Food crumbs on every seat;
Every moment, a chance to play,
Learning new things every day;
Smiles, laughs, silly faces,
Always curious about new places;
Rotten as they may be,
I love them and they love me.

~ Brandy Hanson

Call me crazy

Call me crazy
see if I care
comment on my make up
or what I choose to wear
it doesn't phase me anymore
you can say what you want
but the only one who care what you're saying
is you.

you think it matters
to me what you think?
but I decide for myself,
and before you can blink
I'll choose some new and outlandish thing,
just to elicit a response

from you.

I think at this point
it's just amusing
to watch you wriggle
and snuggle at my choosing
its like you don't get it
so I'll just keep saying
Call me crazy...see if I care.

~Stephanie Sestito



"Blue Serenity"
~Brandy Hanson



"Sharing the Nectar"
~Jonathan Catron



~ Nathan Day

A love not meant to be

I saw you for the first time, swinging on the vine of a good time.

I didn't know of what was to come..., but boy ...didn't we have fun?

Here....now...

It was a cloudy day in my head....

and I found the sunlight in your smile....

So I lingered there for a while.

It was Marvelous! Glorious! Spontaneous ! And free,.....

it's the best you there could be ...for me...

And then it faded...those thoughts were jaded in my mind.

I lost you, and the Ideas of a new viewwith clear horizons ...you were like them...

And Iwas...not..

And I felt my heart begin to rot.

You were taken by a grander vine...and it wasn't mine....
It wasn't mine.
So I left, more shattered than I came.
And all the days began to look the same....
Shame...Blame...a name I couldn't bear to mouth...to house...
in my heart. I tore me apart....
Maybe one day, when I walk on these paved roads, and see all that I've
towed,
I learn to lighten my load...with your smile.
With those eyes with irises that stretch for miles and miles...
Inside your mind...my mind...our time?
Perhaps ...in another...life.

~ Anonymous



~Laurin McDowell

My Turtle

My Turtle is my life. My house built on my back, my pace, my journey. Many have tried to copy me and I can always be put into a specific group. But I'm my own turtle. My exterior is hard in order to help me face the harsh world. My core is soft and loving. As should be all centers of life. My eyes have witnessed many changes in and around the world. And I have changed too. I grow weary as time ages me. My movements are more deliberate and more cautious. I start to follow the current and realize the flow of life has stayed constant, like me. My turtle is my reflection...my turtle is me.

~ Sofia Gomez



~ Leigh Turner



"Dandi"
~ Sofia Gomez



"Moon Close-up"
~ Sofia Gomez

Editor's Pick: THE TAPESTRY

"I want to see the world," I say,
"And learn the 'how' and 'why',"
"But can you bear to see it, son?"
I hear the good Lord cry.

"Yes, I can bear to see it, Lord;
I long to know the weak."
"But can you bear to hear it, son?"
I hear the good Lord speak.

"Yes, I can bear to hear it, Lord,"
But now quiver in my hands.
"But can you bear to touch it, son?"
The good Lord's voice demands.

"Yes—I think—I'll touch it, Lord,
Though now my mind's disturbed."
"But can you bear to taste it, son?"
Asks the good Lord's holy word.

"Yes, I'll try to taste it, Lord,
Though I fear now I mistake..."
"But can you bear to live it, son?"
—His voice my spirit breaks

Suddenly I cannot say
Another "yes" to God,
And so with a cry, I now reply,
"Good Lord, I must be wrong."

"Hush!" He says, with flashing lights,
"Now touch and taste and see!
For know that I have heard your cry
And know your honesty."

A furious light! A sickening sound!
A sudden crash! A glorious beat!
A blaring, bright, and burning ground!
A brash and brazen heat!

Silent now, silence comes—
The darkness now revives.
Silent now, silence now—
My fears enter my eyes.

A shout! Of pain, and passionate, pure desire!
Now millions—billions—do the same, and wreck my soul's attire:
No more questions, longings dreams—no more my mind's poor
wanderings;
Just fear, and hate, and anguished screams—O soul! The
screams, the screams!

A tapestry now flies ahead,
Expanding across time.
A shock of lightning cracks my heart,
Eclipsed behind my mind.

The tapestry runs forever now,
Its graphics are of old,
Depicting horrors, terrors, tremors, fears
Ghastly to behold.

A thousand deaths now all pass by,
Followed by many more,
The violent bath of human wrath,
And morbid, human gore!

My eyes are locked on this expanse,
This fiendish, frightful sight;
I try to turn, but am forced back,
To gaze on this dark light.

The tapestry, pure death to me,
Weaves in and out of ages;
I see great kings, and paupers like,
All locked in their own cages.

They march asleep, and some awake,
And, terrified, they scream,
“Death and woe! No mercy shown
To Adam and his seed!”

“I cannot bear this anymore,
Good Lord, my soul now take!
Or pluck my eyes, my ears, my tongue
—good Lord, let me awake!”

“I feel a mist, a deep dense fog,
Now overturn my mind;
I hear His voice, my master’s tongue,
“My son, now you see why.”
“You saw a sight I always see—
And not inside mere time.
O son, I see man’s tapestry,
And notice each one’s life.”

“You cannot bear the pain I know,
As a Father of this kind;
You can only see what you’ve been shown:
A hint of my own mind.”

“The tears you weep, they come from me,

And now you must rise up,
For I will give your eyes my light,
And you will learn to love."

