

The  
**Rapids Review**



**Spring 2013**



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# The Rapids Review

*a literary arts magazine*

a publication of the Anoka-Ramsey Community College  
Creative Writing Club

## Club Members

*Kali Anderson (Editor)*

*Jose Barela*

*Michaila Gerlach*

*Erin Green*

*Phil Hammitt*

*Matt Heidelberger*

*Kristine Holmes*

*Emma Pence*

*Tyler Strickland (Editor)*

*Andrew Wold*

## Advisor

*Tracy (Youngblom) Turner*

***All writing and art work was judged as an anonymous submission.***

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Holmes*

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*thanks from the Creative Writing Club!*

**Pure Innocence**

*Back cover photo by Rachel Keller*

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## House of Cards

*by Emily Goenner*

I am a house of cards  
One whole made of many parts  
I am built to my highest peak  
And then  
A slight breeze will knock me down.

I am the Joker  
The trickster  
The fool that may sometimes be removed.

I am the Queen of Hearts  
Royal, majestic, beautiful  
No deck will be complete without me.

I am the King of Hearts  
I fight, I fight, I fight  
But the fighting becomes too much  
Get the picture?

I am the Ace of Diamonds  
Glittering, bright and true.

I am the two of Clubs  
The lowest of the low.

All together I make a house of cards  
No part can stand alone.  
If one is removed the whole crumbles  
But the good thing about cards...  
I can be built up again,  
Differently.



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**Empty Canvas** by *Kashia Vang*

You're still there,  
Blank and clean,  
Casually leaning  
On that easel,  
Waiting for me,  
For my hands to touch you,  
Mark you,  
Make you unique.  
I will drag charcoal across  
Your chest and rub it  
Into your skin until I am  
Satisfied.  
You'll be one of a kind,  
I promise.

**Up at 11:32** by *Mary Stokes*

There is that moment  
when all have gone to  
bed, and the silence  
is the best, full of  
ideas. Muses whisper,  
text breathes, and  
the ink dances from  
my fingers onto the  
pristine page, the type  
flying, as if it is  
its own, and I were  
merely a bystander.



**Cutting Ties** by *Tiana Boskovich*

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**Crash Revised**

*by April LeBahn*

It's being in a car and rolling deep into a ditch  
knowing that you're upside down,  
but not understanding what's going on.  
Seatbelt? This is a boulder.  
Not a drop of liquor in your blood,  
but you must be drunk  
for the world to spin like this,  
to hear screeches like this,  
for your stomach to turn like this.

It's like missing a step on a flight of stairs.  
Your heart skips a beat and you can't breathe.  
The ground rushes to meet you,  
as you brace for it,  
then smash into the ground.

It's like being on a ship on the ocean.  
The waves going up and down-  
making your head light, fuzzy,  
feeling like you're going to faint.  
You never want to be on a boat again.

It's like your first time on a roller coaster,  
when you hear the click-  
click-clicking of the track,  
and you're sure that you're going to die.  
But you're okay.

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## Johnny Frost

*by Austin Bosse*

It was nearing the end of the second set, the jazz show winding down, when Haley heard John Paps at the microphone call Johnny Frost's name. Haley's eyes widened; Johnny Frost hadn't really spoken much to anyone yet, let alone play in front of anyone since he returned three months ago. Haley's last memory of Johnny involved a newspaper she had kept in her purse since she first read it about six months ago. The front of the paper had a picture of a large group of children standing around a soldier, Johnny.

She heard his name, and to her surprise, saw him slowly and cautiously rise in the bullpen towards the front. She hadn't seen him join the other local musicians, including Shady Brown with his tenor sax in the bullpen, which were simply a dozen or so chairs grouped near the bandstand. The young locals gathered there each Sunday evening hoping for a chance to perform and be invited to sit with the band. They sometimes even got to choose the tune they wished to play. Everyone knew since Johnny Frost came back, he didn't want to participate anymore by sitting in the bullpen, but he did so anyway.

This Sunday Johnny Frost, recently out of the Army after five years and enrolled because of the start of the war, was the one being invited to sit in. As he rose, Haley noted the physical changes of his body, changes the military had evoked: the broadened shoulders, muscled arms, and strengthened hands that had lifted hundreds to safety. Scars, scars from the unthinkable, the unspeakable, with one in particular on his left arm. It was as if a strip of barbed wire fencing had been crushed into his entire arm. Around and around like a winding staircase, starting at his fingers and continuing up to the peak of his shoulder. She thought back to the photo in the paper and remembered what Johnny had looked like, along with the caption beneath. She remembered his face; the exhausted scuffed up face, along with his arm, his left arm, making a red pool in the earth's soil. The caption, "Famous

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musician saves 13 children at the cost of his arm.” In smaller notations, “May never be able to play music again.”

Haley watched him with bated breath as he separated himself from the hopefuls and approached the stand. He took his time, moving with a deliberate pause between each of his steps. The crowd waited. That was his way, Haley knew. His body moving absentmindedly through space, his thoughts on something other than his surroundings, his eyes like a curtain he occasionally drew aside a fraction of an inch to peer out at the world. A world far less interesting than the music in his own head.

She watched now as he slowly mounted the bandstand and conferred with the bassist and the drummer. Then, without announcing the name of the tune he intended to play, without acknowledging the audience, he sat down at the piano and brought his hands, the fingers long and splayed and slightly arched, down on the opening bars of “Sonny Boy Blue.”

“Sonny Boy Blue! That hokey-doke tune!” she said.

Around her, the purists looked askance at each other from behind their regulation shades and slouched deeper and deeper in their chairs in open disgust.

At first, hokey though it was, he played the song straight through as if he were the one who had originally written and performed it. And he did so with great care, although at a slower tempo than was called for and with a formality that lent the Tin Pan Alley tune a depth and thoughtfulness no one else would have accorded it. Quickly taking their cue from him, the surprised bassist reached for his bow, and the startled drummer for his brushes.

Johnny Frost took his time as he paid his respects to the tune as it was written. He hunched closer to the piano, angled his head sharply to the left, completely closed the curtain of his gaze, and with his hands commanding the length and breadth of the keyboard he unleashed a dazzling pyrotechnic of chords. You could almost see the colors,

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polyrhythms, seemingly unrelated harmonies, and ideas-fresh, brash, outrageous ideas. It was an outpouring of ideas and feelings informed by his own brand of lyricism and lit from time to time by flashes of the recognizable melody. He continued to acknowledge the little simpleminded tune, while at the same time furiously recasting and reinventing it in an image all his own.

There was a collective in-suck of breath throughout the club.

