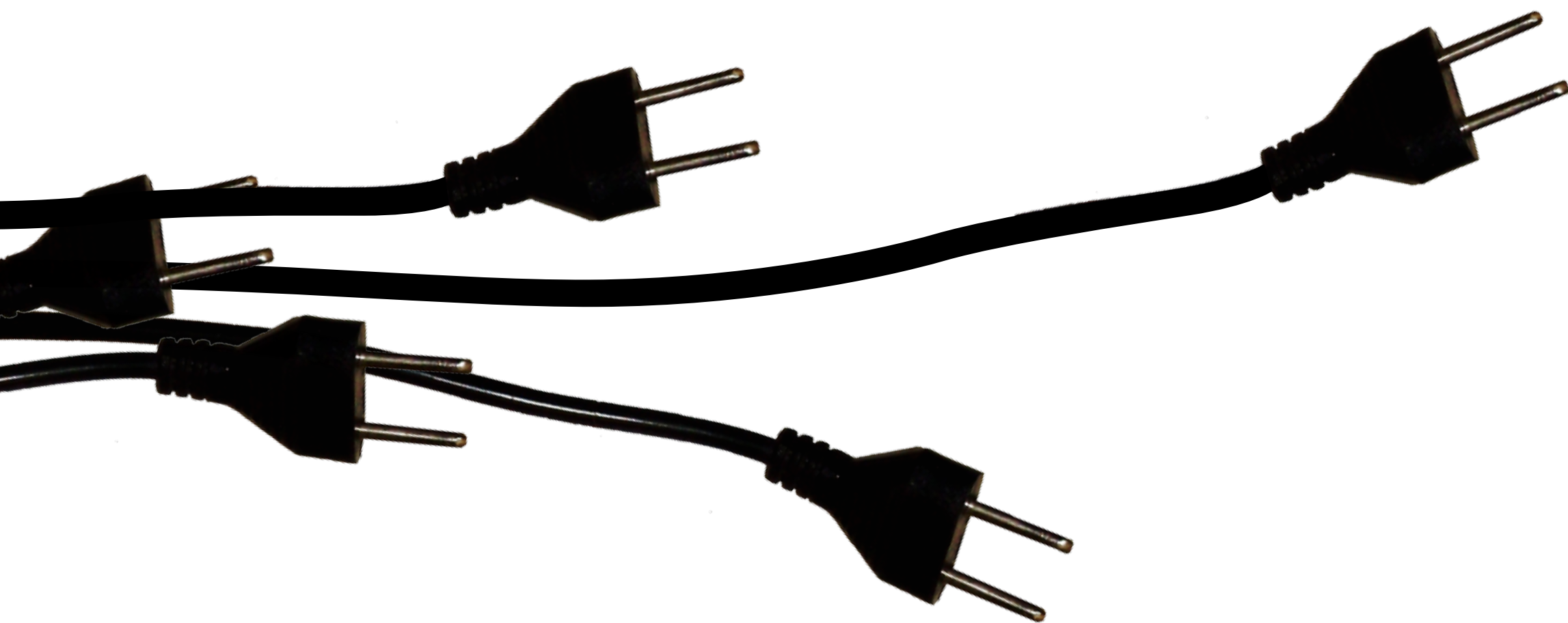




# OUTLET

FALL  
2010

BYU-IDAHO ART +  
LITERARY JOURNAL  
DESIGN+WRITING=ART



“WE WILL YET HAVE MILTONS  
AND SHAKESPEARES OF OUR OWN.”

—Elder Orson F. Whitney







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## DESIGN + WRITING = ART:

“The aim of all real art is high: to lift us, to expand us, to deepen us—to make us more fully conscious of what it means to live here upon this earth as part of the human race. And the wonderful thing about art (and remember this includes things such as poetry and music as well as sculpture and painting) is that it allows us to “experience” a multitude of things we could never, because of the obvious limitations of time and space, actually experience in a single lifetime. Furthermore, it allows us this endless variety of vicarious experiences without our having to suffer all the agonies of real life experience.”

—Donald R. Marshall

## Burning At Both Ends

by: Tatiana Schow

She sat on the edge of the street  
A bundle of matches  
clutched in her hand.  
Examining their red capped heads,  
she smiled.  
Raising one little figure  
above her head  
She knocked off his warm red hat  
Revealing a sputtering flare.