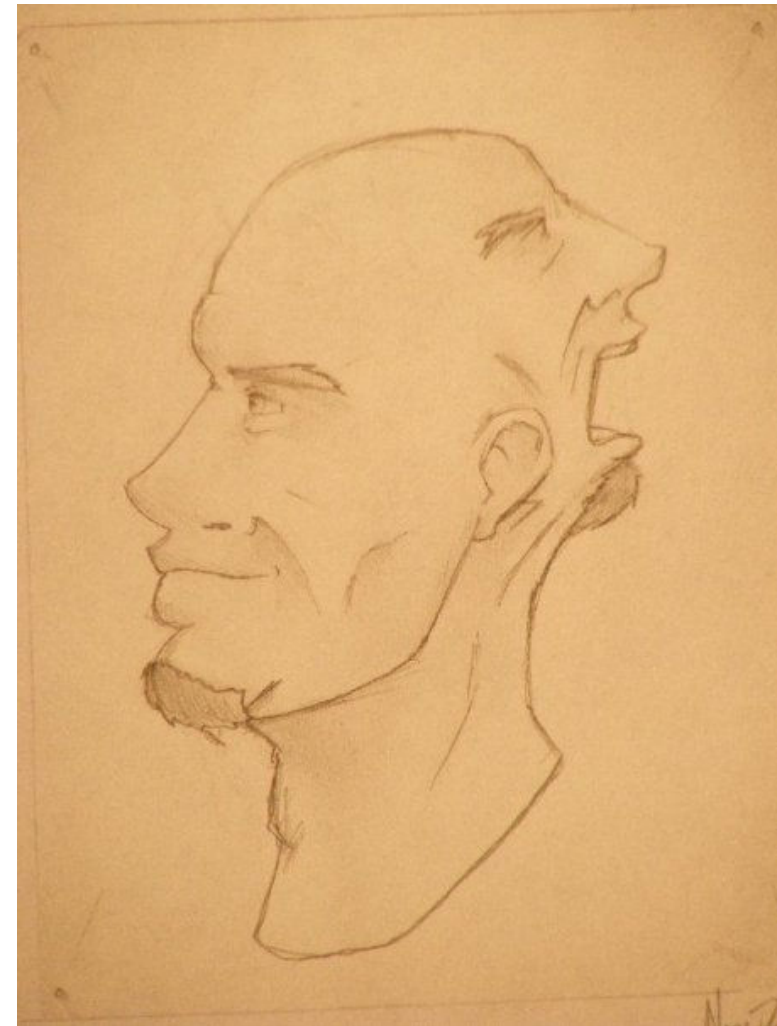
The world is damned apart from me,
And I love it all, you see;
So I will cry, and my Son die,
To love them thoroughly."

"Remember now what you have seen,"
I hear the good Lord say;
"And bend a knee, when 'ere you weep,
And come to me and pray."

"For I will not leave you desolate:
Today that promise 'tis kept,
For you have seen the tears of God,
And by them you have wept."

I want to see the good Lord still,
And hear the master's cry,
And though the path is hard to tread,
Still I will trust, and try.

—Ryan D. Seibert



~ Nathan Day

Life is good.

Noontime approaches, and the sun makes its way high into the sky causing light to pierce through the curtain-less window. The Captivating warmth and sweet smell of fall seal the bedroom as a nice breeze travels, lightly brushing our cheeks. Her long brown curls hanging down her back sweep from side to side as she runs and jumps in my arms!

Her tiny frame make it so easy to throw her on the bed for the ultimate ticking match! She giggles and squirms to get away, but the fun of it all keeps her coming back to tease me, because she knows I will entertain her playful nature. As we calm down and situate ourselves on the edge of the bed, we both seem to have the same idea in mind; to stare at the pleasing picture-like blue sky just on the other side of us. She kisses my cheek. "I love you Tina," she says.

"Where does God live?" she asks. As her big brown eyes gaze at me, her small hand grabs mine, and I know she is seeking a real answer. I clasp her round face and say "He lives way up there," pointing with my other hand to the sky. She responds "wow!" and we agree how awesome it is. She begins to transition from her hyper self to a shy little 4-year-old that I usually don't see. We talk some more about God, "Jesus in Heaven," as she calls Him, and we agree how cool He is.

As children tend to do, her mind quickly changes, and in the next instant I am chasing her down the stairs for a midday snack. "I want fruit snack Tina," she calls to me from the living room. I situate her on the couch so we can watch her favorite movie, Tinker Bell. As she shoves three gummies in her mouth at once, I am already anticipating her asking for another pack. In my tendency to spoil her, I fetch more to have on hand. Her eyes sparkle and she performs for me, clapping and cheering.

We snuggle...

~Tina Youmans



"A Rose"
~ Moriah Sears

Light A Candle So I Might Find My Way

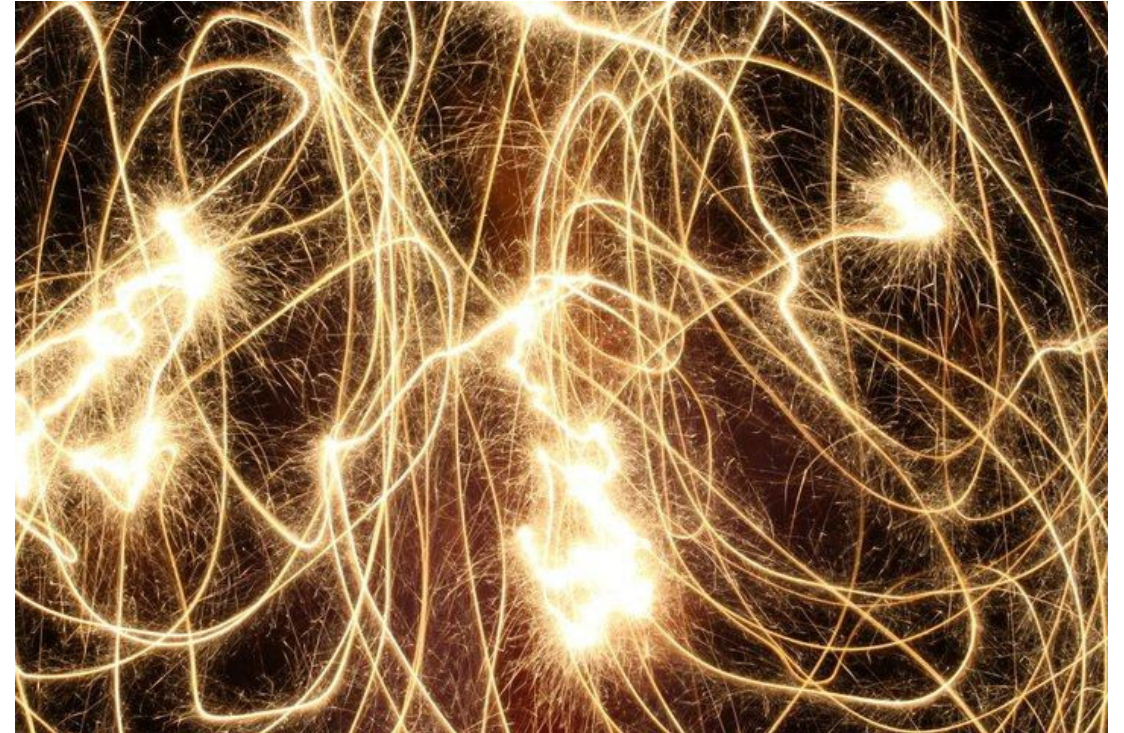
The sun rises high from beyond the horizon
I climb the mountain and reach its bright top
But night will come; light a candle so I might find my way

The sun pauses at its shining zenith
I roam throughout the lush valley forests
But night will come; light a candle so I might find my way