Where, Haley wondered, did he come by that dazzling array of ideas and wealth of feeling? What was the source? What was the inspiration? How could he still play like this? It had to do, she speculated, with the way he held his head, angled to the left like that, tilted toward heaven and earth. His right side, his right ear directed skyward, hearing up there, in the Upper Room among the stars Malena sang about. A new kind of music: splintered, atonal, profane, and possessing a wonderful dissonance that spoke to him, inspired him. His other ear remained earthbound, trained on the bedrock that for him was Bach and the blues.

Again and again he took them on a joyous, terrifying roller coaster of a ride. When he finally deposited them on a terra firma after close to twenty minutes, everyone in Blue Royal could only sit there as if they were in church and weren't supposed to clap. Finally, Haley leaped to her feet and began to applaud. Everyone joined in, including the purists who normally refused to applaud even genius. They too, stood up in languid praise of him.

He had done it, she thought. He had proved them wrong about never being able to play music again and had come back to reality. The look she saw next on Johnny Frost's face was unforgettable. His face was emotionless, firm, and true. With an automatic single wave to the crowd, he proceeded back to his chair in the bullpen. As she looked at his face she could see that in fact Johnny Frost the musician war hero may never be the same, as she saw him look down at his scarred arm.

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Drugs

*by Kayla Tuttle*

I never fly far, but boy do I fly high!  
People call it cloud-nine, but I prefer  
cloud-mine. You can't touch me here,  
hell, I don't even know where 'here' is,  
but I do know it's away from you.  
It's far from your judgmental thoughts,  
miles from your disapproving eyes.  
Since you can't reach me, you can't hurt me.  
So I keep flying higher  
and higher and higher until  
I crash. I'm in your world once more.  
Not for long though. Soon,  
I'll be high again; high forever.  
The snake never stops biting,  
I don't want it to.  
My veins never get a break,  
They don't want one.



**Blue Moon** by *Kali Anderson*



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## **Wishful Thinking**

*by Kayla Tuttle*

When people wish on a shooting  
star, they're wishing on empty  
gases, disintegrating  
color, and burning  
metals. This may bring them  
joy and hope, but hope can't  
grant their wish. After all,  
shooting stars are just dead  
stars, losing their light and falling  
from space.

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**Tides of a Dream**

*by Mary Stokes*

A shark's ill humor -  
Oh, brother, you sway,  
caught in Death's  
awfully big adventure  
and the wallet hits the sand.  
Breathe, choke, exhale;  
but what of Neverland?  
What about the summers we spent  
living the other great adventure?  
You sway, and I know:  
Oh, yes, I can take  
everything - but I can't have  
you back, can I?



**After the Storm** by *Kali Anderson*

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Damon Did the Splits

*by Joshua Chase*

I didn't stop to talk because  
    I don't think I need the trip  
right now—probably not ever—  
    but I saw you on the bus  
heading downtown  
    and knew where you were headed.

The ink on your face turned green.  
    Skin as thin as your frame.  
I thought the sickness got you  
    long ago, Damon, and after today  
I know I was right.  
    They just haven't put you under.

Yet.

Ever since I've known you  
    you've had one foot in the grave  
and the other foot in mine.  
    I fretted about tainted sharps  
hiding in couch cushions and shag carpeting  
    like Viet Cong booby traps.

You're a reminder that things  
    rarely get better for guys like me  
and never will for guys like you.  
    Why would they?  
It's hard to see the cure  
    when your T-cells have gone blind.

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## Why We Play

*by Mary Stokes*

Let's pretend  
that I have something  
amazing to say, and  
you want to know  
what it is.

Let's pretend  
that you care, and  
I am a writer  
who can forge  
through a forest -  
a story of pages  
that were once  
trees.

Let's pretend  
that a dragon  
didn't steal my dreams  
and that we still  
have a mother -  
a resting place  
for our hearts.

Let's pretend  
because you won't  
open your eyes  
unless I apologize  
for scaring you, and  
we can be friends  
again.

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Let's pretend  
that reality  
isn't a series  
of overlapping days  
that come to a  
point at the  
dragon's tail,  
that cars are kind,  
roads forgiving,  
that Mother's story  
never ended, and  
that the driver  
didn't know  
what he was doing.

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**Watching the End**

*by Cassandra Rumpza*

Her skin so ugly,  
pale, and gray,  
like the sky  
before it rains.  
Her body drained lifeless,  
empty,  
and her eyes  
like a field of fog.  
The last breath  
wheezed from her body  
slow,  
and weak.  
It was over.

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Rest

*by Ashley Montgomery-Johnson*

Her shining eyes  
her cat in my lap  
her quiet apartment.

Her soft voice  
her car on the leaf-strewn street  
her silent phone on the bedside table.

Her porcelain fingers  
her body on the bathroom floor,  
the pill bottle in her grasp.

Her smile  
her ashes in her urn  
her flowers in the dirt.



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## At the End of our Days

by Emma Pence

Every television station has been blaring on about it for days, not even the kid's channels are playing what they should anymore. It's all men with waxy hair, wearing suits and smiling in spite of it all as they talk about how we're all going to die.

It all started a week ago; the president was on the TV. His suit was pressed so that not a single crease showed, and his mouth set in determination as he went on about all the big things he has planned for the country. I myself was sitting at home, reading through a book of recipes that my grandson had given me for my birthday. Personally, I couldn't care less what the president had to say, I've seen twelve men go through that office in my lifetime, so unless he turned to the camera and said my name, I would be content to let it remain in the background while my husband stared blankly at the screen.

I can't rightly say what the president thought of what happened next, but I imagine that he was none-too-pleased when his broadcast was interrupted and the logo for NASA filled up the screen.

I didn't notice it at first, but my husband letting out a stream of curses was more than enough to draw me out of my recipes and fix my eyes on the screen. Images flash almost too quickly for me to see while five different men speak over each other, using only about ten words I can understand between them.

It's a wonder that they ever got their message out at all, but soon enough it becomes clear. Death. Complete death. And not just the usual kind that the news stations always spoke about, the kind of death that made you afraid to go even so far to your mailbox in case there should be a bomb planted somewhere along the way. No, this is different.

Silence had hung between my husband and I as we allowed the information to sink in while the scientists speculated what the day that we die is supposed to be like.

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Sky turns to fire, the planet heats, anyone unlucky enough not to be killed immediately by the impact of the asteroid would be dead within days.

My husband and I don't say anything, but both of us realize at the same time what this will mean, that there will be complete panic. We've lived through riots before, but we both knew that what was coming would be nothing like what we've experienced before.

We hardly left our home after that, and watched through the lens of a TV camera as the rest of the world processed the news. They reacted even worse than we anticipated; every day there would be an update of everyone who had been killed in one of the riots, followed by details of how close the asteroid was getting to us.

Two weeks on, we stopped getting calls from our daughter. We hoped that she was just someplace that she couldn't get phone service, safe but out of reach, but we both said a silent prayer that night as we listened to the world break apart around us.

We don't talk about what's going to happen, we just go about our day as best we can, but I can see a faraway look in his eyes when he thinks I'm not looking, and I know that it won't be the asteroid that takes him from me.