His head turned black,  
but the fire mounted  
Up his body to warm his frozen toes.  
Mesmerized, she allowed the flame  
To lick her porcelain fingertips  
Surprised at the heat  
she found there.

She dropped the corpse,  
dismayed at its expiration  
And glancing at her angry  
red fingertips,  
Grabbed another from their ranks.



## Just an Orange

Written By: Jeffrey Farnworth  
Designed By: Mikaela Pronk

Just an orange.

A lopsided ball of citrus juices, suspended in a fleshy matrix of stringy pulp,  
Sitting on my counter.

In my fingers the heavy fruit dimly stirs recollections of gently calloused hands.

Almost tenderly my thumbnail pierces the thick carapace—  
Resilient orange flesh wedges, almost painfully, into tender pink flesh.

Tiny bursts of citrus oil flash into the air, refracting in the humming yellow kitchen light.

A barely audible, sickening sound of membrane tearing away from membrane.

My tiny kitchen brims with the scent of pulsating life and the imagined smell of Minute Maid commercials.

Naked, resting in the palm of my hand—leathery jerkin crumpled, discarded—

White webbing weaving around each segmented piece.

Almost quivering.

Half, half, and half again, until eight segments bleed upon a blue paper floral napkin.

Brilliant colors blaze

Taste, texture, scent, senses glow

Orange awareness.

## CLEANING HOUSE

Cool breeze behind, scorching heat in front,  
He watches in awe, unbridled passion consuming.  
Flow of tears unable to quench the thirst.  
Flames caress and kiss,  
Demons dance, roar and cackle,  
Licking, biting, breaking.

Ashes rise while smoke swallows the stars.  
Within play visions of Mother dancing...  
Echoes of Father's screams, and beating.

Heat on his cheeks, reminder of the blows.  
Murky light illuminates the kitchen,  
Memories of Mother crying while Father shouts.  
Paint flakes, bubbles and falls, exposing,  
Leaving bare to burn.

Sirens' warning screams approach. Covered in soot,  
He smothers the life from the match with his foot.

WRITTEN BY: Andy Rice

DESIGNED BY: Karissa Phelps





# Bathwater

by Justin Haxby

## FREDDY SPLASHES IN HIS BATHWATER.

His tiny hands slap the surface, sending droplets everywhere.

A healthy puddle threatens to reach into the adjacent room. He stops and smiles at me. At seven months, he's a big kid—twenty pounds and thirty inches long. He looks at me with round, blue eyes and an adorable smile. It is open-mouthed and all gums. I smile back at him just as his attention diverts to the suds and the dozen toys floating around him. He picks up a rubber duck with his chubby little digits and sucks on the bill.

I experience a moment of envy.

I am sorry to say that it is not the first time.

I wish I were tiny again. I remember my baths, or maybe the comfortable feelings they evoked. When I was an infant, I know I was loved and protected. I know I was never bored; I too sat in a lake of toys.

As I grew, my baths evolved. The change involved two things – new tubs, of course, and new toys. The edges became sharper, the masculinity started to take shape, and interests began to be realized. In essence,

I was playing with action figures and boats in lieu of rubber ducks and teething links.

I don't know when it happened. Between being a kid and maturing into a teen, the toys were put away and never pulled out again. I still remember their last resting place beneath the sink—I wonder what Mom did with them.

Despite the years, I never lost my love for baths. They are my time to relax and read.

In an instant, my right pant leg is soaked. Freddy has just broken his own record. It's the biggest splash yet. All I can do is laugh.

We laugh at each other.

I am laughing at the fact that, until four months ago, my baths had been toy-free for well over a decade. Now, I can't help but step on a rubber duck or a plastic donut when I get in the tub.

I rub my son's head. He loves that. He has a skull like granite—hard and, if he follows the Haxby trend, impenetrable. I take a small blue cup from the edge of the tub and dip it in the water. I pour water over him to keep him warm. He turns his head and reaches for the cup, latching onto the edge with the surprising strength of an infant.

He wants it. I can't let him have it. He likes to dip the cup in the bathwater and drink from it. I am able to pry his tiny fingers from the edge He cries,

“Now, I can't help but step on a rubber duck or a plastic donut when I get in the tub.”

his mouth open and screaming, his eyes scrunched shut.