The sun rolls low, a red flower of flame
I walk the twilight road ere the colors leave the sky
But night will come; light a candle so I might find my way

Night, encompassing dark filled with sparkling gems of light
My way found, I leave a candle lit, a star among the constellation
The shining guide to the next traveler's way

~ Serena Miles



~ Tanner Gibson



“Unveiling Soul”
~ Nathan Day

A Conversation

by Zay Sanders

-My patience fizzles as time fades. A squinted glare strikes a forbidden chord, opening a healing wound. My mind is my worst enemy. I'm blocked by an invisible barrier that seems to anger me rather than give me peace. It's as if I want anger to consume me. I've interviewed my schemes and narrowed the playing field to a simple adversary... my knowledge of right and wrong. As my mind slurs a curse, I become the embodiment of my former self. Past motives leak into desire and I fight against it with all of my knowledge. Is my fight in vain? Do I want what I once was?... How long can my answers remain questions? Non-Fiction is my solitude. It comforts me. It takes me to a place where lies are obsolete... or in that case, non-existent. Is my non-fiction the thing I'm fighting?

There is but only one Truth, my son.

-I'm stuck on a feeling that I thought was annihilated. It scares me because my Father has entrusted me with His will. It angers me because I can't shake it. I'm killing myself, but my body is in bliss.

No... it's flesh Zay. Be strong! Self-control is your struggle... it is not with right and wrong.

-With no one to listen, I shouldn't even care!... but I do.

You know your heart just as I do. It lies frequently. You're an addict of sin just like your brothers and sisters. Though, my Grace is sufficient. Who is your Father?

-Yahweh. You are... I cry to You, *Abba*.

Well, don't run from me. As I speak, you're remembering my promises to you. Be cheerful and don't scatter.

-IT'S TOO HARD!... I don't want to quit though. As my eyes swell, my heart runs to you! HELP ME FATHER!

My hand is already out-stretched. Just grab it...

-Selah.

Red Moon Lunacy

Do I lay me down to freeze?

I have fancied it, indeed.

Conquering sounds
to somewhere bound.

Welcome to the New Frontier,
where gases grasp the eye that peers

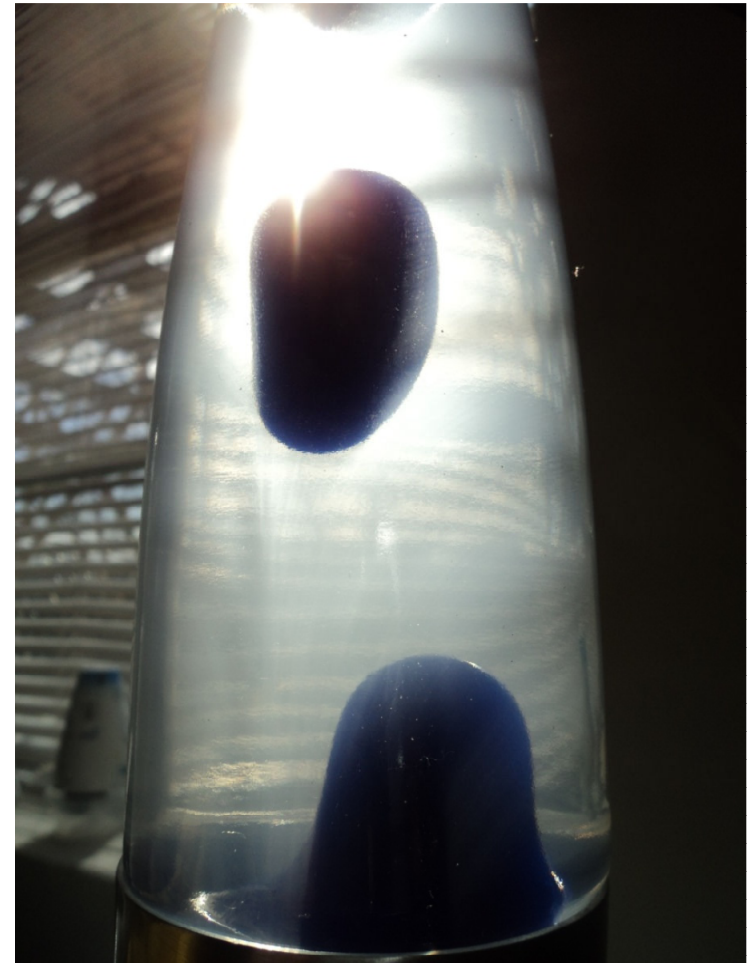
Greetings from the atmosphere,
where pasts surpass the eye that peers.

What are the odds?

A Perfect Third.

Here on this solstice
solacement endures.

~ Jason Reese



"Imagine"
~ Moriah Sears

A Story at the Close

A man who walks on a beach
Treads softly in the sand beneath
He knows that which has passed
And he smiles at the last

Through all the pain and tears
Through all the tired, aching years
He loved a woman, with all he had
They loved each other, through good and bad

Through school and distance
And trials and every instance
In front of all he held her hand
The day he gave her a wedding band

With children young and old
Until every child left the fold
Together they faced the world
And traded nothing for diamonds and pearls

They felt no dark
And left no mark
Save the one in their hearts
Til death did them part

The man knows why
It was time for her to die
For old age's bitter plight
Was that which took her life

The old man feels no regrets
For to this day he still bets
That he shall see her again
In the everlasting glory of heaven

~Ryan Kivett



~ Clyde Jagers



"Kifaru"
~ Tyler McGrady

Vacant hands

my hands have held many things
hammers and pencils and small golden rings
seeds and leaves and flowers bright
a candle to extinguish the night

a mother's hand for crossing streets
a needle for creating pleats
a fork and spoon impart nutrition
a pen and paper fuel ambition

and i cast a glance downward
towards weak and vacant hands
wishing they helped something
beautiful
bright
wanted
needed
just something
to give

my heart is full, but my hands are empty.
what do i have to offer the world?

~ Stephanie Sestito

A Fool's Mistake

I swore I'd never go back
I told myself in youth
When I was older
I'd never return here.

It crashed my heart
Dashed my image
Extinguished my courage
My will undone

Oh how short a promise is
How easily a heart betrays
How soft a lie
How tender an illusion

It was only a shadow
This tale but a story
The flame only a wisp
A mirage in the desert

For a dance there must be two
For an embrace, a pair
A marriage, two circles
One life, two fires

What hope is there in distance
What power saved from afar?
What strength was given
Except that in person?

How can a man on fire be still?
How can a passion be cold?
What summer without the sun?
What life without breath?

