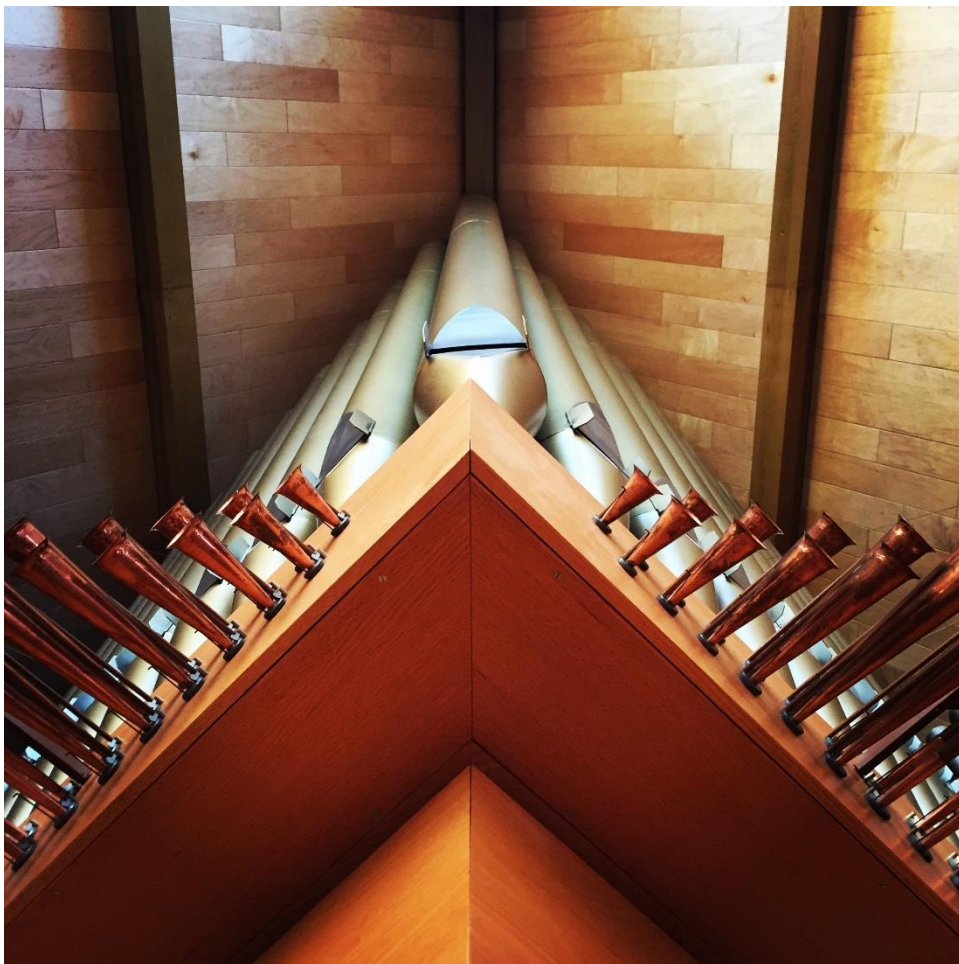

RAPIDS REVIEW



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The Rapids Review

A literary arts magazine

A publication of Anoka-Ramsey Community College Creative Writing Club.

Club Members

Bryan M. Anderson
Connor Rystedt
Grant Brengman
Hope Omohumen
Kareem Abdulrahman
Pete Howe
Priscila Cross
Rebecca Higgins
Robert Revering

Advisor

Tracy (Youngblom) Turner

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photo by Chris Dang

Stony Foundation

Nicole Anderson

As I gaze into the abstract picture, it reminds me
how a past and future can develop into one image.
Possibly the chapters of my book of life,
hope, strength, despair, faith and character.

Stony mountains of granite and marble
guard the blackened river as it winds
into the distance, vanishes into the horizon,
the charcoal teal clouds of a sunset meets the ebony river,
a collision of brilliant silver beacons shoot out of the sky,
like a lighthouse in the distance
searching...for the next chapter of hope in life.

The last chapter of my past, faded into the stones, solid,
a reflection of life and the foundations of your past built.
Strong and true never to be moved, yet the flowing
of the river winding, like a ribbon tying it all together.

New Tradition

Connor Rystedt

What's so wrong with keeping tradition?

Why modernize with Mother Earth

Declining into this chaotic condition?

Call up Time,

Prepare to print a new edition.

Pray to your own God

That the People will listen.

Would T.S. stay true

To meter and form

If he had known

how our globe

Would

come to warm?

Would Frost accost the people more boldly,

Or was Fire and Ice that man's scorn?

Would Emerson transcend and leave us

Below withering in the forlorn?

A bullet from the New

Into the old one's head.

Ezra Pound is laughing

In his bed.

Yet so much beauty,

Enough to pity what comes next.

In a case like this I wish tradition were dead.

Iva

Phil Hammitt

Spilt milk – cheerios rolling across the floor,
Some escaping, only to be found under the refrigerator door.
Different colored finger paintings – planted on a wall.

Like a bird in flight, laughing she jumps on the bed,
Tearful hugs, a cry, when she falls and bumps her head.
A smile of love, band aids on a knee, after her fall.

An old deck of cards, shuffled, dealt – a game of chance,
The excitement of letting her win, laughter, joy – her romance.
Everyday day something new, as I wait for her anticipated antics.

That push on a swing, pretending she's flying high – into outer space.
Her head tipped back, a smile, the sun glimmers upon her happy face,
Birthday, Christmas, a heart on a card,
Loving her is not very hard.

Starless Night

Priscila Cross

Look at the sky, it is starless tonight
A constellation almost invisible
Wish upon this endless and dark sky
Surely tomorrow the sun will illuminate

A constellation almost invisible
Dimmest star, sixth magnitude star
The sky will tomorrow illuminate
Alone I became nothing but stardust

Dimmest star, sixth magnitude star
Only you were able to find me
Alone no more, I am but stardust
Look at the sky, not starless tonight.

Elephant Embrace

Kalie Havener

The ground shook as the great beast threw his head back and shouted. I have never been more unsure or curious until I saw the elephant grimace in my direction. I adjusted my dress to allow a staggered breath to enter my tense body, like trying to push air into a tiny rubber balloon. This was the first time I had ever been to the Renaissance Festival, so I took it all in. The crowd consisted of women in corseted dresses and men carrying giant roasted turkey legs in one meaty hand, and a goblet of sweet mead in the other. Small cottages held treasures: giant metal swords, jingling jewelry, etc. The people sauntered here and there: jubilant, rosy cheeked, and fully emerged in the time period we all pretended to be a part of. Two lucky people dressed as the “King and Queen” and were treated as royalty of the festival. They walked through the crowds, parting them like the Red Sea. If anyone appeared to be disrespecting their “Highness,” they were locked up in the stocks and ridiculed in front of everyone. It was all in great fun, and I was enjoying myself like the happiest fairy in the forest.

The sun began to crouch below the trees, a skilled hunter, only noticeable to me who could feel the presence out of the corner of my eye. That is when the sunlight attacked, blinding me full force until I could no longer move forward,

grasping out for some sort of relief. I brushed against my best friend Jarrell's sturdy tree-trunk of a forearm. His squat muscular torso was covered in an off white button down, his thick skin the color of dark stout beer. I looked into his pure white smile, his teeth the color of dove soap, emerging from behind the scraggly curtains of his scruffy black beard. The late August air was crisp, slightly comforting without being overbearing, like a sweater with a few holes in it.

I climbed to the top of the stairs, while the shouts of praise from my friends below filled me up to the brim with ease. Jarrell and I reached the jingling burgundy wooden seat which lay unstable atop the elephant's broad back. Sticking my thumb nail in between my two front teeth as I subconsciously do out of nerves, I was still quite unsure about the whole ride. Jarrell turned towards me, cocking his head while smirking, saying something along the lines of, "You can do this buddy. You'll be just fine. I promise."

Life is funny. I went my entire life without knowing Jarrell, and I never thought twice about it. The moment we met--as strangers who are destined to meet do--it is like I lived my entire life thus far with only one arm. After I met him, I realized I had been hugging people wrong all this time. Besides, let's face it, one-arm hugs are probably one of the most awkward things in the world. Within a short time of knowing him, he was able to slow down the world, presenting it to me like a

looking glass; reflections of hidden meanings and lessons came to life, as if each object of truth was suspended on a delicately spinning mobile inside an infant's nursery. He clearly pointed out the flawed logic behind every mistake that I have blamed myself for, and through reflective golden sunrises and starry space, Jarrell had been teaching me that: we can turn any passionate dream into a reality, perfection is an illusion created by the shallow, (and should be avoided at all costs), and most importantly I must love myself while others are loving me. Friendship is a carefully constructed quilt, stitched together over time with golden thread-like memories.