I grab his favorite duck, one that looks as though it has hatched from a pumpkin, and squeeze it. Its squeaking distracts him from his tears and he takes it.

The day when his rubber ducks lose their appeal, and a truck or boat or an ATV replaces them, I will write it down. He will know when he changed, when he grew. I see him driving a truck over the edges of the tub and around the faucet, making the noise of a rumbling engine in his throat, knocking shampoo bottles and soap into the water.

He squeals suddenly and goes back to the business of exporting water from the tub to the floor. The duck is floating at the other end of the tub. I hand him a link and put a towel down to stem the flood.

He's having such a good time that I can expect to sit here another twenty minutes. I don't mind. He'll play, he'll talk, he'll sing and splash and abruptly—he'll be done. He'll rub those beautiful baby eyes with his fists and complain to me. He can speak some words quite clearly and in context. I'll listen, and hear that it's time for a bottle and a nap.

When he is ready, I will pass him on to his mother, wrapped in a towel and happy.

Often he'll be asleep before I finish cleaning up, so I never say anything like, “I'll see you in a minute!”

I just tell him I love him.

I wish for him to take advantage of these early years. I wish for him to be this happy all his life. When that little tongue of his finally gets itself efficiently around the English language, it will be time to start chipping away at childhood and teach him responsibility. The time for accountability will soon follow.

Then he will be grown.

He latches onto my leg. He wants to stand up.

He struggles and grunts as he rises. Standing there, he looks at me.

“Dada,” he says.

I smile. It falters.

Time to get out.

Time to grow up.

The bathwater settles and cools, as if removing life from it takes its warmth. In my arms I can feel that the boy carries it with him.

That gives me hope. ■



# Goodbye Elsie

by: Skylor Mocks

designer: Nathan Cowles

*Emergency crews used the Jaws of Life to extract Rosenberg from her vehicle, and immediately she was life-flighted to OHSU.*

*“She arrived in critical condition,” said Dr. Jeffery Lang, one of the surgeons who treated Rosenberg when she arrived. “We could only do so much and then trust that God would handle the rest.”*

*Lang, along with a team of experts, worked to stabilize Rosenberg for just under two hours while her family waited to hear of any improvement. It would be a somber night as just before 1:00am Rosenberg would pass away from internal injuries.*

Up here, you can feel your lips chap and then slowly split open. You can taste the dust and the dirt and the blood, and it all makes a metallic grit that’s on your tongue. Up here, box after box, your muscles start to ache with repetition and frustration. Up here, though, is my answer—is my closure. Staring blankly pulls me nowhere, so I slide one gone-through box across the attic planks and stack it with the rest of the gone-through boxes. I’ve been up here so long the wall behind me has been steadily creeping and lurking just over my shoulder.

*“It’s the past trying to ambush you, David” she would have said. “Don’t worry though, it’s all behind you. The past is the past, and so are these boxes.”*

*“No,” I say to the heat. “I can’t leave now. I can’t escape you, Elsie.”*

*“The doctors did their best, that’s all I could ask for,” said Brett Rosenberg, Elsie’s father. “These things just don’t happen, I wasn’t ready to lose my daughter—what father ever is?”*

*“She was just so involved,” said Casey Rosenberg, her mother. “She wanted to be a part of everything: choir, newspaper, student council—she was so involved.”*

More boxes and more memories. Sweat soaks the small of my back where my shirt sticks to my skin. I slide a new box in, search for my answer, then slide it into the past.

In the attic, there is dust. It sits right in front of you and won’t let your eyes focus right. You can feel it as you breathe—as it climbs down your throat and settles in your lungs. The heat makes it worse. It’s August and 97 degrees outside, so the temperature hovers around 110 maybe 115 degrees up here. I would know; I’ve spent five straight hours up here. Five hours of me just digging through box after box looking for whatever will help me get over this, for whatever will help me get over that night.

*GRESHAM—after a small, but intense victory by Gresham High School over its rival, Sam Barlow, friends said their good-byes to eighteen year old Elsie Rosenberg. Her friends didn’t know these good-byes would be their last to Elsie.*

*After leaving the basketball game, Rosenberg took Highway 26 to begin the short trip back to her aunt’s house. Shortly after 10:15pm, a drunk driver swerved across two lanes of traffic to collide with Rosenberg’s vehicle.*

Boxes line wall behind me. They are stacked two-high in some places, three- or four-high in others, creating a skyline like the miniature version of some big city. They block the light from the windows and seal off the ladder down.