As soft as a sunset
As treacherous as the sea
Could a woman pull my heart
And see the end of me.

~Ryan Kivett



~ Tanner Gibson



~ Tanner Gibson

Love

Beauty in your eyes is what
I see.
When I look at you,
What I see is me.
So amazing,
Awe inspiring,
Tantalizing,
Fantasizing.
Smooth as silk
Flowing like milk,
Your love.
It blows my mind
Sears my heart
And warms my soul.
You invade the deepest parts
Of me.
Parts that were not suppose to be
Attainable.
You give to me,
Free me,

Caress me,
In ways I never imagined.
A force to be reckoned with,
Dealt with,
Felt with,
Unbelievable you are.
You touch me,
Kiss me,
Tease me
In ways that are unconceivable,
Unbelievable.
You're scaring me!
Taking me to a place
I said I'd never go.
Too much heartache!
Too much pain
But, well worth the trip.
A world all your own.
In yourself
By yourself.
~ **Celissa Patterson**



"That Which We Call A Rose"
~ Katie Baumann

ON THIS PAPER WITH THIS PENCIL

ON THIS PAPER WITH THIS PENCIL,

I CAN TELL YOU MY FEELINGS,

FEELINGS FOR EVERYTHING,

FEELINGS OF LIFE,

FEELINGS OF LOVE,

FEELINGS OF LIKE.

IN THIS PAPER WITH THIS PENCIL,

IS THE ONLY WAY,

THE WAY ANYONE WILL KNOW,

KNOW ABOUT ANYTHING THATS GOING ON,

IN MY LIFE.

WHAT IS LIFE ON EARTH?
IS IT OUR HELL?
IS IT OUR HEAVEN?
IS EARTH WHERE WE WILL SPEND ETERNITY?
ETERNALLY LIVING, IN THIS HATEFUL PLACE,
FULL OF SINS,
FULL OF DISLIKE,
JUST FULL.
WHAT IS GOING TO SCHOOL DOING,
YES, WE WILL HAVE ON PAPER THAT WE COMPLETED IT,
BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN,
ON PAPER.

MINDS ARE WONDERING,
DAY IN AND DAY OUT,
BUT NO ONE IS HEARD.
SPEAK UP FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE IN,
IF YOU DON'T THEN YOU DON'T BELIEVE,
WHY SHOULD YOU BELIEVE,
WHAT SHOULD YOU BELIEVE IN?
I ONLY KNOW WHAT PEOPELE TEACH,
SO WHAT DO I KNOW?
RIGHT FROM WRONG,
MY ABC'S MY 123'S,
WHERE IS THAT GOING TO GET ME IN LIFE,

I DON'T KNOW DO YOU?
UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ARE THE WAY OF THE WORLD,
HOW WILL THEY GET ANSWERED IF YOU DON'T ASK,
HOLDING IT IN IS LIKE COMMITTING A SIN,
A SIN AGAINST YOURSELF,
AND WHAT YOU BELIEVE,
I ASK YOU AGAIN,
WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?
AND WHY?
I BELIEVE THAT A QUESTION THAT IS ASKED,
IS BETTER THAN A QUESTION UNHEARD OF,
THE ONLY WAY MY QUESTIONS ARE HEARD ,
ARE MY WRITINGS,
SO HOW WILL YOU LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD?

~ Ashli Cooper



“The Cog Up Mount Washington”

~ Jonathan Catron

SPEAK OUT

At the beginning of the play, the curtains rise, the lights go down, and the spotlights on Him, I wonder what color the person will be. Maybe that doesn't even matter.

She is defined by her roots, not her ancestral trace, but what she inherited from her ancestral traits. What she gained was knotted at the core, barely could get a comb through without hitting a sore, spots of imperfection covering her face. The same face that was roughened and smeared in rocks. Very similar in texture to a tree's bark, so often overlooked because she is abnormally dark.

Her soul stands in the rain; while consuming the water she swells with pain. Screaming to be dry again, but when she tries to **stand up, stand out, speak up, speak out**, fear is cocked and aimed, metaphorically muzzled her mouth like an automatic's silencer, and murdered her last thought.

She fell down, but she didn't stay there. So her brother tries to **stand up, stand out, speak up, and speak out**. He tugs at her rib like its their last chance. He said "we got to get up, get out and do something. My heart is empty....and for freedom I hunger. I'm soon to be a hot commodity so I'll recycle my do-rag for a brand new shoe bag to carry while we're running away from our entrapments, the killer that i call silence."

Audacious as if he knew the final results. As if he had already seen our president's complexion, not narrowing the path, but being honest about overcoming the past. Making history and setting new precedents. Standards

that we as not just a race, but as a country, could never have. Someone cut the rope so we are no longer in the grip of deadly living. No strange fruit, swinging from trees. We are open, swift, and bold like when an eagle learns to spread its wings.

Pity should never be a factor because Mr.Ifelsorryforyou is an amazing actor. So I guess we have to weigh our options here. Shut up and just see me for my hair, and I get nowhere. But my refusal to mask up my roots allows me to muscle up a substantial amount of effortless strength to push through walls of prejudices, and issues of social injustices, to see the real issue. **The black community is crying to be free from stereotypical delays in success, mediocre levels of understanding, falling down while standing, trying to set a standard that we don't even see.**

Division is failure because of its complexities, but at the end of the play when the lights go down, the spotlights on Him, I wonder what color the person will be. Maybe that doesn't even matter, let's leave him invisible to our eyes, and clear to our imaginations. We can still hear him, and he says **STAND UP, STAND OUT, SPEAK UP, SPEAK OUT**

~ Jasmine Smith



~ Tessa Morrison

Editor's Pick: Golden Afternoon

“...All my little landscapes, all my yellow afternoons
stack up around this vacancy like dirty cups and spoons...” ~ Joni Mitchell

Afternoons have a way of magnifying whatever state of mind has been developing over the course of the morning. By midday or shortly thereafter, problems are more tangled, deadlines more pressing, lovers more in love than they realized in their grey grogginess; the sun is brighter, patience is thinner, and Christie is inevitably more convinced that she will kill herself.

Christie is one of those individuals whose pallor changes several hundred times a day as their mood waxes from dreary white to beet red; since her family was killed on the interstate last month, I've been watching new shades emerge. Deep purple first flushed her face in the campus counselor's office; I was there for “moral support,” or something. Everyone eventually heard about her strange flush during questions about her father, about the screams that followed. Further discussion that afternoon was carefully steered towards post-traumatic eating disorders.