It's been a month since they made the announcement, this morning I turned the television on to find that we couldn't secure a signal. My husband went outside this morning, and I haven't heard from him since.

It's pretty bright outside today, I think I'll draw the blinds shut.

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Why Dream?

*by Christian Ray*

The darkness is welcome  
compared to the swirling  
circus of confusion.

The darkness is a blanket,  
protecting from the intelligible clowns.

Why dream of the unknown,  
the jumbled horde  
of the crowd, laughing.

The tent of our subconscious collapses.

What do they do for us?

The darkness is welcome.

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**Bridges Make Me Think of Suicide**

by Grace Linde

*Minneapolis, Fall 2012*

Stone arch,  
sandstone and redbrick  
fit together like a puzzle,  
constructing a bridge  
a passage across water

Rapids  
rush and foam,  
current surging  
leaves into formation,  
a shape like a body  
by the bank beneath the bridge

Boys  
lounging on the  
isolated riverbank  
together, smoking  
away pain  
from morning to night  
their reflections in the water  
mirroring the place where their lifeless bodies  
of surrender will float



**Driving Through the Cities** *by Rachel Keller*

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Detox

*by Joshua Chase*

The jails, he said, the jails  
have better linens than this place  
and trust me, brother,  
I've been in a few.

This olfactory assault,  
it's molasses-thick  
and turns crystalline  
on your nose hairs.

And he was right.  
Whatever it was sure beat  
shit on the shower room floor  
and the drunks' pickled pores.

It's the stench  
of decomposing electrons  
and it lingers because  
maggots won't feed on dead souls.



**Hidden Silence** by *Brittany Waters*

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**Roadside Art**

*by Christian Ray*

They look like pictures  
the animals flat on the blacktop canvas  
artistically posed,  
frozen and unmoving like a statue in a museum.

They lie unmarked and flawless  
resting on the baking rock.  
Other times they are torn like confetti,  
spread out and divided.

The additional colors,  
like a child smearing paint  
on the clean blackness  
is sloppy and careless.

They look like pictures,  
as they slowly fade,  
decaying  
and uncared for.



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**A Black Boy's Hunger**

*by Musab Khalif*

To: African American society.

Subject: Absent Fathers

My soul aches with hunger  
Like a growling belly  
Longing for the warmth of love  
But I am faced with the icy blizzard of abandonment.

Wandering alone, far from home  
A lost child, I call out for my father  
Drenched with thirst  
But I go on, longing for my father.

Deaf to my voice when I call out-  
A rainstorm, darkness  
Thunder and the flash of lightning,  
You thrust your fingers in your ears.

The streets I walk are full of fathers  
Walking away, their faces  
Turned toward younger women  
And behind them following  
Like packs of hungry wolves  
Are lost boys, the earth their bed  
And the sky their ceiling.

Growing weary and tired of your games  
Listening for quiet phone calls  
Waiting for the darkness of your midnight arrivals,  
I grow weary with hunger.

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## Bayou Ghosts

by Grace Linde

They don't bury people underground in New Orleans. The city's below sea level and the bodies would be swallowed into oblivion. I have this weird mental picture of my parents dissolving into the water and turning up in the bayou outside the city. The thought makes me shiver. Fortunately, my parents are safely embalmed in a high, white marble tomb. I can see the shadows of the gathering clouds shifting on its granite top through the glass door.

I don't know whose idea it was to build a coffee shop across the street from a cemetery, but the tombs don't seem to deter customers. In any case, it's my parents' proximity that reminds me why I continue steaming milk and slicing banana bread. I do it for the promotion. I need that promotion. For school. For buying food, 'cause our foster mother nurses her bottle a little too closely. For Colton. So we can leave this God-forsaken city and he can have a better life somewhere the storms don't kill people. He still doesn't understand why mom and dad are gone.

Fingers close around my wrist. "Watch it, Jess!"

Hot coffee overflows the pot, flooding the burner plate, issuing a cloud of steam with a hiss that singes my fingers. I recoil with a gasp and Kashesha intervenes, shaking her head with a quiver of black dreadlocks.

"Seriously, Jess, you gotta stop being so absentminded. How do you expect to become a manager if you can't even brew coffee right?"

Her reproof stings more than the burn on my hand. I let the faucet run cold water over it, cooling my frustration. I never liked coffee in the first place and feel particularly resentful toward it now. Mom and I used to have chai tea together every night before bed. She would soak the tea bags until the water turned red and then add milk. I haven't had a cup in a year.

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Kash reaches under the countertop for the red first-aid kit and I glance at the T.V. suspended in the corner of the ceiling. Obviously the genius who thought coffee and croissants appeal in the company of the dead also believed people love to have a heart-to-heart conversation with a television blaring overhead. A slick-haired weatherman is giving a report on a tropical storm brewing off the coast, just thirty miles from here. Hurricane Chelsea, they're calling it. I glance out the window at the sky, the color of slate.

"Are you even listening to me?"

I look over my shoulder at Kash, holding out a packet of burn gel. "Sorry. I've got a lot on my mind."

I look at the T.V. again.

"The storms worry you, don't they?" A thin line disrupts her smooth, dark forehead and her lips press into a thin line.

I shrug.

"You can't keep being afraid of the weather just because your parents didn't make it."

I split the packet and squirt the gel onto my thumb and forefinger. "I can't help it. Colt and I are still stuck here." I throw the packet into the garbage bin and shake my head. "Every time the sky threatens rain he asks me if the house is going to flood."

A customer passes, leaving a ceramic mug on the countertop. We smile and thank him, and Kash drops the mug into the sink. "What are you going to do?"

"Finish senior year. The day I turn eighteen I'm outta here."

"Where will you go? How will you pay for it?"

Her questions annoy me. Probably because I don't have a clue where I'll go. "I'll get promoted and continue saving."

Kash meets my gaze and mine falters. I turn away and retrieve my apron to wash the dishes. Kash needs the promotion, too. Her mom's got cancer—breast, I think. Kash's dad sells insurance that no one wants to buy, so she and her four brothers work to help pay for the

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medical bills. I sympathize with her situation, but in my head, I need the promotion more. At least she still has her parents.

The bell jingles as the door opens, letting in a blast of hot air. I look up and my stomach somersaults. A tall dark-haired boy walks in, his eyes sweeping the room for the best corner to claim with the heavy messenger bag slung over one shoulder. Warm water soaks into my stomach suddenly and I jump away from the sink. Too late. It's overflowed, leaving me looking like I've wet my pants. Kash starts laughing and I bug out my eyes at her, quickly extracting the apron from around my neck. He's at the counter, wallet in hand, a polite smile on his face.

"Afternoon."

I leave the sopping apron in a wad by the sink and take refuge behind the cash register.