While crawling cautiously into the cramped seat on top of the creature, I began to feel at ease. I was letting this feeling wash over me like the curling tide in a coastal whirlpool, allowing all anxieties to be swept out into the ocean like sand dollars and starfish. As the elephant shifted feet, trembling bubbles of terror were rising up inside me once more. My insides were sticky with fear, like the swirling of cotton candy being forced into a tiny carnival cone. I felt unable to go through with the ride at first, but looking up I met Jarrell's chocolate eyes which always calmed me down. I saw beads of sweat like tiny glass marbles cluttering his prematurely receding hairline. He wiped his vast brow with the back of his coffee colored hand, his fingernails small pieces of creamy caramel. Although he was sweating, I knew everything would be okay, just as he promised. Jarrell's button-down shirt flapped

sharply, cutting the wind as the elephant talked to us through our uncertainty with spurts of sound issuing from his trunk, like bursts of loud music erupting at the end of a song in surprise. Beneath this creature's heavily lidded eyes lay a fierce and kindred soul. I noted the similarities of my best friend and this elephant: both determined like a blinding white light, as proud as a new father on the birth of his first born son, admirable in the way they care for their loved ones. The elephant lifted its massive feet, and we were off on a journey with all fear and emotional distress sailing away on a zephyr. I had no time to be afraid. Letting go of the small wooden dowel keeping me safe from falling, my arms opened like a pair of wings and I was floating through the air like a yellow monarch in a sunny garden. Closing my eyes, I inhaled deeply the aromas of smoky supple turkey legs and a familiar musty smell issuing from the costumes we were wearing. Determination drove me to get on the elephant's back, but it was Jarrell's support while he was standing right by my side that did the trick. Growing up, there are certain events which can take you by surprise and change life as you know it. It is like putting on a pair of tortoise shell glasses against your will, only to realize that you are able to see clearly for the first time in your life. You think nothing will be as thrilling as seeing a blur of colors turn into an outline of silvery green leaves, snapping and flickering in the tree's branches against the sunlight. You become humble the first time you are aware of each tiny leaf's individuality, gratefully seeing them no longer as one giant green

orbit. The first time you taste what life has to offer growing up is the first time you ride a bike, the first time you fall off, and the first of many times you will have to pick yourself back up. My friend Jarrell helped me remember that warm feeling of childhood, and that growing up doesn't mean leaving that place behind--but rather always keeping a special space in your heart for it.

Lifting my arms out to feel the sensation of flying, I realized I no longer feared falling, because even when my head is stuck in the clouds I know Jarrell will always have his feet planted firmly on the ground, like the mighty elephant. At first I thought the sun was attempting to rob us blind of sight, but as I shielded my eyes with my hand which was no bigger than a child's, I became aware of something else. What I thought was an inconvenient amount of sunlight turned out to be a beautiful mistake. I saw the sun dancing with the trees, a nymph casting sparkling crystals of light on all those caught in her shower; the warm golden light reflected upon my red hair like an amber halo.

While the ride was coming to an end, Jarrell provided me his rugged, solid hand. Lifting my heavy velvet skirt of royal blue, I struggled to swing a short leg over the hairy grey back of the animal, trying not to trip on the rickety wooden platform. I couldn't help smiling. Jarrell and I thanked the caretaker, waving good-bye to the elephant as we descended the shaky staircase to join our group of friends again.

Elation filled me like a sugar rush, as I began spinning around in exhilaration, my thick skirts billowing out as I twirled around and around. Jarrell embraced me in a caring way, enfolding my entire body inside his tree trunk arms. Grinning, we both knew this was one of the many beautiful days and adventures alike we would get to share, because this indeed was only the beginning of a marvelous friendship.



Walking North on Southern Trails

Bryan M. Anderson

Conformity is for the weak,
The desperate, the narrow-minded,
Those that feel like it's the only option.

The assembly line you believe life is doesn't exist.
I'm the ghost in the machinery;
I'm the glitch that causes deformities from your norm;
I'm the differentiation that you hate.

I'm the north-walker on the southern trail;
Persuading many to tread east and west.
Those that stay will scorn us,
Labeling us as freaks.

Well I'd rather be a freak
Than what you call normal.

Take a Chance

Dylan Merrifield

I have been known as random,
a gambler's instrument.
They ask me for luck.
I can only give so much.

All is decided when
I have been cast.
From the moment I plummet from their hand,
to the moment I clatter to the table,
breaths are held
and hopes are raised.

Cheers and tears,
are often heard.
I have granted victory,
and I have granted defeat.

It is not my choice,
the wins and losses I bring.
The glory and misfortune
go to those who take a chance.



LYING ABOUT THE TRUTH

Connor Rystedt

I can't remember exactly what night it was, but it was cold. It was the kind of bitter cold where every gust of wind felt like it was peeling flesh from the cheeks. I stood in the fluorescent light under the canopy outside of the gas station, watching the little screen on the station tank as I fueled my truck. I rocked on my toes in anticipation, cursing the numbers as they continued to climb. I just wanted to be out of the cold.

It wasn't a long drive home from the gas station. Actually, most of it seemed to go by in a blur. The roads were caked with snow, and the harsh breeze moved icy dust over the asphalt. I remember coming to a red light on Main Street and having to pump the breaks on account of the glaring ice. They say that a majority of car accidents happen when you're closest to home. I guess when you feel safe enough you just stop being careful.

My street is a long and curving one. Houses line the road and different streets and circles branch off of it. At that time of the night, all of the houses seemed dead, but for the occasional light in the entryway. I had scarce seen another soul on that ride home. It was as if the higher power had intended for me to go about this ride home alone, without the comfort of other humans being present.

I saw the car from at least one hundred yards away, when my street comes to one of its only straight shots. Lest I wanted to lose control, I had been keeping the car at a reasonable speed. This other car confirmed my precautions. The car, an old and raggedy thing, had been coming from the other direction. As it was coming around one of the many curves, the driver hit a patch of ice, did a one-eighty moving counterclockwise, and stuck himself in the snow bank facing the other direction.

I had time to think about things before I approached him in my truck. His car was submerged in front of a big cluster of pine trees. Sometimes on the news, you'll hear about people pulling over to help other drivers in distress, only to be beaten and robbed by the 'distressed' person's companions. There was something about the dark and lonely winter night that made me imagine hooded figures

crouching in the shadows of those pine trees. But as I got closer, I saw the driver, and my apprehension turned to pity.

With naught but his bare hands, the man was pecking away at the snow that surrounded one of his tires. It didn't seem to be doing much. As he sensed the approach of my truck, he stood and turned. A grin crossed his face when he saw me, and it grew bigger when I pulled over on the other side of the road, across from his car.

Before I could even let myself think about what I was doing, I was stepping out of the car, ready to help a complete stranger. "Nice of you to stop," he said with an outstretched hand. "Three cars have passed me already. What's your name?"

I took his hand in my own. It was wet and cold, the grip firm. "Grant Breyer."

"Nice to meet you, Grant. It's cold out here, so what do you propose we do?"

I answered him immediately, almost as a reflex. "I have a chain in my garage. We could hook it up to your car and tug her out?"

He smiled. "Let's get moving then."

So this complete stranger jumps into the passenger seat of my truck and we start moving down the road towards my house. I was uneasy about being alone before, but somehow this was worse, and it had all happened so fast. And during my realization of this random occurrence where I had adopted a strange new passenger, he chooses this, of all things, to say to me:

"There's an asteroid headed toward Earth, ya know."

I looked at him from the corner of my eye, all too aware of the look of disgust on my face. "What?" I asked.

"Scientists don't know exactly when it will make contact, but they're thinking sometime within the next few years." He paused and looked out the window. He wasn't smiling anymore. "All of humanity will be wiped away."

I was too stunned to say anything, so I kept my eyes on the road. We came over a hill and my house came into view.

"I guess it's a good thing though." His gaze was still locked out the window.

"What," I asked, "an asteroid destroying life as we know it?"

The stranger chuckled. "Saves us a lot of unfinished business."

I pulled into my driveway, desperately wishing I hadn't stopped for this man. I looked hesitantly at him, and he turned and looked right back at me. He looked at me in a way no one had ever looked at me before, like he saw something more than what was on the surface.