Green—that is, a lentil-tinted, greasy, Limpopo River-green—is another recent addition. Her hands, I think, tinted first as they shakily set down the bottle of bad wine we were drinking in her apartment, but it spread up her arms, her chest, her perfect neck, until it pooled in her face, turning her black eyes into two rocks in the midst of an algae-covered pond.

“I always have perfectly sober moments when I’m dead drunk,” she mused, “and I know—beyond the alcohol fumes or the cold water-dousing that you’re going to give me in an hour or the sick sympathy of my friends or the numbness that has rooted itself in the pit of my stomach—that I can’t live the way I am anymore: crying and not knowing why I’m crying...though everyone else claims they know—how should they when I’m the one crying...maybe one day I’ll get past it, but I feel nothing right now except the need to end this.”

Jaded, I’ve heard some people call it. Kind of a euphemistic term, I think, for what she was feeling that afternoon in her flat, what I felt listening to her. Life doesn’t often seem to have words big enough to describe itself. Most of the time, we’d just as soon settle for something that doesn’t say everything: words that will twist about us so we’re only half-naked in front of each other, phrases that may leave us ‘high and dry,’ but at least don’t get us wet.

Never mind—today is the day and the afternoon to top all others in its jadedness, or hopelessness, or whatever we can agree to call it. One o’clock comes around, and I am gathering our trash from off the café table. Picking at her untouched Asian salad, Christie’s eyes drill through my temples and out the back of my head. Questions that I manage to shove to the edge of my tongue rush instead out of the hole her gaze made in my brain before I can catch hold of one and translate it into words. Right now, each query seems useless, anyway. Staving off the hungry indifference that mocks me in her gaze is impossible.

Tonight, I am drawn back to her apartment, half my instincts warning me not to intrude, the other half impelling my feet up the steps, my hand beneath the herb-garden pot, the key into the bolt. Unlocked. Very softly, the door swings inwards, opening up the gentle darkness within to the crisp blackness without as I begin searching the living room for—something, anything, nothing: all three embodied in Christie lying on the venerable loveseat and gazing out the open window while the ashes of half a dozen unopened prescriptions spill out of the ancient grate to dance in the air like firefly-ghosts. Whistling through cracks in the molding and around the Indian curtains, the night breeze sings some song about dry riverbeds and empty nests, and I am singing it for a minute, too, as I kneel by her head. ‘X’ they called the generation one back from us—what can we be, then, when we’re still unsolved and waiting for someone to get the equation right so we will know who we are and why the world hurts?

“You know, it’s better at night,” she is saying, “as though all our emotion is spent by dusk and we have to let go of the intensity that seemed so real during the daytime. Zen masters say all we need is peace; I think all we need is darkness: a ritual evening to take the edge off afternoon.”

~JM



~Leigh Turner

Compass

Chapter One

It is the moments in time, when one's life is filled with music, and the rhythm of pulse leaves the heart with a sense of longing. Longing for the future, of the innocence past, and of a true reality presented before the individual. The journey was not about destination, or origin, but the travels presented along the way. And may the lost souls of the world find their way in the light, though the darkness in humanity be kept at bay by the good souls of the world...

The sound of basketball was, as Michael Rayne believed, the pulse of the world. Every heartbeat was beating in symphony with the game. Every footstep was in tune with basketball. The game was Michael's whole world.

Michael crossed the court with ease, his dribbling a motion of liquid grace and innate muscle memory. Basketball, to Michael, was as natural as breathing. Any movement, however complicated from an outside perspective, was effortless. The court was home. Today, Michael could not be stopped. The shouts of the other players transformed into background noise. Michael existed in his own world. This was a world in which no one could touch him in, and a world that he could shift with the touch of his hand. Within seconds the ball moved easily into the hoop, giving Michael's team the final three points of the game. Everyone, including the other team, ran up and smiled.

His best friend, Barry, was the only other regular player at the park that could keep up with Michael. Ever since childhood, the two boys competed in sacred game of basketball. Each of them felt that it was the

only way to spend their time. To them, nothing else was near as important as the game.

"Mike man, you seriously gotta tone it down for us. Winning by thirty points isn't going to make people wanna play," Barry said, his breath coming in rapid succession.

"I thought I was toning it down. I only shot outside the paint three times," said Michael, a grin forming on his face. He was a bit out of breath, but nowhere near as out of breath as the rest of the players.

"Whatever man. Next time, I'm guarding you." Barry said with a sarcastic tone, shaking his head to get the sweat off of his face.

"I could only *be* so lucky," laughed Michael, picking up the ball.

Michael's usual routine allowed him to run through the town. He did this while dribbling the basketball, which permitted him to retain that very vital muscle memory.

He was distracted on this particular night. His mother was having trouble with her business. She owned a music store on a small corner of town, right alongside Main Street. Business had slowed lately.

The new concept of downloading songs onto a computer had stopped mostly everyone from getting in their car and actually driving to pick up an album from a popular artist as opposed to simply acquiring the only song they want from the Internet. As a result, Michael and his mother had fallen on hard times. Michael didn't notice this all too much. So long as he had basketball, he would survive the TV dinners.

Michael jogged across Mayweather Bridge, the bridge that allowed safe passage across the river that ran through the small town in Indiana.

Though it did not appear to be interesting at first glance, Michael had always loved it. He truly loved the town. He often felt as if, no matter what happens in the world outside of Tracy, Michael and his town and basketball would always remain the same. He liked it that way.

Bounce. Bounce. Bounce...

He passed by a school playground. Little children were chasing each other, each determined to shout above the din of the others. Michael smiled, remembering those times in his child hood when he did the very same thing at the very same school. The memories seemed so distant and clouded, but still brought fresh joy to his mind. It was the feeling of innocence, and simplicity. As he smiled, reminiscing in his childhood triumphs, he dribbled onward down the street.

Michael became distracted by old memories. His thoughts became sporadic, shifting from one memory to another. He felt as if he had lived a great deal of life in the short span that time had allowed. It seemed impossible to him that he had so much more to live, with much more time. And yet, he would.

Unfortunately, Michael wasn't looking where he was going. He promptly ran right into Emma Price at full speed. This was a great misfortune for many reasons, the greatest being that Michael was very, very attracted to her. He was also physically incapable of talking to her.

It was more than attraction to Michael, though he had little experience in the ways of love. To him, Emma had been something he'd always wanted, and yet he felt she would never take a chance on a guy like

him. Michael wasn't rich, popular, and he didn't associate with the teens that were. He was the guy in the park, playing basketball. Their worlds didn't intersect.

"Watch it jock." Emma said coolly, her face configured in annoyance. She shoved Michael out of her way with a frustrated sigh, her curly blond hair slapping him in the face.