"Hi." If there's one reason in the entire world for me to stay in the state of Louisiana, its standing in front of me. "What can I get for you?"

He peruses the menu board and I watch him shamelessly. Like me, Jamie Reibel is in the white minority at the high school. Was, I should say. He graduated last year and is now at UNO. He doesn't know my name, or that I've had my eye on him since freshman year.

His lips twist to the side like he can't make up his mind. Then he shrugs and flips his wallet open. "Just a regular medium roast, black. Thank you, Jess."

I stare at him, forgetting to punch it into the register. He hands me a five dollar bill, his eyebrows rising in question.

"You know my name?"

One corner of his beautiful lips tips up. "You're wearing a nametag."

"Oh. Right." I take the bill, count out his change, and Kash passes over his coffee. A brief smile and thanks, he turns his back and walks away.

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I push the center of my rectangular glasses up the bridge of my nose. Guess there's no reason for me to stick around.

"Dammmmn, girl!" Kash drags it out like the devil's got a hold of her tongue, "You got it bad."

I push her playfully and shake my head. "Don't get me started."

She laughs, her lips parting easily to reveal two rows of shockingly white teeth. She's beautiful, her skin the rich dark color of our famed coffee. Not at all like mine, red and uneven. Her eyes large and expressive, and remind me that mine are too close together. Her smile is ever-ready for the customers, where mine is missed because the indent in my chin is so distracting. She's quirky and charming, and an expert barista. Not like me, who can't even brew coffee or wash dishes without catastrophic results. If anyone deserves the promotion, she does.

The old grandfather clock above the upright piano chimes four-thirty.

"Shoot, I'm late." I punch out, retrieve my backpack, and hail my friend. Outside, the air is thicker than pudding and smells of hot asphalt and rain. The sky steadily darkens and a warm wind tugs at my long dark ponytail. I dash across the street and let myself through the gate into the cemetery. I'm not obsessed with the dead or anything; it's just a shortcut to the riverfront. Normal people would drive a car to work, or take a bus, maybe a bike if worse came to worse, but not me. I live with Lila, who is as out of touch with reality as the coffee shop owner and decided to foster kids in her shack house on the bayou. Somebody in the CPA let that one slide. I mean, what if one of the kids walked off the dock and drowned? For all the drinking that lady does, it's a miracle she got past the paperwork, much less had children placed in her home.

The spider web paths of the cemetery lead me to a service road. I follow it a mile to the fishing docks, where I harbor Lila's small outboard motor boat. It's old, the red paint peeling off the sides, the

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stuffing coming out of the swivel seats. The whole contraption reeks of fish, and Lila's ex-husband's fishing equipment rusts in the bottom where it's been a good four years.

The dock creaks beneath my tennis shoes and I clamor into the bow, dumping my bag unceremoniously on the tackle box. Someone hails me from a nearby boat, and I wave at Charlie, a weathered fisherman. He's shirtless, his dark skin glistening with sweat, and though rather skinny, he has a paunchy stomach courtesy of all the beer he consumes. A cigarette hangs out of his mouth and he tucks it into the corner of his lip so he can talk.

"Better hurry up, honey! The rain's a'coming."

I settle into the chair in the stern. "You should take your own advice!"

He grins, literally a golden smile, as half of his teeth are filled. "But I 'in't got as far to go. You go straight home now, you hear?"

"Aye aye, captain. See you tomorrow." I yank hard on the cord until the motor sputters to life and pull away from the dock. As I ease the boat into high gear the rain begins to fall, sporadic, heavy drops at first, and then hard and fast, pinging off the metal sides of the boat, soaking me until my ponytail resembles straggly seaweed. The boat bounces on the choppy water and the wind drives the rain into my face. I'm squinting to stay in the middle of the channel and not veer into either bank.

I slow the boat down when I emerge on the wider bayou, raising the rudder so it won't get caught in the weeds. There are several communities of homes along the bayou, grouped together like any land neighborhood, but most of the houses are rather dilapidated, supported on unstable stilts with long docks. Lila's is the first of these groupings and perhaps the ugliest, with a sagging roof and peeling tile siding the color of urine. I steer the boat up to the lopsided dock and kill the motor, hurrying to tie it and grab my soaked backpack. A peal of thunder follows me up the dock to the screen door, which is banging on

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its hinges in the wind. The inside door is wide open and the rain has collected in a puddle on the yellow linoleum.

“Dammit, Lila.” I tie the screen shut with a bungee cord and slam the door, leaning against it to wipe my foggy glasses. The hall light flickers above me and television static starts to buzz in the next room. I track mud through the hall and into the kitchen, dropping my backpack onto the red, booth-style table in the corner. Colton’s cereal bowl sits there from this morning, its soggy Cheerio remnants a breeding ground for the flies.

“Colt? Where are you?”

A loud grunting snore answers me. I replace the milk carton to the fridge on my way into the living room, yelling at my little brother that he’ll get salmonella poisoning if he leaves it out all day.

He’s not there.

A large box fan whirs in the window, our only respite from the heat, and the T.V.’s black and white, popping like the corn Mom made us for the Christmas tree one year. Lila sleeps on the sagging couch, her skinny body lost in a pair of large sweatpants and shirt. The glass coffee table is strewn with old newspapers, a bottle of vodka, and a half-empty two-liter of Seven Up.

My lips tighten as I walk past her, into the bedroom I share with Colton. It’s quiet, but there’s evidence he’s been there. The blankets from my bottom half of the bunk are strewn over the floor, a telltale sign that the storm has freaked him out.

“Colt? You in here?” I stick my head in the closet where he sometimes builds a fort. My clothes are hanging where they should. Lightning cuts the sky outside, illuminating our room with a white flash. I get down on my hands and knees and press my face sideways against the stained carpet, inhaling the scent of stale cigarette smoke and cat litter. The telephone rings and Lila wakes and starts swearing. I run into the next room and follow the ringing to a heap of blankets on the floor. “Lila, where’s Colton?”

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She mutters under her breath and rolls over. The phone squawks at me and I answer it.

“Jess! Guess what?”

I open the sliding doors of the coat closet and peer in. “What, Kash?”

“Casey’s given me the promotion! I start manager training on Monday.”

My heart dives into my stomach and I sag against the coats. “That-that’s great. Really well done, Kash, you deserve it.” My voice doesn’t sound right.

“Thanks! I couldn’t believe it. He said my work is really impressive. My mom is going to be so happy.”

I swallow the lump that has risen in my throat and go into my bedroom, closing the door behind me. “I bet. Look, I gotta go, Colt’s freaking out about the storm.”

“Right. Amazing he made it this long without coming after you!” She laughs but I drop the phone and rip back the plastic blinders at the window. The fishing boat bobs in the water, a gray blob in the haze of rain. My heart leaps into my throat and begins tattooing a beat somewhere behind my ears. The little blue paddle boat is gone from where I tied it to the dock yesterday after going out with Colt.