"I'm going to go get that chain now." I opened the door and left him sitting in the passenger side. I could feel his gaze on my back as I got out of the truck.

The chain was in the corner of the garage. I picked it up with thoughts of doom and destruction in my head. When I got back in the truck, I ask him, "Is there really an asteroid that's gonna collide with Earth?"

"No." He didn't look at me when he answered. "That'd be something though, wouldn't it?"

I stared at him for a while, the door of my truck still open on its hinges. I considered putting the chain on his lap, but I decided against it and threw it in the back seat. "Shut the door," he said. "It's cold."

So I did. And then I took my first *good* look at this man. I saw his dangling beard, and his disheveled brown head of hair. I saw the frown lines on the face that was grinning upon my first introduction. I tried to remember that grin, and now I could only imagine a grimace from a troll or a goblin or some other evil kind of creature. Maybe it was a look of bloodlust, brought on by the fact that he had finally entrapped someone like me and now he could devour my mind. I wasn't about to let that happen.

"What kind of mileage does this thing get, anyway?" He glanced about my truck with a mild look of contempt.

"That's none of your damned business," I snapped. "I won't have you asking something like that again." I put the truck in reverse and backed out of the driveway. Things were quiet for a while. "What's your name, anyway?"

He sighed. "Just call me an outcast."

This time I laughed. "You make it sound like that's not your own fault."

He glared at me, but I wasn't scared of him anymore. I could see him for what he was. "I can't help my programming."

"No," I agreed, "but you can keep that loony shit from coming out of your mouth."

He pulled once on his beard. "Loony shit?"

"You heard me. I've known you all of five minutes, and you start up with this Armageddon talk? It's not right. You'll go around scaring people." I changed my grip on the steering wheel. My palms were sweaty.

The outcast shook his head with a condescending smirk. "The Armageddon has been happening for a quarter of a century now. Experts predict that ours has been a world in ecological overshoot since before 1990. We are living only by depletion of Mother Earth's life blood." He pulled once more on his beard, this time with a bit more ferociousness. "What monster of a species can destroy their home?"

I slammed on the breaks. The outcast reeled forward and was jerked back by his seatbelt. His old hunk of metal was just around the bend of the road, where he'd crashed it into the bank. "Why are you telling me this, hypocrite?" I pointed down the road to his car. "You drove this road the same as me, so how can you be so bold?"

He frowned. It was an ugly frown. The lines near his mouth reminded me that he did that often. "My programming. Besides, it doesn't matter what I say, or

what I do. Even if I wanted to, which I don't know if I would, one person could never change the world on their own."

I pinched the bridge of my nose between my thumb and my pointer finger, wondering if this was actually some terrible nightmare. I still hadn't seen any cars. Maybe I just wasn't paying attention. It was late, anyway. "Get out of my truck." The words were hushed through my dry lips.

The outcast rubbed his neck with a pained look on his face. "I think I might have whiplash--" He looked at me like he expected some type of sympathy. "What did you say?"

I turned in my seat and stared into his dark and foreboding eyes. "*Get out of my truck.*"

He gestured forward. "Don't make me walk the rest of the way, it will be quicker if you--"

"GET THE HELL OUT!"

"What about the chain?"

"You can forget the damn chain. If you want to change the world, start walking."

He looked at me with something like disbelief. After a moment, he opened the door and the bitter wind took my breath away. The outcast left the truck and didn't look back. I turned around in a driveway, not wanting to wait and see if he went back to digging out his car.

When I got home, I left the chain and all its perfect and unified links in the backseat of my truck. I didn't even want to look at it. I went to bed that night feeling like I'd had myself a brush with disaster, but everything was better then. I knew, or I willed myself to know, that when I woke up the next day, everything would be back to normal.

A New Perspective

Sabrina Dahl

It was a normal blustery, cold, winter day in Minnesota on January 16th, 2013; except it wasn't a normal day for me, my life was about to change. It was the day I left for the Air Force Basic Military Training, the time had finally come. I saw that day as something so far off into the distance, like the sun when it's setting at, what seems to be, the end of the earth. The preparation had paid off: the intense work outs to get in exceptional physical shape, and studying the Air Force ranks, rules, and regulations. At that point in time, I had no idea what to expect, all I could do was try to mentally prepare for what was to come and, most of all, get used to the thought of not seeing my friends, family and boyfriend for four long months, with little-to-no contact. The only ways of communicating were through writing letters and a phone call, maybe, once a week for ten minutes. That was one of the biggest struggles, not being in constant contact with people I loved the most.

Along with that being the longest time away from home, to an unfamiliar place for intense training, it was also my first time flying alone on an airplane. The fear I felt was like nothing I had ever felt before, although, at the time I didn't realize that the fear and nervousness I felt was only minor compared to what it would be like at Basic Military Training (BMT). Before I even boarded the plane, I was in a

puddle of tears as I hugged my parents tightly. Over the loud speaker I remember hearing, “Now boarding all passengers in zone two”, that was my cue. I turned to my parents one last time, with tear filled eyes, to wave good-bye.

Finally, after all that traveling, I had made it to Texas, on a bus to Lackland Air Force Base where I would spend the next eight and a half weeks. We had approached the dormitories and came to an abrupt halt, so abrupt that all the women on the bus jolted forward, like you do at the end of a rollercoaster ride. We peered out the foggy windows into the darkness, saw the plain gray walls of the building, and the long cement sidewalk leading to it; soon we saw a very intimidating figure coming our way. *Was it a man?* I wondered. It was a female Military Training Instructor that looked as if she was a man with her short brown hair, slicked back, no make-up, and a masculine, box-like build. She hopped on the bus and yelled, “You have thirty seconds to get off this bus and get over there underneath the overhang!” Scared out of our minds we frantically collected our things and sprinted off the bus. Thankfully we made it in time, otherwise who knows what she would have made us do or what she would have done to us. Standing under the overhang a wave of thoughts came over me, *what am I doing here? What have I gotten myself into? Have I made a terrible mistake?* I was numb from my head to my toes, I felt like I was outside of my own body; it didn’t feel like real life. I felt as if it was a terrible nightmare and I had just arrived in hell.

The next morning at 0445 (4:45am) we were awakened by the loud playing of Reveille. Getting dressed and prepared was as hectic as shopping at Wal-Mart on Black Friday. Everyone was scrambling for their uniforms, tying their boots as fast as possible, rushing to brush their teeth, and making our beds as quickly and neatly as possible. Soon after we were dressed, our MTI came in and began teaching us some of the things we would need to know while we were there: how to make our beds properly, how to present our clothing in the drawers the correct way, explained that all our strings on our uniforms must be cut off and our hair needed to be perfectly slicked back in a bun, no stray hair was acceptable. Everything was about paying close attention to detail.

We've come to the end of the first week and a half of BMT and have been in class for a while, learning even more duties we were required to have and learning about self-aid buddy care, combative fighting, shooting M16s, et cetera. At this point I was so stressed, I hadn't been getting much sleep, I had a sore throat, and I was feeling terribly homesick. I remember being in one of the classes, trying not to fall asleep since it was stifling with all the bodies we had packed into that classroom, I stopped taking notes because I thought, *I'm leaving after this class, I'm going home, I've had enough, I want to be done, I quit.* It had gotten to a point where I thought I couldn't take it anymore. After class we were told to march back in formation to our dorm; I hated marching on incredibly hot and dry days. Once we got back to the

dorm, I broke down in tears and cried out to one of the girls in my flight. She encouraged me; she said, “It will all be worth it in the end, I promise, you aren’t the only one feeling this way, stick with it, we’ll all get through this together.” I didn’t believe much of what she was saying at the time but I couldn’t bear the thought of calling my parents and telling them I was quitting. I could only imagine the disappointment; I’m sure they would have understood but I still would have felt like I let them down and that I gave up too easily. I took time to think about it that night, I’ve never quit anything in my life and I wasn’t about to start then. I knew that I would regret that decision later in life had I quit.

It was now the sixth week, “BEAST Week”, which stands for Basic Expeditionary Airman Skills Training. By BEAST week, I had gotten the hang of things, had a set routine every day, I was excelling in my physical training, was doing really well in class, and I had been going to church every Sunday to gain more encouragement and motivation to keep me going. I made lifelong friends, and did things I would have never experienced had I not enlisted. BEAST week was to help us get a small taste of what the deployed life looks and feels like. We were bused about half an hour away from the dormitories; it seemed as if we had left the state because it was even drier and there was only dirt, no trees and no grass, like the Sahara desert. This is when I started really applying what I was learning to the meaning it had in my life, realizing what a great community of people I was about to

be a part of. It took teamwork, blood, sweat, tears, and pure drive to get through that tough week.