"You, uh, too..." Michael managed to stammer as he lost the rhythm of his dribbling. There were other arguments running through his head, all very assured to give him conversational victory. However, at this moment, his habit of not being able to speak to Emma overwhelmed him.

He supposed it was her eyes. Every time he thought about talking to her, he'd fall deeply into those brown eyes of hers, and completely forget what he had desired to communicate. They were the sort of light brown that simply attracts one's focus into the eyes; a mixture of different shades of brown, enough to distract him. And then she would bring out her usual bitter response....

Michael knew Emma wasn't bitter. He knew that there was more to her than the popularity, and the crowd she spent her time with, and her cold attitude toward him. Michael had faith that the person inside was much more than the person she chose to show the world. He knew by her music, and by her writing. She was a person he could love, had he been given the opportunity to reach her.

She walked on, acting as if Michael bumping into her had never happened. Michael did the same, now moving at a faster pace with the ball.

A thousand reasons as to why he wasn't good enough burned through his head. The rhythmic bounce of the ball kept him focused. Soon enough, the thought had left, and Michael continued running.

"Hey there gorgeous," said a girl's voice as he ran by a small side street. It was Michael's best friend, Rebecca. The two of them had been friends since Michael had turned eleven years old. Rebecca came from a large family that lived across the street from the record store. One day Rebecca, who tended to get involved in anything that she was curious about, ran right over to the record store and asked Michael's mother if she could live with them.

At first, Michael's mother, Alyssa, thought the small girl was serious. She had no idea that the girl lived right across the street, or that it was her way of meeting new adults. The surprised look Alyssa gave the girl was enough to make both the girl and Michael laugh.

Rebecca loved going to Michael's home. She was able to get away from the chaotic life at her own home. Having seven siblings would create such an annoying home life that Rebecca visited Michael just to hear the metronome of his basketball hitting the ground.

"Careful there girl, or you'll break someone's heart." Michael said with a laugh.

"Emma seemed glad to see you today. That makes it thirty seven times that she's greeted you with so much enthusiasm!" Rebecca said, her eyes widening with feigned excitement.

"There's always tomorrow," Michael said.

"Or the next day... Or the next day...Or-" repeated Rebecca

"The next day?" Michael finished for her.

"Uh-huh!" Rebecca laughed.

There were still a few blocks to go until they reached Michael's house. Rebecca kept pace with Michael. While Emma's face still burned freshly in his mind, he also anticipated the smell of his mother's kitchen. The sweet scent of freshly-made brownies, especially the brownies made by his mother, was divine. His mother made them every Tuesday, which coincided with Michael winning at basketball at the park. Michael liked to think that it was a reward.

Michael stepped inside the kitchen door; the yellow light that hung on a small chandelier above the table filled the room. Alyssa was taking a fresh pan of brownies from the oven.

"Michael, you're home early, aren't you?" She asked, as she carefully set the pan on top of the stove.

"Actually, no Mom" Michael replied, setting the basketball on the floor at last. It had bounced its final time for today.

"Well, I think we're about thirty seconds early from when we normally walk in." said Rebecca, as she stepped through the door.

"Enough time for no one to care!" said Michael in a false-cheerful voice. He smiled at Rebecca, letting her know he was joking

"We had a busy day at the store for a change." Alyssa said, changing the subject. There was an air of excitement in her voice. A busy day usually meant some old rock group had released a new album and all the old fans

wanted to be able to buy the entire album. Alyssa usually didn't mind though, since any business was good business.

"That's great Mom. Will that mean we get to go get some groceries?" Michael asked, eager to eat something other than cereal.

"Yes, yes it will," she said with a wink. "You know, Coach Randolph came by the store, looking for you."

Michael's mind froze. Even Emma disappeared from his mind. Coach Randolph, who coaches the local high school basketball team, came by to look for him? Michael had never been a part of the school basketball team. The players tended to be jerks. They picked on most everyone who wasn't on the team, and took advantage of every girl they came across. Also, Emma dates the captain of the team, Paul Williams. If ever there was a jerk, it would be Paul Williams. Michael and Paul have hated each other since they first played against each other as kids. Michael disliked Paul because Paul had everything Michael never did: Money, girls, and attention. Paul didn't like Michael because Michael had something Paul didn't: Talent. Paul spent his entire life working at being good at basketball. Michael didn't even play competitively and he possessed skill in the game that Paul could never have.

Back to Coach Randolph. Michael's mother had great respect for the man, but Michael had never met him. He had never talked to the coach at all...

Michael was hesitant, but he still pressed onward. "What did he say he wanted?" he asked, trying to sound more curious than nervous.

"I don't know dear. He just said he had a few things to talk to you about. He's the sort of man that tries to help teens out whenever he feels they need it," said Alyssa, fanning the hot brownies.

Rebecca fidgeted with a spatula, anticipating her slice of the brownies. "Randolph helped me once with getting a job," she said, eyeing the dessert with desire.

Michael did not think that he had any problems or issues that Coach Randolph would feel obligated to address. Then again, his life was centered on basketball, and reading, and music. There was not much to be lectured about there.

"I'll stop by the gym tomorrow at school and ask him about it," said Michael, dismissing the idea altogether.

"I'll go with you," said Rebecca, sensing Michael's nerves.

Michael nodded, smiling. It probably wasn't important after all. At this moment, Michael could not see anything that could complicate his life. With basketball, his best friend, and his loving mother, Michael could not foresee any dark clouds on the horizon.

~Ryan Kivett



~Emily Danuser

The Dilemma

He came into the world silent-- devoid of a voice of his own. The sterile, stark white room filled with voices full of urgency. No doctor ushered him into this world, yet his world would be one filled with doctors. No father waited anxiously in any room for his arrival with thoughts of tossing baseballs, tossing footballs, and making plans for his future son. There was only one waiting. There was only one filled with hopes for the new arrival and making promises never to let him down. Today, though, is the day that his mother will let him down.

His voice is one that does not know how to cry. He does not cry out. He does not know how to cry out. He is expressionless. He knows only how to "do." He streaks through houses in flashes of pink skin, blue shirt, blue pants, and white shoes. Tiny cars spin wheels in large circles on linoleum with sound effects produced by the mouth of the giant hand that slams them around. There is no laughter that accompanies the pitter-patter of little feet, no tears, and no emotion, but at times, a head banging against the wall shows frustration. It is during these times that his mother swoops in; long arms like angel wings reach down, envelop him, and hold him until he is once more a normal child filled with normal expectations. Yet today, she will not be able to be there for him.