I’m running to the hall, grabbing the keys off the hook by the door, leaving the screen door blowing in the wind like Colt had done. My wet sneakers squelch as I run to the boat, yank the rope free, and jam the key into the ignition. The roar of the motor is lost in a grumble of thunder, and lightning rifts the sky, shocking the water white.

Oh God, help me find him. I’ll do anything you want. I’ll stay here the rest of my life if you just let me find him.

I’m not the praying type, and somehow I don’t think God makes deals, but I’m desperate for any help right now. The bank on my left is a massive black clot of forest, the bayou on my right stretching endlessly in a marshy maze, covered with thick fog that hovers like a



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ghost. One wrong turn could get you stuck in the middle of nowhere, entrenched in weeds. During the day you can follow little red flags along the bank to the city, and I've navigated this channel so many times I don't even notice them anymore. But Colton. He can barely move the paddle boat on his own.

Lightning splits, followed by a clap of thunder. Close this time, and my metal boat is a magnet carried on an electrical current. When Colt was younger, Dad explained to him that for every five seconds you count between lightning and thunder, the lightning is one mile away from you. Sometimes I wish Dad never told him that. Every storm since, Colt panics when the lightning comes within a five mile radius.

I'm squinting through the angry rain, following the natural curves of the channel, yelling Colt's name until my voice is hoarse. My shoulders are quaking in my soaked t-shirt, my jeans chafing my legs. Suddenly the motor chokes and the boat loses momentum. Panic shocks every nerve in my body as if I've been electrocuted and I drop onto my stomach to glimpse the propellers. Bubbles sputter at the surface of the waves as the blades try to turn, jammed with dark green weeds like the feelers of a water demon.

"No, no, please, not now!" I turn off the ignition and try to extricate the propellers, but the mass of weeds is too thick. I turn wildly in the boat, tears streaming down my cheeks. Up ahead, the channel splits into a Y and I can hear a faint crying.

"Colton!" I seize the paddles lying on the floor of the boat and slide them into the clamps on either side of the hull. "Colton, I'm coming!" The waves resist my rowing and my slight shoulders strain against the weight of the water. Just as spasms begin shooting up and down my arms, I emerge onto the right portion of the split and crane around in my seat. The shape of the paddleboat appears through the haze, rocking gently on the waves, caught in a patch of cattails. There's another shape just beyond it, larger, purring. A fishing boat.

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My heart leaps and I drag the oars through the water. “Hang on, Colt, I’m coming!”

His crying intensifies as I draw near and I paddle into the weeds before abandoning the oars. His rescuer has pulled him into the boat and scrambles to the bow now to help me over.

“Here! Grab my hand.” Jamie Reibel’s face appears white and slack underneath the hood of a red jacket slick with rain. I tip in head-over-heels and he pulls me to my feet. “Are you alright?” His forehead is plowed, his eyes searching my face. “Jess, right? Are you okay?”

I push the wet bangs out of my eyes, nodding. “Yes, yes. Thank God you found Colt!” My little brother huddles shirtless in the boat and I pull him into my arms, holding his shaking body tight, my tears mingling with the rain.

“What were you thinking, taking the paddleboat out in this storm?”

Colton convulses with sobs. “I-I was worried about you! You didn’t come home on time.”

“And what were you going to do, paddle all the way to the riverfront?”

He buries his head against my chest. I glance over my shoulder at Jamie. “How did you find him?”

He squats down beside us. “Left the coffee shop when the rain began to fall. I was considering turning back when I got caught in the storm, but I heard someone screaming and saw him stuck in the weeds.”

I nod, closing my eyes. “Thank you. My rudder jammed in the weeds, I didn’t think I would reach him.”

Jamie rises. “Don’t worry, I’ll take you back home.” He brings the motor to life and the boat slowly edges out of the marshy channel. I sit back against the bench and try to shield Colton from the rain. “Don’t you ever, ever come out on the bayou on your own, alright? You know I always come home, why did you try to find me?”

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He draws back and I push his dark hair off his forehead. “You were late! You’re always at work, a-always gone.”

I trace his tear tracks with my thumb. “I do it for us, Colt. So we can get out of here.”

He shakes his head and hiccups.

“Don’t you want to leave? We could be independent, free of Lila and Child Services.”

He shakes his head again, trying to gain control of his tears. I understand them well. They’re the kind that come from the pit of your stomach and give you a headache when they’re over. “It’s okay. You’re safe now.” I kiss the top of his head and close my eyes to the surging motion of the boat.

When we reach the dock, I help Colt out of the boat and then turn back to Jamie. “You shouldn’t be on the water in a storm like this. Tie it up until the lightning stops.”

He smiles, but shakes his head. “Thanks, but I should just get it home. It’s not far. The rain is lessening, anyway.”

I don’t want to argue with him after what he’s done for Colt. “Thank you again for staying with him.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll come back tomorrow and help you get your boats back.”

I nod and help him push away from the dock. I watch the retreating back of his red jacket for a moment and then follow Colt into the house. Inside, I can hear the shower running in the bathroom. Lila will drown herself for the next half hour and I’m glad, ‘cause Colt’s appearance will only make her rage. I make Colt hot chocolate out of a Nestle packet, swirling extra whipped cream on top, thinking about the hot chocolate I make at work that tastes so much better. Colt doesn’t understand how important that promotion was to us.

But as I watch him drink it, wrapped up in a blanket, whipped cream tracing a moustache across his upper lip, I start to wonder if maybe he’s the one who understood what’s really important. Right