In two days, it’ll be a year from her accident, and still she is everywhere. It is her eyes I see when I pass a stranger on the street. I used to tell her the green was the color of Ireland and was one of a kind, but I see them everywhere now. I breathe her perfume when a girl passes by at school—some kind of lavender and vanilla, some kind of familiar. I see her, and that’s why I came up here, because she was everywhere else—because there are only boxes.

*Because the accident occurred in such a remote area, authorities were delayed getting to the location. On arrival, paramedics found 37-year-old Grant Woldford in the front seat of his car and Rosenberg unconscious, trapped in her vehicle.*

*“Don’t worry though, it’s all behind you.  
The past is the past and so are these boxes.”*

Sliding.  
Searching.  
Sliding.  
Repeat.

What used to be a neat towering wall is now clusters of boxes—pieces of third grade huddled with parts of summer vacations, boxes of baby memories with cases of Christmas ’05. They are all gone, though—they are all behind me.

Box after box slides into the towering past, and still no closure. I’m starting to think I’ll never get my resolve. It’s been six hours now, and Elsie would have made me take a break. She would have made me stop after the box of middle school awards and sports pictures.

*“Not yet. No, not yet. There is still more up here,” I say.*

*Many enjoyed her presence at a local bookstore, where she had been hired shortly after moving and where she met her boyfriend David Tillson, a fellow student from Gresham High School.*

*“She wasn’t just your typical teenager,” Tillson said, “She was bright and just had that spark everyone was drawn to. You just wanted to be around her.”*

Paper cuts and cracks crowd my fingertips now, splitting, snaking and bleeding. Memories of that night are closer now—almost close enough to get my answer: yearbooks with “have a good summer” and “don’t you ever change” penned across pictures, a senior class t-shirt folded neatly to show my graduating class across the front.

Before me are three boxes, each labeled in the fat ink of a Sharpie pen. I sit before them on the worn oak floor, feet sprawled in front and hands behind me, holding me upright. Aches spider out from my spine and stretches across my back.

For a long time, I hold a wallet-sized picture of her and me at homecoming. Her dress is ivory with black lace circling her waist. Her hair falls to her shoulders, hanging in chocolate

spirals. Around her neck is a small silver chain with a circle of diamonds suspended at the lowest point.

*“I looked so plain next to you.”*

*Hundreds of comments flooded Rosenberg’s Facebook page to express memories of Elsie and to create a comfort among her group of friends.*

*“I always looked up to you.” One wrote, “Thank you for always saying hi even though you were a lot cooler than me.”*

*Grief counselors will be on hand at Gresham High School from today until Wednesday, school officials said.*

*Services are pending and will be handled by Bateman-Carrol Funeral Home in Gresham. Only family and close friends are expected to attend.*

I hold the picture between forefingers and thumbs. Her eyes are beautiful and vibrate with life. Her cheeks are flushed, and she is smiling.

*“I miss you,” I say, and then place the picture back in the box.*

I lay it next to the dried out rose with petals delicate like tissue paper. Next to notes folded into triangles and hearts. Next to a birthday card with bent and worn edges. Next to so much of the past, and then close the lid.

With my palms, I push the last box to all the other ones. I push until it runs into the smaller piles of boxes, and keep pushing until it runs into the wall. Then I collapse with my back against it, facing the emptiness where so many boxes were before. The box presses the dampness into my back. My hands are before me, palms up and open. There is only dust and boxes up here—only the dust and what is already behind me.

*“I miss you,” I repeat.*



# Linked Together

MARLEY’S BENEFACTION IN  
DICKENS’ A CHRISTMAS CAROL  
by Heather Baird

PARENTS OFTEN REMIND THEIR CHILDREN that lessons can be learned “the hard way” or “the easy way.” This implies that experience is not always the ideal teacher. In Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol, Ebenezer Scrooge receives from his deceased business partner the opportunity to learn vital life lessons through observation and introspection rather than through painful and delayed retrospection. And so, though his place in the story appears relatively small, Jacob Marley stands as the true hero of A Christmas Carol.