Abbreviations of large words fill the mouths of medical professionals who scribble into notebooks or on white sheets only to fasten them into manila folders. The pages grow substantially as each abbreviation- PDD, ADD, ADHD, OCD, ODD, ED- multiplies like dandelions in a green, summer field. Short words must require large amounts of room to write, his mother thinks, or perhaps the abbreviations leave out desperate descriptions that she already feels in her heart. The doctors shake their heads, shrug their



"Kenyan Wheat Field"

~ Tyler McGrady

shoulders, and give no hope. They do not know how to piece together the puzzle. There is no response for tears pleading for answers.

School becomes synonymous with more abbreviations as IEPs and BIPs become second nature in the jargon that surrounds his plans of education. In elementary school, the teachers and principals talk around his mother. They threaten her, coerce her, and say, "This is what you will do." They fill her with a sense of failure that eats away at her insides and bring forth tears for him. She is left helpless and scared with more feelings of confusion than she had entering into the room.

Seventeen years of wondering, ten of those years being told that he is unable. He cannot learn. He will not learn. They tell his mother with eyes looking sideways, not meeting his glance even though he is in the room, "You know what this means, don't you?" She shakes her head as she realizes he has no future. Despite ten years of pleading that he can, she resolves that perhaps she had dreamed it all. She shakes the clouds of hope from her head and fills it with the cool steeled rigidness of the school psychologist's hopelessness that fills her heart with an aching. She wonders where the God she spoke to while sitting on the front porch, tears streaming down her face as she looked up into the black velvety diamond studded sky is and why He has left her.

Yesterday, though, brought with it a rush of hope that swept through the hardened steel, bursting it out, replacing it once more with bright clouds. A new abbreviation inserts itself in his IEP: GED. His teacher gives her words that cause her heart to soar when she speaks of on grade level, above grade level, and exceeds expectations. Teachers do not have to tell a mother how she should feel. Tears of pride well up into dry eyes that now glisten with the hope that radiates from sunshine inside her chest in an explosion of bright light until she is certain even her fingertips cannot

contain this light from escaping. He is radiant. He mimics her smile and she hopes it is his own. Words tumble out of his mouth on the way home of poetry slam, girlfriends, and plans of what he will be when he grows up. She stops on only two: poetry slam. All the other words spill past the two like water rushing over rocks in a stream. These words are fixed and stay in her mind.

"I can't go," she says. "I have class in the morning." The light leaves his face and the darkness now clouds over. He mimics her frown.

"But it is the first one I've been able to participate in," he says.

She knows that words of next year mean nothing to him. There is no next year. There is only now. He needs to see angel wings spread wide today, to reach down, and to scoop him up and whisper words of love, pride, and encouragement. He needs to look down into unrecognizable faces in a crowd and stop on a familiar face. As he reads his poem today- the one that gives him a voice to express everything he has been unable to express- he needs to see the one who has always been his voice. He needs to see me.

~ Martha L. Bishop



~ Emily Danuser

There is One in Every Town

There is one in every town. In this town, that person just happens to be you. Everything you say is agreed upon at once to be the answer; as soon as you leave, they change the plan. They whisper to new people in the town, “Don’t worry. It’s just being crazy as a loon.” They think you cannot hear, but in reality, you hear every word. The words cut like glass. They are a bunch of hypocrites. It is sickening. You just want someone to help you through situations without them “helping” by telling someone else your secrets. Is that so hard to ask? Apparently, a little sympathy is too much to ask for. In a small town like Scarlotville, there is no other source of entertainment. All of the real talent left. The trains roll in and out in the morning. The trains are the only constant in the world as far as you are concerned.

There was someone once that helped you. They filled the world you lived with wonder and excitement. Anthony Duke was the center of your universe for so many years. He was really like an older brother who lived in a different house and had different parents. Even still, he was closer to you than your own parents. Every morning was worth getting up just to see him. Your own crazy antics were nothing compared to his. The trains were a joke. One day, you would both get on the train and leave the town forever. There are things that you would only dream of doing with that one person. How easy is it to forget the joys in life? He died less than a

month ago. That was when the whispering started. 20 years started to seem like a good length of time to live. It seemed healthy to only live 20 years. What else is there to experience? There is only one other option to consider.

You buy a ticket for the train. You live for those who beg you not to waste your life in a memory. You want to run away with the train as it comes and goes. Not a bystander to the action anymore, you can be the person on the train everyone looks at and wonders if they could be so bold to never really have a home. The train will keep you company wherever you will go. The train will be your home. The whispers of the town will disappear into the night when the train pulls from the station. What if it is not what you expect? What if the journey is hard? If the journey is hard, the experience is worth it. Anthony would have wanted it.

~ Anna Argot



~Beth Hyder

STORY OF A ROAD

The little one's shaved head collected small drops of rain as he peeked out the window of the driver's seat. The rain bounced off the white hood and trickled down in busy streams to the tires and headlights, where it dripped inconsistently upon the cracked, uneven concrete of the road.

The boy was too young to grieve at the disappearance of the opened window; his attention now turned to the new sputtering noises of the rain as it struck against the glass. The boy leaned his head back upon his mother's chest as she piloted her way down the rough-hewn street. He never wondered why they moved or how; he was content on his mother's lap, close to the security and nourishment that she had always provided him with. He did not know the reason for the journey; he did not notice her shift from sitting on one side of the car to the other. He did not notice that she now sat where once his father did.

The little boy did not know death, despite that shroud's newfound relationship with his father. He did not understand the absence of the man; nor could he fathom the fact that the man would not return himself to them. All that the boy knew was that he liked the sound of rain, and enjoyed his new window, where just beyond its hidden perimeters his friend, falling sky, ran by.

The back seat was crowded with the boy's two brothers and two sisters. The youngest of the children, Srey An, slept on her older sister's shoulder, until a bump either jolted her to consciousness or caused her to slump into her sister's lap. Nari did not mind; her thoughts were too

occupied with her father's disappearance. The sudden velocity of time had coursed through memory when the news had originally been told to her as she stood within earshot of her bewailing mother. Since that day her mother had said very little; now suddenly they drove through the muddied streets of their village until they had reached and passed the crossroads that would lead them out of their province and on to the capital.

The rain was still tapping the galvanized tin above the doorway of the house when they arrived, well past midnight. "You're late," a man said. The new world welcomed her as a worker, not as a widow. Her five children in tow, she followed the man into the house and up two tedious flights of stairs until they reached the narrow hallway that led to their new home: a small room with concrete walls, tile flooring, and a blaring fluorescent light overhead.