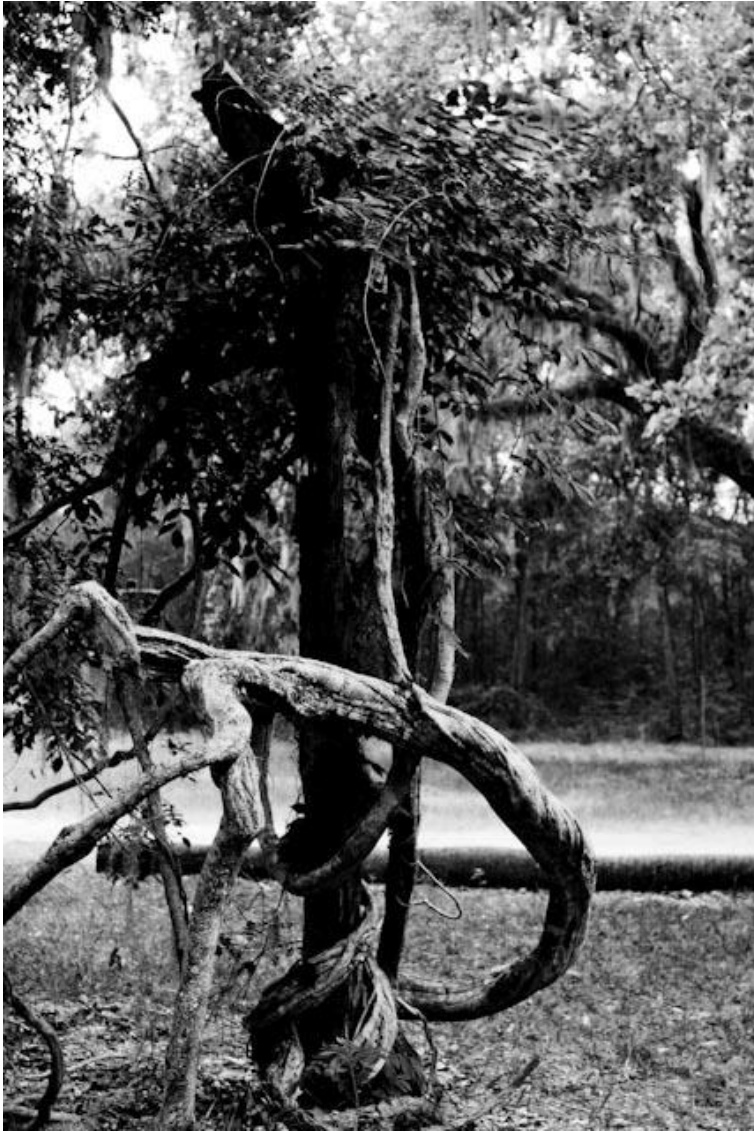
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now, this is the best hot chocolate he's ever had. The television comes back on and I recognize the voice of the oily-haired weather reporter.

"...air currents are sweeping Hurricane Chelsea north of the coast and away from the city."

I walk into the living room and lean against the door frame, watching the red swirls minimizing on the radar screen. Evacuations are being canceled. Levees are holding. The eye of the storm is passing. False alarm. Maybe the important thing is not just finding a way to get away from the storms. Maybe it's learning to ride them out.

I want something soothing to drink, too, and I make what I haven't in a long time—a mug of chai. Colt joins me on the couch and I tuck a blanket around us, kissing the top of his damp head as he burrows into my shoulder. Together we listen to the storm abate outside, and as the rain ceases drumming on the roof, he falls asleep in my arms.



**Withering Growth** by *Kali Anderson*

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**Miracle Workers**

by Austin Bosse

these hands are pleasing hands.  
they need people to ask  
for favors. they don't fright  
stitching up torn flesh. these hands  
are brave hands.  
they don't like to be prisoners in pockets.  
these hands are steady and strong,  
they go into battles in the core of people,  
these hands are gifted hands.  
these hands are healing hands.  
i have known them  
to console the concerned.

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**Winter Nights**

*by Adam Woodward*

Trains hum distantly, resonance  
strengthening the ground—

and with the stillness of snow,  
creatures sleep close to silence,

Christmas lights sing without sound,  
falling stars are countable.

Our breath is measured by sight,  
puffs escaping as if we were chimneys.

Frost gathers on windows, fingers  
trace hearts and tic-tac-toe. Ice

gloves the night, warming me numb,  
and mutes the coming morning.

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**Humanity**    *by Mary Stokes*

It was in  
the bruising of ink  
on her hands;  
the curl  
of her hair  
against the snow.

It was in  
the unspoken  
spilling from  
her lips;  
the sincerity  
of angels  
pressed into  
the ground.

She lays  
like a forgotten doll  
in the snow,  
gaining perspective,  
she says.  
She only finds  
the beautiful  
in the broken;  
she can only love  
what has been  
marred.

The broken chalk,  
the footprints in  
the snow, and  
the asymmetry  
of your face.



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## Men Can Do Anything

*by Jessica Lane*

Men all too often think they can do anything. This holds true with the kitchen sink. It started out with a small leak that would have only required a pipe wrench. The phrase “pipe wrench” turns into a river flowing onto the kitchen floor. Their inability to ask for help when necessary must be from the cave man era, when there was little to no communication. The grunts and groans under the kitchen sink proves this theory to be true. Unfortunately, most people do not speak cave man, so we do not understand what they are saying. Could it be that they had a past life where the motto was “fend for yourself”, that the only way to survive was to rely on yourself? Now, this could not possibly be true due to they cannot cook for themselves, clean, do laundry or coordinate clothes without a woman’s help. Maybe it is machoism that is eating them from the inside out; that they have something to prove to the world around them. This could hold partly true due to when we hear the word “macho” we think of masculinity; big, strong, indestructible man. With them not asking for help they are building their muscles by a point of a percent, and therefore increasing their masculinity. The only problem with this is that after staring at a person from the waist down for days, with no improvement, it starts to look like stupidity. It is the mother’s fault, it always is; they raise their sons to think that they can do anything, be anything, and accomplish anything. Instead of giving their sons a well rounded childhood with failure and disappointments, they sugar coated their childhood with all of these empty promises. Now their poor son is lying under the kitchen sink with the pipe wrench in one hand, and the other hand is scratching the top of his head wondering how in the world he is going to fix this. However, because he thinks he can do anything, he will spend the next week sleeping under the sink with his tool bag next to him, saying unimaginable things, wishing he could just shut the water off and say the leak was fixed. When he is asked if he is okay, or if he needs help,

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his response is simple, “I am just about done, just a few more minutes.” We all know what this means, “I am working on it, and you will be lucky if there is going to be any running water coming out of that faucet, and not just from the pipe under the sink.”

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## Checkmate

by Emma Pence

Rain mounted a frontal assault against the windows, each droplet being hurled against the windowpane by the wind, hitting with the force of a bullet expelled from a gun. The windows held a strong defense, though they rattled in protest to their treatment, and protected the room inside from becoming both dark and wet. Lightning clashed every few seconds, lighting the room up like daytime before it was plunged into the dim candlelight once again.

Hidden in the shadows of the room, flickering candles between them, sat the lone two occupants, both bundled (so tightly that they almost couldn't move) in any blankets that could be found in the small apartment. Their breath clouded in front of them, and between them, among the candles, a board checkered with black and white rested.

"Check," a small voice said.

"Check?" The man blinked, shifting his cocoon and looking at the board, eyes locked onto it as he studied it in the dim light. "Rhonda, how can it be check? You're nine."

"So?" Rhonda tilted her head, pulling the blankets tighter around her. "It's still a check, uncle Peter, see?" She pointed to each part. "Just like you taught me."

"Huh. Well damn. Looks like I'm raising a little know-it-all." Peter moved his king into a safe spot, not flinching at all as the windows shook from the force of the burst of thunder. Rhonda, on the other hand, looked at the window with wide eyes.

Peter gently prodded her to make her next move, he didn't ask her if the rain scared her, he knew all too well that it did, and why that was. The fading scar across her forehead spoke all too clearly of that, and all Peter had to do was close his eyes for that day to come rushing back to him. Hardly more than a year before, on a night that was so like this night that he could almost share Rhonda's fear.