During our intense training period, we were reminded that the goal of BMT was to break you down to your absolute lowest point and after you've been broken down, their job was to build us back up to be strong Airmen. If the Military Training Instructors didn't yell at us and push us to our limits our military would be weak; there wouldn't be a purpose for BMT. I kept trying to remember that whenever I would get yelled at six inches away from my face or when I'd have a break down, where I'd bottle everything up and let everything out once in a while; everybody was going through the same things. I grew to know the real meaning of being an American Airman, and how to be an outstanding wingman to my fellow Airmen. *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in all We Do.* My father is also in the Air Force, and I've always supported him and our troops but it wasn't until BMT when I truly gained a greater understanding of what it meant to be in the military, the sacrifices and hard core training that goes into it. I was thankful for the opportunity that forced me to grow up and mature.

We made it to graduation day! Hundreds of families and friends gathered together to celebrate that memorable day. It began with a coin ceremony where the instructors would shake the hands of the Trainees and present them with their

Airmen Coins that signified the transition from a Trainee to an Airman. Next, it was time for the band to play the Air Force song. The music filled the air and traveled across the entire base. The last thing we did before we were released to see our families was to recite the Airman's Creed one last time; the creed we memorized and said every day that we were there:

I am an American Airman.
I am a warrior.
I have answered my Nations Call.
I am an American Airman.
My mission is the Fly, Fight, and Win.
I am faithful to a Proud Heritage,
A Tradition of Honor,
And a Legacy of Valor.
I am an American Airman.
Guardian of Freedom and Justice,
My Nation's Sword and Shield,
It's Sentry and Avenger.
I defend my Country with my Life.
I am an American Airman.
Wingman, Leader, Warrior.
I will never leave an Airman behind,
I will never falter,
And I will not fail.

The feeling of becoming an Airman in the United States Air Force was overwhelming, and the honor we all had in becoming soldiers was out of this world. It was a wonderful day filled with happiness, joy, and emotion for all the Airmen and their families. We've made it through an intense eight and a half weeks of training and were rewarded with time to spend with family. The joy that consumed my body

was nothing I've ever felt before. I could see the tears welling up in my parents' eyes as I made my way to them, I could see how proud they were.

On the last day at Lackland Air Force Base our flight got together in the dormitory to talk before we left the next morning to go our separate ways for Technical School, where we would learn about our new jobs. We felt like we've actually accomplished something in our lives rather than just the normal graduating from high school and attending college to earn a degree. Although those are great accomplishments, our accomplishment of joining the military has given all of us a greater sense of worth, and that we've made something of our lives. Other girls mentioned how most of their friends back home weren't doing anything with their lives: partying, goofing off, and slacking at work. I mentioned to them that this experience has changed me in such a way that I see things differently, I pay closer attention to detail, I'm more thankful, and I'm forever grateful for all the men and women who have served, who are currently serving, and for the future men and women for serving our country and allowing us the freedom so we can live a good life in the United States. It has given me an entirely new perspective on life that I will carry with me throughout my lifetime and share it with my children.

Last Friday Couldn't Have Been Any Colder

Bill Olson

We sat in the steel casing of my car; rats in a trap.

The desolate complexion of my skin wrote the sky.

I smelled acidity in the air,

The sulfur of mud,

Rust of blood,

Clumps of shit stuck to the bottoms of our boots.

I laughed as the engine died.

Pull the curtain.

The air became a noose.

My cold fingers wrapped around my throat

clutching for a glimpse of a star.

My chokehold bruises covered the hickies and scars.

We watched the empty sky through the frost

of the windshield.

You created galaxies with the touch of your fingertip;

fashioning a constellation on the windshield.

Creating my world.

Pinpricked the endless void of my skin.

Release

I threw you into the backseat.

Collision

You kissed me carelessly.

My lungs became a nebula.

Smoke left my ears as you kissed my neck.

Your body shivered when I ripped off your clothes.

Goosebumps.

We entangled ourselves in our brief exaltation,
caressing the constellations you left all over me.

Sharing the nebula of my lungs.

We made love until our passion

filled the car with smoke;

Flames ensnaring us.

Burn baby, burn.

We transformed into ash.

Everything does.

We snickered.

I noticed another nebula you frantically drafted.

It was sensible in all of the sensibility of the word.

It shined down onto our frozen corpses and smoke damaged lungs;

it filled the void.

I reached through the flames to grasp it.

Holocaust.

Our makeshift sky dripped blood.

The car started, the radio flashed on,

screeching like a mother protecting her child from ash.

The radio snapped. *Silence*

You screamed.

I'm having fun.

It left us alone in our melancholy;

Blood dripping on our blessed solitude.

We bathed in it.

We bathed in the silence and the slow burn blood;

the dripping faucet in my insomniac dreams.

I told you I had a secret disdain towards the dark;
it's the panic attacks that I hide like blood stained rags.
I smoked a cigarette and popped the trunk,
because I felt the need.
Covered in blood;
in necessity.
The car warmed with steaming blood,
our clothes frozen in our silence.
My eyes faded to a cotton candy pink;
porcelain skin stained by your galaxies.
You told me I was evil.
I protested.
Blood waterfalls from your fingertip galaxy.
I agreed.

The wolves started to sing.

The Wolf's Revenge

Katie Zezulka

I was finally nearing my den after a long hunting trek. Normally I wasn't gone for so long, but this being our first set of pups, they came rather late this year. The humans have been stockpiling meat for winter so I needed to go rather far to find any large prey. After only two days I had been lucky enough to catch a large moose. With the two days spend traveling there and back, I hadn't seen my little family pack in over four days. With the pups only three weeks old that felt like an eternity.

With my jaws wrapped tightly around the throat of my barely living prey I dragged it towards the cave, but something wasn't right. The normal lively sounds of the forest were gone, replaced by an eerie silence. Under my feet I felt tufts of fur and skin, too thick to have belonged to our normal prey.

"Alana?" I called nervously, somehow knowing there would be no response as my prey slid down into my arms.

What finally made me accept the horrible truth, whatever it may be, was not seeing my young mate come out to greet me. Being just barely of age, she felt nervous when I was gone, fearful of the humans in the area and of making a fatal

mistake with our offspring. Until now I would have said her fears were unfounded. She was a wonderful mother, despite her inexperience.

Dropping my prey in a panic, I fell down on all fours and rushed into the den to find a nightmare. My mate was the first thing to catch my eye; it was hard for her not to. Her blood and pieces were spread all around the walls. Chains were wrapped around her still body, spears thrust through her tough hide.

Sniffing the air I confirmed that all the blood belonged to my mate, and for the briefest of moments, I felt hope for my pups. The thoughts were dashed just by smelling the decay in the air. In an effort to protect our young, my mate had hidden them in the nest in the back corner. My paws dug carefully through the straw until I uncovered two small bodies, heads limp from snapped necks.

Dragging them gently, I placed each in a small hole I dug. I lay there, curled over them until morning, the sorrow and ire of my howls filling the sky. I knew everything would be different in the sunlight; the humans would feel my wrath, but for now, I remembered my family as it was, my two boys, whose bodies I had found, wrestling each other and chasing little field mice; my mate, watching them fondly. Lastly was the runt, my little girl. Even thinking about the horrors they must have taken her tiny body for made me shudder. Tomorrow, I would work for revenge. Tonight, I would mourn.

Surveillance on the humans was easy enough. They were quite stupid creatures. I was able to sneak up behind their sheep shed and listen as they worked. One of the men had heard my cries the night before and feared I would come for them.

Another laughed coldly, "After the mess we left there it wouldn't be stupid enough to attack us."

"Don't be so sure," a third voice broke in, "you convinced us to attack them because the mother would be too aggressive with young pups, but if she would fight to protect them, the male might be willing to avenge them."

The second man kept laughing. "It's nothing more than a stupid beast. It can't think like you or I can. My grandfather wanted to get rid of the thing when it holed up nearby all those decades ago and I'm proud to say I've finally done it."