Her children came in and collapsed on the mats already laid out for them, crammed and tired and hungry. The baby boy now stirred, craving his mother's milk. The exhausted woman sat propped against a wall and complied as she surveyed her sleeping children in front of her. The two boys, twins, lay close together in a sweaty heap. Srey An lay curled up in between her brothers and Nari, who lay stiffly with her legs stretched out and her feet crossed.

The man entered the doorway to the family's new quarters and knelt beside the woman, giving no heed to sleeping babes or her nursing of little Meng.

“You need to start early tomorrow,” he said, “if you want to pay for this room.” He left without hearing a reply from the woman and turned off the light and closed the door. Suddenly everything stopped, and the combined sounds of crickets and the drizzling rain outside began to rise in the woman’s ears. She nursed her little boy to sleep and then, finally, lay down beside the wall, cradling the boy close to her heart.

Days and weeks now passed without notice; time became elusive, choosing only to show its face in order to insult the drudgery of the woman’s “new” life. With no one from home to support her, she worked long and hard each day at the factory, sewing a certain brand’s logo onto golf tees, while her partner did the same thing, but with a different brand name stitched into the fabric.

While their mother worked, Nari and her sister kept the baby; meanwhile their brothers lined the streets outside the small house looking for trash worthy of recycling.

The children watched their clothes become dirty and ragged. They watched their bodies become thin and bony. Their hair bred lice; their teeth darkened and occasionally chipped or fell out of their mouths. Their mother continued to work, and the boys continued to beg, and all the while the owner of the house began to hire out the girls behind their mother’s back. He would send them begging along the riverside of the Tonle Sap, where gangs of boys roamed and where skulking foreign men wandered about.

One day the mother found out, and argued with the man, until he hit her and told her not to complain, or he would force her and her family out. He reminded her that it was not his fault that her husband had died. It was karma. Her anger subsided, though not willingly. She could not forget the fate that bound her to this life, a life that had, in turn, bound itself to her children.

A day came soon after when Srey An did not come home. Nari had been busy watching little Meng, who had been busy all this time cutting teeth and learning to take his first steps. While Nari was not looking, Srey An had disappeared. She wailed over her lost sister, her silent but understanding companion in all this turmoil, and cried out to something—unnamed and unknown—to bring her back. When finally her cries diminished, and the incapable arms of fate had failed to return Srey An safely home, she gave in to her mother’s sullen assumption that she had fallen into the river and drowned. No one had witnessed this, nor had anyone sought to look for the little girl. Nari’s mother was too overwhelmed to feel anger; after fighting the owner of the house, she had given up her right to remorse, and all animosity that once resided in her she poured out ineffectively through quiet tears in the dead of night. “Karma,” she would say, hardly weeping. Karma had spoken for her daughter, just as it had for her husband. For all of them.

The woman’s posture depleted; no longer could she work long hours at the factory. By midday she was spent, and her spirit was gone. Hope hung in the air like the air itself: sticky, dreary, more menacing than alleviating.

The day came when little Meng learned his first words. No one applauded his accomplishment; his mother gave scarce attention to him, save during the night, when she would sleep with her frail arms wrapped around his tiny body.

A day came when the man hired the children's mother out to work in the evenings, sometimes into the early morning hours; seldom did her children stay awake to see her return, save for Nari, who would lay quietly near the doorway, listening. Many times it would be just short of daybreak when her mother's slow feet could be heard coming down the hallway.

The woman's children never knew their mother's work, though they might have guessed, having been exposed to the nature of the after-hours in the city. They would sleep until morning without their mother, and rise to find her lying fast asleep on the floor nearby, her clothes and physical appearance greatly altered from what they had known before.

Srey Nari began to reason that calamity had struck her family because of her brother. If not for his wailing, her mother might have peace of mind and take a little rest. If not for him, surely she would find time to console her embittered daughter. If not for him, perhaps her father would not have had to go away. It was not fair, she thought, though she feared what it would mean to tamper with the fates of her family. Still, her anger towards him daily increased, while her mother's life seemed to daily deteriorate.

The only time she could keep him silent at night was when it rained. Whenever the sky began to open its mouth, she would rise and place young

Meng outside at the end of the hallway, where he would sit, quietly staring up into the clay-red sky above him, his tiny eyes straining to find his friend, the falling sky. The only time that Meng issued forth any laughter was at the coming of a heavy rain. Because of this, no one ever heard him laugh—and what a generous, joyous laugh he possessed! But no one would hear, for the friendly rain would unwittingly drown out his enamored squeals. No one saw his bursting smile, which elevated his cheeks and wrinkled the corners of his eyes and chin.

One day Nari was along the riverside. She held little Meng in her arms as he stared up at the tall cumulus columns that rose like immense giants in the distance. A man from the province came by. He spoke to one of the gang boys. The man and the boy stood close enough for young Nari to hear the subject matter of their conversation. The man was looking for “new ones.” The boy tilted his head towards a few young children, toothless and ragged, as they unwittingly posed for a picture near a group of romanticizing tourists. The man shook his head and held his left hand out at his eye's level. He brought it down to his waist and said, “Smaller.”

Nari had an idea. It possessed her so quickly that before she could understand the ramifications of her decision, it had been made. Now she was free and swiftly running back home, with several dollars tucked safely into her skirt. The boy had taken all the rest. She ran home alone, as fast as she could, to see if she had achieved her miracle. Perhaps now her mother's life would return to its former state, when once she possessed strength and that long-desired capacity to attend to her daughter's affections.

When Nari entered the room, her mother was no longer there, no longer asleep. This excited her at first, and she thought the curse had lifted. Then the approach of footsteps caught her ear, and she ran out into the hallway and into the path of the man who owned the house. “You’re mother is gone,” he said. “Time for you to work.”

It had begun to rain again, unexpectedly. That is how Cambodian storms often are. They mount up on great columns before plunging down, turning the streets into streams. Some fight the rain with coldness, or with ignorance. Many simply accept it as natural—a thing not to be fought or tampered with. For them, daily activity must remain; thus the Khmer people will travel through the blinding, drenching downpour, often passing through its streams with a characteristic sense of casual disregard.

Little Meng pulled himself up in the back seat of the van, next to several other children, who slept. He watched, with a smile of delight on his face, as his friend, falling sky, came running up from behind. After a while the road looked strangely familiar to him. He had spent an earlier day with the rain here. He sat down after a time and fell asleep, his mind’s small memory filled with visions of his mother’s grasp, and the white car hood, and a window without its invisible walls.

~ Ryan D. Seibert



~ Leigh Turner



~ Emily Danuser

A moment of thought...

“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”

~ Helen Keller

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