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A phone ringing, a voice far too detached from the words they said droning on and on, buzzing in his ear and ringing in the back of his mind, forgotten quickly as the core words swam behind his eyes and burned into his consciousness.

Car accident... Slippery roads... Dead on the scene... Critical condition...

The knowledge that he couldn't fly down immediately, that to do so would be risking himself in the same conditions that his sister's family had been caught in, hit him hard. The knowledge that he couldn't go down there to hold his sister's daughter while her mother and father left her forever...

He had only seen the car once after the accident, and it had been a single instance that left him sick and wanting to vomit. For anyone to have survived that, for one as fragile as Rhonda to come out with only a few scars... His nightmares hadn't quite gone away after all of those thoughts entered his-

"-Uncle Peter, it's your turn." Rhonda's voice pulled him back to the present, back to the room where the water was hitting the "Ah, right, sorry kiddo." He made a move, hardly noticing the path that his hand took, only noticing how steady it remained despite the turmoil within him.

Rhonda looked at the board for only a moment before making her move.

"Checkmate."

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**Remembering her Singing**

*by Musab Khalif*

It was like watching an old classic American sitcom,  
Every song tells a story about back home, rich with culture.  
She would sing for hours and hours, singing about war,  
Singing about politics and singing about peace.  
Her voice cracked, her arm shook, but she was at peace.

The smell of Arabian coffee with its enveloping aroma,  
As the sun rises glistening on her old dark tan wrinkled skin  
She sings “get out, get out, war has come, get out, get out...”  
Her light blue eyes defying her body, spaced out  
Sitting across each other, the light scorching tauntingly off the glass  
dining table.



**Spigot in the Pasture** *by Rachel Keller*

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## Orchards

*by Adam Woodward*

An apple, a treat  
at the end of the day,  
juice melting like wax  
over the heat of dying  
candles, lighting  
this darkness. We laugh  
on memories, ponder  
the inevitable, toast  
with plastic wine glasses,  
apple juice for friends  
we share and love.

Now, when I pick  
a honeycrisp, palm  
its cool strength,  
admire its pale red  
arc, I remember what  
it was like to sing out,  
snap shot life, wander  
dazed in happiness, and rest in trees  
in hoodies against the wind.

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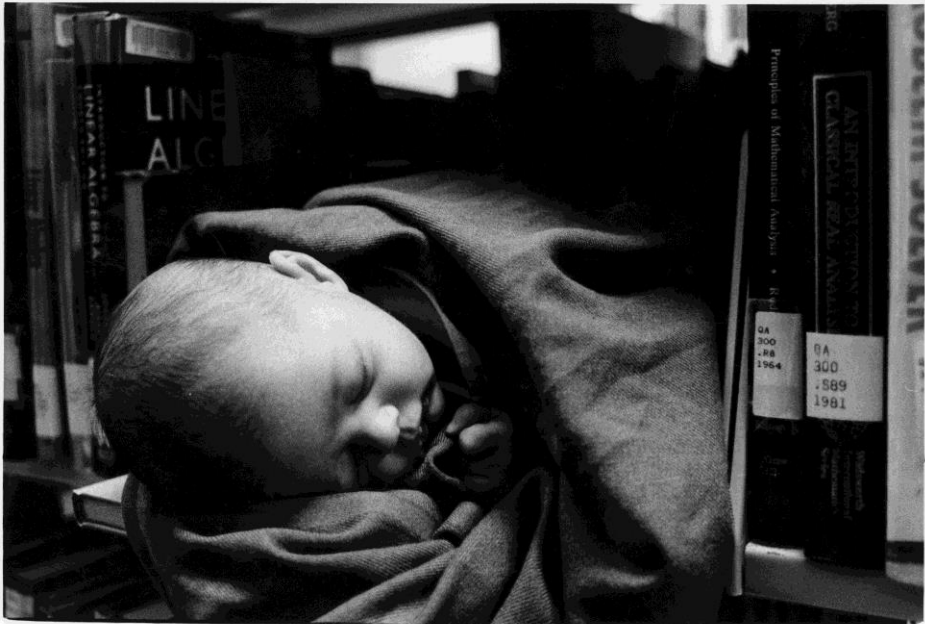
## I Remember

*by Mary Stokes*

The smell of gray, the wet city streets.  
The metal sink, filled with  
soapy water, the towering dishes.  
The dog's sigh as he curled  
by the door, ice melting on his  
fur. The crow's feet outlining  
the weariness of Dad's face.

The musty coat closet – the scent  
of decades of winter; the tired, fragile  
snow-smell lingering. The sound  
of Mother's ring hitting  
the side of the Dutch oven, and  
watching the snow fall  
from a prison of windows  
and mathematics; the feel  
of being loved to sleep.





**Untapped Potential** by *Kristine Holmes*

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**A Heart**

*by Kara Eikvar*

This swollen organ in my chest  
Pumping  
Thumping  
The quality that's my best  
This organ called a heart  
Breathing  
Believing  
That my own life I can start  
A heart with which I choose to love  
Reaching  
Teaching  
For everything that is above  
With love I do not fear  
Trials  
Smiles  
All I love is always near  
Overflowing and bursting wide  
Flood  
Blood  
The power of love on my side

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## **Strumming**

*by Beca Gleason*

White, callused fingertips press  
against thin metal strings.  
Careful fingers pluck with  
a pristine knowledge  
which ones are muted,  
which are sustained.  
Each chord humming  
like a six person chorus.  
Each voice contributes  
to a unique sound.  
Each string ringing clear,  
standing on its own.  
They move and  
tremble with passion.  
Resounding a pure feeling.

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**Homage to Her Fingers**

*by Beca Gleason*

Those fingers are strong fingers,  
they need tasks  
Weeding, stirring.  
They don't like the calluses,  
from years of digging in the loamy earth.  
These fingers have never failed,  
they grasp wheelbarrows loaded with rocks,  
a baby on each hip,  
a boy on her back with ease.  
They gently pick a small flower.  
They move quickly about a needle,  
and slowly stroke a baby's cheek.  
I have known them  
to make many a job  
seem simple.

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**Words**

*by Kara Eikvar*

I was so surprised  
To find out it was true  
That such simple words  
Could scorch and burn right through  
This organ called a heart  
A lump of flesh alone  
Broken oh so harshly  
Like concrete against bone  
Such simple words  
With no matter to their name  
But their power I admire  
And one day will learn to tame

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## **Thunder and Lightning**

*by Phil Hammitt*

An old deserted road we sat,  
There's a storm in the distance, approaching fast.  
In each other's arms we listen and wait,  
With thunder and lightning, we're never too late.  
The lightning flashed and we counted to three,  
Waiting for the rumble that was meant to be.  
I remember that night like it was yesterday,  
In each other's arms, promising together, we would stay.  
Lightning flashed as we began to kiss,  
It's that feeling inside we will always miss.  
The thunder in our hearts seemed to rumble on,  
Our love for each other would never be so strong.  
In that storm, nothing was out of place,  
Even the rain, tiptoeing upon your face.  
I longingly wait for that storm to renew,  
You holding me, me holding you.