My eyes locked on the speaker carefully. He would pay more dearly than any other. It took all the restraint I had gained in my decades of life not to launch myself at him and end this here and now. Still, that would be too easy. The dead bodies of my little pack would forever haunt me and I wouldn't let him get away with a quick death. I, Vlad the werewolf, would make them pay. They would learn to lose all you held dear. They would learn what it was like to see those you love

bloodied before you. They would learn what it was like to live in fear like the old days. The thoughts of their terror and devastation held him back.

I didn't need to wait long to make my first move. My fool of an enemy waited only two nights before he sent his eldest son out to investigate a late night disturbance I created amongst his sheep. The boy, a mere child of thirteen cold seasons, had no chance to scream or cry out. I was on him before he knew I was there. I was not a heartless creature. The child's death was payment for his father's aggressive actions. There was no need for me to make it long and drawn out.

My intent had been to leave his broken, but intact, body in the shelter with the sheep, but I had let the moose I captured go bad and had little chance to hunt since then. If I had any hope of keeping up my constant watch I would need to feed. While not enough to satisfy, the meat would save me much time hunting. Once finished, I retreated to the tree line to find a meal and wait until daylight made known my work.

I was cruelly satisfied by the shrieks of pain heard the next morning. The corpses of my little boys sprang to mind as a mother cried pointlessly for her child. Although it was thought that I was the culprit, I left behind no footprints or other evidence to tie me to the crime, some were unsure of whether it was a random

attack from a true wolf pack. The smart ones knew better. A wolf pack would have no reason to attack the boy and leave the defenseless sheep. Only I had that.

The concern around town wavered, their discussions teaching me more about what had happened back in my den. The mothers feared the most, but they had little knowledge to help me on my quest. It was again the hunters who told me the most. Some were silent with their fears, but others seemed happy to throw around blame. They yelled at the leader, the man who had led me to their doorstep. They named those who threw the spears and those who held the chains. They named those who went happily and those that went reluctantly, though that specific distinction held little meaning to me. They even named who went after my mate and who targeted my pups. They didn't know it, but they had just ended their futures as they knew them. The murderers would first hurt and then their world would burn around them.

The next few weeks were a struggle, as the humans banded together in fear and my patience rapidly began to dwindle. It was a pity they no longer believed the old legends about full moons and silver tools; it would have made my job easier as they wouldn't know to fear me when the moon began to wane.

It took another two months, but I culled another three from their herd, being forced to take a full grown housewife when there was no other. Finally I'd had

enough. I waited until the new moon to make my move, my superior vision assisting in my unexpected assault.

I carried a lit torch through the town, knowing that I wouldn't leave anything when I finished. The first house caught well and was burning before the humans had a clue what had happened. On my way along I caught a scent that shouldn't have been here. It was the scent of my offspring.

With an angry growl I rushed forward, letting my nose lead me a few houses down. With a single backhanded blow the front door of the home was knocked from its hinges. I had to stoop my nearly eight foot form to get in the door but nothing would stop me from discovering the truth at the end of this trail.

A man stood in front of a corner with a stick, holding it defensively. My presence didn't seem to surprise him at all. I started to snarl and move forward, but the man dropped his weapon and put up his hands.

"Stop," he ordered softly. "I-I know what you're after."

I had to admit I was torn. Screams outside told me that villagers had been woken and they were working against the fires I had started. My time was limited but something about this man held me back.

“I was there,” I heard him whisper, “in the cave, when they killed your family.”

Having heard enough I started forward, but was stopped by a small whining sound from the left. Turning, I nearly fell in my shock. There, beside this man’s human girl, was my own little girl, safe as far as I could see. Her coat was the same special shade of bronze I always saw in my dreams, looking so like her mother.

“I couldn’t do it.” The man in front of me admitted. “My own wife was taken from me last summer and when they told me to kill the littlest I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I wrapped her up in my jacket and carried her here, hoping that somehow, you would come for her.”

How could I not have known? My poor pup had been here for weeks on end while I planned my own selfish revenge. She was alone when I could have been with her. What extra trauma had she suffered that I could have prevented? Could I consider myself a worthy pack leader, a worthy father, after leaving her in the hands of human filth while I mourned alone?

I thought everything had been lost when I walked into our den that night. Could this be a second chance for me? Could it be that after waiting so many years

to have a family of my own, it hadn't all been stolen from me in a matter of moments?

I could hear the humans outside. They knew the fire wasn't an accident and were beginning to look for me. I was out of time. I hadn't planned on making it out of this alive, but at the time I hadn't cared. Now I had to come up with an exit strategy quickly.

"Come here baby," the man ordered to his child. As if sensing the seriousness of the situation she obeyed instantly, shuffling across the floor to her father while I allowed it.

The man stayed in his spot as I moved to my pup, taking her scruff between my teeth I backed up towards the door, trying to decide on a way we would survive this situation. I could hear the villagers at the house next door, searching for a sign of my presence. I saw the light from their torches coming in through the small windows on the wall. It was as if I could feel their ire, making me shudder ever so slightly. I had only seconds before I would be overwhelmed in this small room and they would kill both me and my innocent pup.

“Take her,” the human advised. “Take her and run. No one knows the baby is alive. There is a back door in the kitchen that opens to the forest. I’ll tell them that I surprised you when you went for my girl.”

For the first time in my life I felt something for a human besides indifference or utter hatred. This simple man had done what I was unable, protected the little part of my family he could, and cared for her until I came. Our eyes met and I knew he understood what it was that I couldn’t say.

Falling down on all fours I sped through the little house, ramming the back door open with my shoulder. When running on four legs, even with my longer arms, I was faster than the humans and I needed to use that to my advantage to get myself and my pup to safety. I shot out into the cover of darkness and ran with everything I had in me until dawn broke hours later. I had been wrong. I had something to live for. And I would live.

Death in War

Dylan Merrifield

Bones of the fallen
lie everywhere.
The cries and screams of the dying
still hang in the air.
Death, on his white horse, approaches
each dying soldier,
and he ends their cries.

The bones crunch under the hooves
of Death's white horse.
Without hesitation,
he procures the souls
of the dying.

He takes away a soul from the body of a rich man
as well as a soul from the body of a beggar.
Both have been felled by the sword,
and both will be taken.

A survivor begins to help his wounded comrade.
The injured one screams at the sight of Death.
He tells Death about his family
and his youth.
The survivor sees nothing
as Death removes the wounded one
from the world.

Many will take no notice
of Death and his white horse.
Others will see him,
a transparent image,
as they lie hurt.
They will receive aid,
and he will vanish
from their sight.
Hundreds have been taken,
hundreds more await.
Death and his white horse
continue on,
collecting each soul.
Until the day
war is done.

Based on the painting

White Horse, from "War: Mystical Images of War"

CrossBeau

Anonymous

It was a typical winter day after school. My seven year old son got off of the school bus. But, then this afternoon became anything but typical. He came running into the house, with his sister holding him tightly, screaming in pain as he held his hand. My children told me what I thought to be the most ridiculous story that I had ever heard. They yelled, "Zach's been shot...Zach's been shot." They told me that the new neighbor boy, Beau was shooting an air-rifle at them as they were walking home from the bus stop. Zach showed me his hand. It had a one inch long by ¼ inch chunk of skin missing. He was shuddering. The dusting of fresh snow that stuck to him when falling to the ground in pain was now falling to the floor. The motherly horns in me came out, and I made my husband Rick go to the neighbors to find out what had happened. Beau and his friend were leaving his house as Rick started to approach them. Rick confronted the boys, but they denied everything and made up a story of another boy that ran through their yard. A phone call was made, and before you knew it there were a half dozen police cars that lined our street between our two houses.

I received a call 24 hours later from Hennepin County asking me what I wanted to do about the situation. Beau had a record. A history that made me want to

take revenge. Not the kind of revenge for hurting my son, watching him fall to the ground in pain and having the ability just to walk away as though nothing happened, but the kind of revenge more on his parents for allowing their fifteen year old boy to go down every possible wrong path in life. If his parents weren't going to help him, I was. We went to court and I fought hard for him to be sent away to serve time and receive therapy outside of that dreadful home. I guess for Beau he thought, "What's a little more pain / when pain's eternal?" (26). Beau was sentenced to eight weeks in a juvenile correctional facility. I guess you can say I got what I wanted, but it was a long car ride home as my husband and I had to explain what the little ears of our children had just heard in the courtroom.