To the one I love, Gwen.

YmYP

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## Camaraderie

by Kristine Holmes

We were sisters. Everyone told us we looked just alike, all three of us. But looking in the mirror side by side one day we couldn't see it. We were different in every way, and not really even friends, but for this occasion we were partners and that would change things forever.

We had just moved to Turkey with our parents and brother. Until then we had let the age differences between us create distance. Each of us had our own circle of friends and interests. The only time these interests coincided was during a family event. Moving to Turkey isolated us to such a point that quiet DeAnna, extravagant Missy and I the peacemaker were constantly invading each other's bubbles. We had been told we had to go out in pairs. Doing this wouldn't be so bad except one of us would then be stuck at home left to the communication black hole we had moved to, no internet, no TV, and no phone. Our small apartment was piled with suitcases and boxes from moving, and the crowded rooms and cold cement walls gave us a need to get outside.

We put on our jackets and thrust ourselves out into the constant wind that comes from the Mediterranean Sea. The wind twisted our hair, causing my sisters and me to laugh and fight to keep our disheveled hair under control as we followed the rough cobblestone road to the rocks where the water ebbed and flowed, causing foamy whirlpools before heading back out to sea.

"Do you think we could make it all the way around the peninsula?" DeAnna asked. Missy, the youngest of us, bounced on the balls of her feet. "I think we could!" she said.

"Sure," I agreed diplomatically.

We gamboled along the curve of the Datca Peninsula, reveling in the warmth the sun was letting off even as we enjoyed the brisk wind. "What do you think mom will make for dinner?" I asked.

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“I wish we could have pizza for dinner.” Missy sighed. We glumly contemplated having chicken and rice again as our shoes and hems got wet in the saltwater spray as the afternoon wind whipped up the waves. I could feel the sticky drops of salt water dry on my face and neck with each crash of water onto the rocks.

Finally we were there, at the very tip of the peninsula. Missy spun in a circle, flinging her arms up into the air as she giggled. Quietly looking at the white-capped waves, her elbow resting on her knee, DeAnna sat in the crook of a rock. “I think we should head back, because the waves are going to get even higher on the other side.”

“It would be fun, though.”

“Yeah, but I don’t want to wash all that salt water out of our clothes by hand, Missy,” I stated firmly.

“Ok, let’s go then,” Missy snapped and immediately began climbing upward on the rocks towards dry land. DeAnna and I looked at each other, shrugged our shoulders, and began to trek after her.

As I felt soft grass under my feet, the heavy salt in the air lightened, and the wind stopped tearing at my clothes so fiercely. “Where are we?” DeAnna whispered. I gazed at the low, long buildings with metal bars in the windows and doors making a half circle around a graveled area. My stomach turned in unease as I noticed the dark blue military style vans parked in front of guarded doorways.

I turned to find Missy kneeling beside a brown and black puppy. She was happily scratching him behind the ears as his tongue lolled out, while his whole body trembled with joy. DeAnna and I rushed toward her, and then we noticed the semi-automatic machine guns. Unfazed, Missy bounced up and said, “Hi.” I pushed myself in front of my sisters and held up my hands cautiously.

Four young men in camouflage uniforms were talking to us in Turkish. The language sounded like one long word with empathetic hand gestures punctuating it. I shrugged my shoulders while keeping my hands out, “Pardon. Pardon. I only speak English.” One man,



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shorter than the others, stepped forward, his gun swinging against his side with his jaunty gait. “No, come,” he announced with a heavy accent. I nodded my head and grabbed Missy and DeAnna’s hands.

“How do we get out?” The soldier looked at me confused. I dropped my sister’s hands and made walking motions, then pointed back toward the rocks with the waves crashing up and over them. Then I shrugged my shoulders, “Go?” He turned on his heel and started walking away from us. The other three soldiers formed a line behind us.

We followed the unspoken command to follow them past the silent gray buildings, the military vans, and the patrolling soldiers, arriving at an eight foot gate with barbed wire on it. The soldier unlocked and opened the gate then gestured absentmindedly for us to move forward while leaning against it.

Holding each other’s hands we carefully walked through the gate and found ourselves at the top of a hill, leading down a wide street that led to the low cement buildings in the center of Datca. I looked back over my shoulder to see the soldier who spoke to us smiling goofily, while another frowned fiercely and pointed at the large white sign with red letters on the gate that read “No Trespassing” in four languages.

Being the only three teenage American girls in town, I felt our walk of shame as keenly as the many eyes of the villagers staring at us. I kept my eyes on the brick paved roads and walked as quickly as possible to our apartment. Even the effervescent Missy walked without talking, a pensive expression on her normally smiling face. With an unspoken agreement, we didn’t discuss the afternoon on the walk home.

The dinner table was covered with plates and cups, its surface barely big enough to house the six place settings needed for our family. After my Dad prayed for the food, my Mom dished up chicken and rice for the fourth time that week.

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My Dad filled up his fork with food. “I was having Chi with Aysin, when he told me something interesting.”

“Oh?” Mom ate a bite with a question wrinkling her forehead.

“Apparently some foreign girls got escorted off that military base on the peninsula this afternoon.” Both parents looked at us.

“There was this puppy...”

“We were just climbing on the rocks...”

“We were trying...” We all started talking in a rush; our earlier camaraderie threatened as we bowed to the pressure of our parents. Dad held up his hand with a smile. “Why don’t we try this one at a time.” We shifted uncomfortably in our seats, not wanting to be the one who started talking first.

“How did Aysin hear about this?” Mom asked.

“His cousin heard the gossip about the American girls, and knew that Aysin would tell me about it. After Aysin talked to me, two more men approached me using Aysin as an interpreter to let me know what my girls had been up to.” Dad winked at us.

Seeing that we wouldn’t be getting into trouble we relaxed into our chairs and began eating. The unspoken deal had changed; taking turns between bites, we related how we had gone exploring and accidentally meandered onto a military base after a puppy. After the merriment of the story had passed, we talked about the difference between cultures and the need to be cautious in our new home.

“Do you want to go to the market tomorrow, Guys?” I was surprised to hear my voice ask. Nights before we had fallen asleep in silence; tonight we started a new tradition, making plans for tomorrow. My sisters and I talked long into the night before going to sleep. Suddenly being thrust into a new culture had pulled us together and started building a friendship; until then we had been living in our own bubbles. Our adventure had given us a type of camaraderie that only a shared adventure and budding relationship can bring.

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