Life seemed to start getting back to some normality. Zach was doing well in therapy, and was now able to get on and off the bus at the bus stop again. Soon spring came. It was like a flashback as the kids came running into the house yelling that Beau was out of jail two weeks early, and now he was on top of his house's roof with a bow and arrow. He was actually pointing it at the kids as they once again were walking home from the bus stop. They yelled. As I was running out the front door to find out what the commotion was about, police cars were pulling up in front of Beau's house. Someone else had already called 911 as they saw the imminent danger above us. At that moment I decided that I was done. I was done trying to fix a problem that really seemed unfixable.

It seemed like I laid awake all night until the sun started to rise. Then the phone rang. It was the nosey neighbor asking what was going on across the street. I walked outside in just my pajamas. I saw the Hennepin County Medical Examiner's van amongst the police and sheriff cars, as well as an empty ambulance. My stomach turned and my heart dropped. I instantly knew why they were there. As I pulled away from our house to drive my kids to school, I couldn't help but stare as the medical examiners slowly pushed a cart with a body bag strapped onto it as they exited Beau's house. They loaded the gurney into their van. "There is little comfort / in knowing there / are worse undertakings / than killing yourself" (36).

This kid had problems that were so immensely deep. "There is no refuge / from yourself" (36). I can't help but feel that I was the one that helped push him over the edge. I might as well have handed him a noose to hang himself to end his life. "A glass jar / rolls down / concrete stairs / ringing / a dangerous / music whose / next note / could pull / the instrument / apart" (31). This was his turn to shudder. That is until his body came to a final stand-still. I can't help feel for his mom, who went down stairs to wake her son up for the day and instead she was stopped, gazing at her son, dead, hanging by the rafters. Not by accident, but by choice.

I drove to the church where the Beau's funeral was to be held. But I did this hours before the funeral service was to start. Given the glares that I received from the boy's mom during his hearings and sentencing months before in the courtroom,

I knew I wouldn't be welcome or wanted at the church. I was not sure if I was there for Beau or myself. All I knew was that I needed to say how sorry I was and goodbye. I walked past what seemed to be miles of pews before I got to the altar. There before me stood all that was left: an urn filled with the ashes of a child who was so full of sadness and grief. A child who chose the only path he could see, a path to heaven. "The crematorium leaves / bone chunks on its tongue / among ash we've become. We cannot bear the weight / of our own imaginations / and so we are fractured / further. O cremulator, / o cocktail of potable sand" (57).

A couple of weeks after the Beau's funeral, my family finally received a letter from Hennepin County Juvenile Courthouse stating he would be getting out of treatment two weeks early. Included in the envelope was a short note that Beau had written to my son. It was an apology for what he had done. "Opposite of closure, / a suicide's grave / never grows over" (47).

Quotations from: Rasmussen, Matt. *Black Aperture*. Louisiana State University Press, 2013.

The Physics of Emptiness

Kareem Lawrence Abdelrahman

Who does an athlete beat if there are no competitions?
What color does an artist paint after losing their supplies?
Where does the author write when they run out of paper?
When does a cellist play if the strings are all broken?
Why do we try sing songs after forgetting the sing along, and
how will we be blamed if the instructions were all taught wrong?

We live within our own world of physics,
with reality's gravity reigning inside our heads;
but just like a flower growing in a frozen desert,
or a sober huffing a bowl of liquid sand and glass,
We break life's physical chains singing us to death.

With all our contents emptying into the same mass,
we will always breathe from the same oxygen mask
until another world of physics rips away our class,
with our bodies filling in empty holes of growing grass.

But if actions speak louder than lies,
and science screams energy never dies,
then how is it different for the energy of our minds?

And how did we get this world full of air,
and what happens when it's no longer there?

Is "emptiness" more than just the senses unaware?

Crime and Chaos

Bryan M. Anderson

You say you want peace,
Freedom, love, order, and happiness...

Whilst you have a gun in your hands.

This oxymoron you parade around

Cannot exist.

For what is order?!

What is peace?!

They are ideals—

Derived from perfection.

Perfection perished on this planet

In the Garden of Eden.

And ever since that bite of forbidden fruit,

Perfection has drifted further and further out

Into the sea of violence that we pretend to be order.

And whatever form of order we may proclaim to hold,
Is merely a controlled form of anarchy.

And if by some wildest, far-flung miracle,
Peace is achieved, how long will it last
Before we reveal our true selves again?
How long until blood flows in the streams again?

You say that you want peace,
But what is it that you really want?

Hatchback Warp-Speed

Meghan Oakes

It was a beater. The car was one of the smallest on the road, a dwarf even amongst two-door hatchbacks, and had clear signs of having been a family vehicle for over ten years. The dark maroon paint was faded and chipped, and several plastic details that ran along the bottom of the doors had been peeled off by bored toddlers. The right mirror was missing, but had been ripped off in such a way as to leave an open wound on the side of the door, and the interior smelled of my childhood. It was a smell that was more familiar than pleasant, composed of the slightly acrid scent released by sun-baked plastics and the crayons I'd accidentally left to be melted to the seats years before when I was too young to know better. By all rights, the car should have been left at home. It would have been, if it hadn't gotten the gas mileage it had, and if gas hadn't been nearly four dollars to the gallon, and if we hadn't had three hundred miles to cover in a single day.

It was a cool, snowy January in 2007. We'd left our home in Duluth early that morning to meet my father's Aunt Karen and attend a psychic convention. While my great-aunt was a believer, neither my father nor I really were. Most of the convention smacked of disingenuous entrepreneurs taking advantage of the naive rather than spiritual enlightenment, but having my palm read was fun, and I liked the stories the tarot card reader had told me about my supposed previous lives.

Long after the sun had set, we found ourselves crammed back into the 1995 Geo Metro to make the trip back from the cities to Duluth. The only trouble was, in the time that it had taken to go through the entire convention and dinner, a blizzard had developed in the dark sky overhead. Still, it was a Sunday night before a school day for me and a work day for my father, so we not-very-small people crammed into the very small car until we were pressed shoulder to elbow with both each other and our respective doors. We headed north.

I-35 seemed abandoned. As the snowfall thickened, fewer and fewer cars were visible on the road, until it seemed we'd entered our own world. The night was dark, and the snow only grew thicker as we drove. While I was nervously watching the

speedometer climb upwards past seventy-five, past eighty-five and over ninety, my father laughed, talked, told jokes, and turned the classic rock louder.

Outside the car, the snow did that magical thing it does when driving through it looks like hitting warp speed in the Millennium Falcon, the high beams catching each snowflake before they passed by like disappearing stars. It was comforting, a warm reminder of times on road just like this one, during nights just like this one throughout my childhood.

Soon, we got far enough from civilization that the trees were tall on the edge of the road, peering over us like watchful giants, silent and disapproving. They were only just visible through the blur of snow, and the radio began to fade out.

"Meg, grab my iPod," my father said, not glancing away from the road. His voice was calm.

We had been hovering around ninety miles an hour for some time now, and he showed no signs of slowing or stopping. I felt a little like the children in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* must have as their candy boat careened deeper into the factory, hooking up my father's iPod to his FM transmitter. The sound came through louder and clearer than the radio had for several miles, and I selected "Crazy Train" by Ozzy Osbourne; it was the only song that seemed appropriate from the selection.

I noted with surprise that my father also had a wide selection of classical music, and I snuck a glance at him. I, after having known him for all sixteen years of my life, had thought I knew my father in and out. He liked rock and only barely tolerated my mother's selection of folksy pop and bluegrass on long family trips. He was strong, with the widest shoulders I've ever seen, and hands so rough and callused from years as an airline mechanic that I regularly saw him take things out of the oven without an oven mitt. The idea I had of him didn't fit the collection I saw on his iPod: Mozart, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Bach, Wagner. I touched my own soft palms.

"You've got a lot of classical on here," I said, lamely.

"Sometimes it's nice to listen to something different. It's real music," he said, and went on to compare it to the classic rock he liked best of all. Both required a massive

amount of skill and dedication to do well. Both demanded careful attention to arrangement and composition. Both featured dancing highs, soaring melodies, and strong bass lines as a heartbeat to the music.

"I was a first chair violinist in high school," he said, and I glanced at him again.

His hands. The man, in addition to having the widest shoulders, had the biggest hands and the thickest fingers of anyone I knew. I couldn't imagine them nimbly working any instrument, let alone one so delicate as a violin, and I said so. He laughed, and told me that it hadn't been easy. His hands gripped the steering wheel more tightly. I glanced away from the road again, to those hands and the nine fingers that were wrapped around the steering wheel. He'd lost his left pointer finger in a meat slicer before I'd been born, and I wondered if the loss of being able to play the violin was something that bothered him, but I said nothing. It seemed like it might be a depressing thought.

Silence descended between us as we enjoyed whine of the electric guitar strumming in Eddie Van Halen's "Eruption". As soon as it ended, we laughed about the things we'd seen at the convention, about how we'd been informed that the color orange should never be in a bedroom, about how frequent headaches were a sign of psychic gifts, and how I had been a very conscientious Crusader in a past life. Apparently, I currently have a spirit guide named Thomas, who had been my mentor during that life. My father, it had been said, had angels watching out for him.

It was while I was laughing about all of this that I heard the fear in my father's voice.

"Oh, shit. Hang on!" he yelled, throwing a hand back on my chest to force me back in my seat.

I saw it as a shadow through the snow. A shape on the ground, large, rounded, and much too close to avoid, which became more defined as a deer lying across the road as we got closer. A deer we were heading straight toward. I looked at the speedometer. Ninety-five. Was it climbing?! I screamed a strangled cry, the futility of the action killing it in my throat. The person I'd call for help was the madman at the steering wheel.

We hit the deer with a jolt and several thumps, but didn't stop. Suddenly, what had been a rough, terrifying ride became incredibly smooth with the absence of road noise or rumbling from our tires. My stomach dropped faster than we were driving when I realized we were airborne. In a Geo Metro. In a blizzard. At ninety-five miles per hour.

Everything slowed and suddenly, ninety-five miles per hour seemed a paralyzed float. We must have been airborne for no more than a couple of seconds, but it seemed like we'd never land. Fear drove all other thoughts from my mind, and we crashed back down to the road with a smash that thundered through the car and into my bones. We continued onward in a perfectly straight line, as if nothing had happened. The car did not shake, swerve, or tremble, but the same couldn't be said for me.

We waited, holding our breaths. My father was watching for an oil light or check engine indicator, but I was waiting for the car to start on fire or explode with us in it, like a bad action movie. After several long moments, it became clear that the only casualty had been our muffler, which sputtered now and did very little muffling.

We both let out the breaths we'd been holding and relaxed. A small hysterical laugh broke from my lips, and I felt the tension shudder out of my father from where we were pressed together from shoulder to elbow. My muscles relaxed soon after, but my heart sped a beat in my chest, rivaling the drum solo that still played on the radio.

"If anything about that had been even a little bit different," my father said, seemingly as shocked as I was that we'd survived. "If our angle had been even a little off - if the road had been icier where we landed..."

"You hit it on purpose?!" I asked, my voice an octave higher than it normally was.

"We couldn't go around it, with the roads like this. We couldn't stop, either," he explained. Another moment of silence. "I guess they weren't kidding about the angels."

This time, neither of us laughed. The speedometer read eighty-five.

Imagine

A ten-minute play

By Grant Brengman

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JESS, a young boy with mental instability

BEAR, Jess's teddy bear

WESLEY, Jess's bravest tin soldier

DANTE, Jess's scary gargoyle figure

SETTINGS

Jess's bedroom

PRODUCTION NOTES

Jess's toys' embodiments can vary in appearance and differ from the toys they embody, as long as they still convey the same basic concept.

Bear should be kept as a bear, but can stand on two legs.

Wesley can be dressed like a classic tin soldier, a plastic green army man, or an American army soldier, for example.

Dante can be expressed as a gargoyle, some type of humanoid monster, or in a black latex suit, for example.

SCENE 1

A young boy's bedroom. Clothes are scattered, the bed is unmade. The door on stage left is closed; it leads to the rest of the house. The door on stage right is the closet door, ajar with clothes spilling out.

AT RISE: JESS is in the bed, in his pajamas, holding his teddy bear close. The sound of a door closing echoes offstage. Jess gets up and hides the teddy bear under the bed.

JESS

Wait here, Bear.

(Jess opens the door to his room and sticks his head out.)

JESS

Mom? Mom?

(No response.)

JESS

Okay, Bear, she's gone. We're safe.

(BEAR, an embodiment of the teddy bear of roughly equal size to Jess, emerges from under the bed.)

BEAR

Man. I thought she'd never leave.

JESS

I know. She's so mean. I bet she's glad to get away from me.

BEAR

Well I'm here for you, Jess. No matter what. I always was.

JESS

She says I'm outgrowing you. Everyone does.

(Bear puts his hands on Jess's shoulders.)

BEAR

Don't listen to them. We're friends. Friends don't leave each other behind.

JESS

They keep saying something's wrong with me. But when I ask, they won't tell me.

DANTE (OFF)

(tauntingly)

Well, you know they say ignorance is bliss.

JESS

Shut up, Dante! Come on, Bear, let's go watch some TV.

(Jess heads to the door, and Bear follows. Just as Jess reaches it,

DANTE, a tall, dark monster-from-under-the-bed, slips in and leans back against the door, closing and blocking it. He scowls upon Jess.)

DANTE

You kiss your mother with that mouth?

JESS

(backing away, nervous)

Dante, go away.

DANTE

(approaching slowly)

What are you doing up so late? You should be in bed, not up watching TV.

BEAR

Mom's not home, he can do what he wants!

DANTE

Oh, is that right? Could he also go out and murder a family, because mom's not home?

BEAR

No, of course not!

JESS

Dante, I just wanna go watch TV.

BEAR

Yeah, what are you, his mom now?

DANTE

No, but maybe I'm his conscience. Who'd have imagined one's conscience could be so scary, huh?

JESS

Dante, stop.

DANTE

Who's gonna make me? Mister Stuffing-and-Fabric here?

BEAR

Dante. He said stop.

DANTE

Yes, I heard him loud and clear. Do I intend to obey him? No.

JESS

(progressively louder)

Stop. Please stop. Stop it. Go away. I'm not gonna listen to you. Knock it off. Cut it out. *Stop it. Go away!*

(WESLEY, a brave soldier, bursts out of the closet and stands rigid behind Jess.)

WESLEY

(shouting angrily)

Did you hear the boy? He wants you to go away! Do you have any authority here? If you do not, then you need to crawl back down the dirty hole you came from!

(As Wesley is shouting, Dante backs away slowly. Once Wesley finishes, Dante hides under the bed.)

WESLEY

Are you two alright?

(Jess and Bear nod.)

WESLEY
(sternly)
How many times did you tell him to stop?

JESS
I don't know.

WESLEY
It took you too long to scare him off, because you weren't brave enough! I want each of you to drop and give me fifty.

(Jess and Bear hesitate.)

WESLEY
Now!

(Jess and Bear begin doing push-ups, with Wesley counting. Bear is unable to do any, and Jess quickly tires and stops.)

JESS
(panting)
Why do we have to do push-ups, Wesley?

WESLEY
Because you were too scared to stand up to that monster!

JESS
I couldn't help being scared.

WESLEY
Fear is a choice, boy.

(Bear stands up.)

BEAR

No, it isn't! Fear is natural. Everyone is afraid of something.

WESLEY

Are you talking back to me, Bear?

BEAR

I am, because I'm gonna stand up for my friend.

WESLEY

Looks like you're gonna need to. He can't stand up on his own.

JESS

(standing)

Yes, I can. I don't have to listen to you. I don't know why I did.

BEAR

He shouldn't have to do push-ups if he doesn't want to.

JESS

Why is everyone telling me what to do? I wanna do what I wanna do!

WESLEY

You need to be taught some discipline!

JESS

I can discipline myself!

WESLEY

Now *that's* what I like to hear! There's nothing like a little self-confidence with a side of courage.

(Wesley steps back into the closet.)

DANTE

Say, Bear...

(Dante slithers out from under the bed
and climbs on top of it,
holding up Jess's teddy bear.)

DANTE

What might you have been doing under the bed? You know
that's where *I* live.

(Bear glances nervously to Jess.)

BEAR

I was... hiding.

DANTE

From what?

BEAR

Mom.

DANTE

Oh, and *mom* is scarier than me?

BEAR

I don't know, Jess hid me there!

DANTE

Jess, what were you thinking, putting Bear in my
territory?

(Jess shrugs, scared.)

DANTE

You know what happens when things invade my territory?

(Dante pauses, letting them consider, then rips the head off the teddy bear. Bear gasps.)

JESS

Bear!

(Bear collapses limply into Jess's arms.)

JESS

What have you done?

DANTE

You can't let him go. You know why? Because you're afraid. You're afraid that whatever it is that nobody will tell you is dangerous. So you think you need us. All three of us. And you refuse to let us go.

JESS

I want *you* to go!

DANTE

Do you really?

(Jess hesitates. Wesley reenters from the closet and glares at Dante.)

WESLEY

I thought I told you to run off back to where you came from!

DANTE

I did. But I came back.

WESLEY

You get back down there this instant before we make a scene in front of Jess.

DANTE

Oh, could we, please? I'd love to make a scene. The little boy needs to grow up.

WESLEY

(in disbelief)

What?

DANTE

Let's make a scene.

(Dante produces a tin soldier and wiggles it threateningly toward Wesley.)

WESLEY

Put that down! If you want to make a scene, let's at least fight honorably!

DANTE

Oh, it would be an honor.

(Dante bites off the left leg of the tin soldier and spits it away. As he does, Wesley crumples to the ground, his left leg broken at the knee. He cries out in pain.)

JESS

Wesley!

DANTE

He's broken, Jess. And so is Bear. Now climb on back to bed and forget all about us.

JESS

I can't!

DANTE

Well mommy's not coming home anytime soon to tuck you in, so you'd better learn how to do it yourself.

JESS

Where's my mom?

DANTE

She's gone. Everyone's gone. Nobody cares about you. You need to be independent.

JESS

I wanna stay up!

DANTE

You need to go to bed.

JESS

I don't wanna go to bed!

DANTE

Goodnight, Jess.

JESS

No!

(Jess releases Bear and dives under the bed. Dante then lunges for him, grabbing his legs and trying to pull him back out. They struggle, and finally Dante pulls Jess from under the bed. But Jess holds a gargoyle toy in his hands, which he then slams against the floor, the wall, any hard

surface near him. Dante writhes in pain, storming madly around the room.)

DANTE

Make it stop! Make it stop! *Make it stop!*

JESS

No!

WESLEY

Jess, you're hurting yourself!

JESS

I don't care!

DANTE

Stop!

WESLEY

Jess!

(Jess brings the gargoyle up high and slams it on the ground. As he does, Dante freezes, then falls to his knees and stops.)

WESLEY

Jess... Be... Brave...

(Wesley's eyes close.)

DANTE

You don't have to break us. You can forget us. Give us away.

Convince yourself that we aren't real.

JESS

You aren't the broken ones. I am.

(Jess throws the gargoyle toy under his bed.)

DANTE

No, Jess, don't do this to yourself. You don't need us.

(Dante begins crawling towards the bed, as if struggling against being pulled.)

JESS

I do. If I lose you, I lose me. You are me.

(Dante is pulled under. Once he's gone, Jess slowly climbs into bed and pulls the covers over himself.)

JESS

Goodnight, Jess.

A Dove's Despair

Inspired by Savannah Yokes

Courtney Yokes

Our future faded away like night turning into day.
The pain I caused weighs until my heart is frayed.
But I wonder, would you have fought, would you have stayed?

I wished the leather journals were wiped blank.
Or maybe the tears I create will smear them away.
But no, the memories linger in a haunting cloudy grey.

Familiar, content, I thought I knew you.
Just know, no one could ever replace you.
Each touch and kiss, how did our love sever me from you?

You're a disease eating away at the back of my mind.
There seems to be no cure except for the passage of time.
Missing you is a weakness of mine and the deadliest crime.

I must thank you, though, for teaching me how to love.
You should've warned me unconditional wasn't enough.
I stand strong, but I fear, do you only see a dove's despair?



Proof in the pudding

Reggie Hanson

Oh no, it's stolen once again, but what's captured all my time is all your sin.
Don't remind me of what's fated or let me press rewind,
Because this feeling that I got has me tied up in a knot.

There's no bleak contending shambles that keeps me weighed down like an anvil.

I'm not the safest bet nor gamble, but you can count on me, I'll handle it mathematically,
or if you prefer a soliloquy, the stanza will be revered poetically.

I will use a pen so you know it's concrete.
When it starts to bleed, you'll see the passionate sensibility.
There will never be a question gone unanswered.
You can be my doctor, if you need to examine the truth.
Grab the stethoscope, because my heart doesn't lie.
When you've had all the pudding, you'll have my proof,
that is the closest you'll get to my Catch-22.
There is no woman alive that can extract my youth,
like the great wide open to a palate of food.
Let me be the strong western wind to guide your sail,
the deep ocean blue that sparkles on your skin.
The Tic to my Tock, long after time stops,
forever and after, my beautiful disaster.

Black Walnut

Juliana Boner

Last tree
to get leaves
in the late spring.

First signs of life when
long new shoots stretch
and tiny green buds pop.

Almost overnight
leaves spring out and
completely cover
new branches.

First tree to
give in to
the frost in the fall.

One cold night and
leaves and branches
throw themselves down.

In quick surrender
to the season they lay
belly up on the ground.

All or nothing.

How to have a sociable pillow fight

Remember this is a contact sport where someone could get seriously hurt if not following the mandatory rules set forth in the (NPFRB), National Pillow Fighting Rule Book.

1. Make sure the pillow you are using does **NOT** have any foreign objects hidden within the outer case: marbles, rocks, broken glass or fifty pound anvils are not acceptable. See rule #4 for exceptions.
2. The pillow cannot be smaller than an orange or larger than a bed, unless you're having a bed fight, which then you will have to read the rules for bed fighting in the (NBFRB) National Bed Fighting Rule Book.
3. Pillows must be clean and **NOT** retain the previous night's drool, buggers or cat urine on the case. This is a health hazard and you will be immediately disqualified from the tournament.
4. The pillow within the case can only be made with feathers, or synthetic foam. If using a feather pillow: tar, molasses, glue or honey cannot be within 20 feet – unless your honey, brother, sister or cousin is the one you're having the pillow fight with. In this case tar, molasses, glue or honey must be within arm's reach **AND** rule number 1 above one does **NOT** apply.
5. The case cannot have flowers or little red hearts on it; they distract your opponent's ability to have a serious pillow counter attack. Cases of pure white or with little animals are a preferred. However, Lions, tigers and bears will show your opponent you are an aggressive pillow fighter and they may wish to relinquish early on in the pillow fight.
6. Clenching of teeth and growling is a necessity. Absolutely **NO** laughter is permissible; laughter only provokes your opponent to reciprocate in kind and wet his/her pants or pajamas – whichever is being worn at the time. If this happens an automatic draw will be called and no further pillow fighting will be allowed until the laughter ceases, the yellow stains are removed and a shower is taken. Opponents are **NOT** allowed to shower together; this is

considered a serious violation and both combatants will be barred from the next five pillow fight tournaments.

7. Under **NO** circumstances is farting allowed. This is a pillow fight not a gas war. The person/persons in charge of the event **MUST HAVE** an ambulance, haz-mat team and nose plugs readily available on the premises if this happens by accident.
8. Winner will be determined by independent judges dually qualified in the sport of Sociable Pillow Fighting and sanctioned by the NBPfJA (National Bedroom Pillow Fighting Judges Association). Or your mama.

Please adhere to these rules and may the best pillow fighter prevail.

Phillip Hammitt
President (NPFRB and NBPfJA)

Pantoum to Jeanna

Priscila Cross

Of all the flowers in the garden, beautiful and fair
Thou art the most beautiful and fairest of them all
Forgive me when I see thee, and can't do but stare
Next to thee all other flowers art shallow and small

Thou art the most beautiful and fairest of them all
Speechless at thy simplest sight, powerless I become
Next to thee all other flowers art shallow and small
At thy delicacy my heart beats like a fervent drum

Speechless at thy simplest sight, powerless I become
Rendered weak and helpless, captured by thy bloom
At thy delicacy my heart beats like a fervent drum
Thy beauty and thy wit is Venus' inescapable doom

Rendered weak and helpless, captured by thy bloom
Comparable in brilliance and acuity to Metis and Athena
Thy beauty and thy wit is Venus' inescapable doom
I remain fascinated by thee, the most beautiful, Jeanna

Comparable in brilliance and acuity to Metis and Athena
Thou art so perfect to touch thee I cannot even dare
I remain fascinated by thee, the most beautiful, Jeanna
Of all the flowers in the garden, beautiful and fair.

Jazz

Juliana Boner

The bang
and the beat
of the rhythm
he hears

send up sparks
from his feet
as they tap
and crack
to the sound
in the street.

The music
moves his heart,
and his heart
moves his feet

and his arms,
they sway
to the
syncopated beat.

His head nods time
to the song
in his soul
that is echoed

in the music
in the street.

(this poem was inspired by the art piece called "Jazz", by Henri Matisse, 1947)