While critics acknowledge the significance of Scrooge’s conversion process to the story, Marley’s role in the process seems to be largely overlooked. Morris says, “What ‘we’ remember about A Christmas Carol is the flinty employer, the humbly simple (and sentimental) clerk, and sweet Tiny Tim” (46). Marlow attributes the change in Scrooge to one of his ghostly visitors: “It is, after all, the influence of Christmas Past which permits Scrooge to negate the Christmas Future towards which he is deterministically moving” (23). But Jacob Marley himself says, “I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer” (Dickens 11, italics added).

I wish to consider the key interrelationship between the characters of Marley and Scrooge in Dickens’ story and how this association contributes to the momentous change effected in Scrooge. In order to do this, I will first examine the connections between

the two characters. I will then use psychologist Albert Bandura’s theories of observational learning to analyze Scrooge’s conversion process. Bandura suggests that “much of what we learn is acquired by observation” (Shaffer 290). In A Christmas Carol, this method serves as the primary means for Scrooge’s transformation. I will also include word studies to explore the significance of the chains worn by Marley in the early part of the book. In this way, I will show that Marley, who personifies Scrooge’s own potentially tragic future, offers Scrooge the chance to learn through observation what he will otherwise be doomed to understand only by sad experience.

That Scrooge and Marley share a connection is clear. They worked together as business partners for many years (Dickens 1). In fact, Scrooge felt that the two of them were interchangeable at work. “Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names. It was all the same to him” (Dickens 1). Even outside of the workplace, all they had in the way of association was each other. “Scrooge was [Marley’s] sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner” (Dickens 1).

Furthermore, Marley and Scrooge are both dead at the beginning of the work, though not in the same sense of the word. Marley had already passed away. “Marley was dead to begin with: There is no doubt whatever about that.... Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail” (1). But Scrooge is also dead at the outset- dead to Christmas, to his own emotions, and to the needs of others. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word “dead” can mean “bereft of sensation or vitality” or “destitute of spiritual life or energy” (OED). Both men had gone through life “dead” to the needs of their fellowmen. Marley laments,

“Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted me?” (Dickens 11). Similarly, Scrooge likes “to edge his way along crowded path of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance” (Dickens 2).

These connections lead Marley to return and warn his partner that he is setting himself up for a similar punishment (Dickens 10). Marley offers Scrooge a chance to alter his own course. Dickens gives no implication that Marley’s warning will change Marley’s own terrible situation. “It is required of every man... that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen... and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world- oh, woe is me! -- and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!” (Dickens, 10). His warning represents perhaps the first act of kindness Marley has performed since he was forced into an awareness of others’ needs.

Because Jacob Marley plays the part of benefactor to Scrooge, it is interesting to note the connotation as well as the meaning of Scrooge’s given name, Ebenezer. The name itself originates in Hebrew and means “stone of help.” According to the Bible, the prophet Samuel set up a stone as a symbol of gratitude for the deliverance of his people from their enemies, and called it Ebenezer as a memorial of the event (The Holy Bible, 1 Sam. 7.10-12). In the same way that the Israelites received deliverance from a source of power outside of themselves in the form of their God, Ebenezer Scrooge receives, from an outside source in the form of Jacob Marley, a miraculous deliverance from his own foolishness and from the eternal penalties that await him.

In addition to Marley’s own poignant witness, there are “despatched to [Scrooge] through Jacob Marley’s intervention” three Christmas spirits, the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Future (Dickens 24, italics added). In Johnson’s words, “Marley’s Ghost is the symbol of divine grace, and the three Christmas Spirits are the working of that grace through the agencies of memory, example and fear” (98). These spirits show to Scrooge visions of various Christmas Days in which he beholds people who exhibit distinctly different attitudes and practices from his own, such as his cheerful former employer, Fezziwig, his happy nephew, Fred, and his impoverished but grateful clerk, Bob Cratchitt. Even his visions of himself in younger years provides a contrast and a lesson for the embittered Scrooge.

Is this extensive observation of himself and others an optimal way for Marley to change Scrooge’s behavior? The work of psychologist Albert Bandura implies that the answer to this is yes. When Bandura studied in the 1960s, behaviorism stood as the dominant school of thought at the time (Krapp 43). However, Bandura felt there was something lacking in the explanations of human behavior (Krapp 43). He believed that experience cannot account for all the learning that takes place because a lifetime is not long enough for a individual to learn all of the complicated responses that come through personal experience with rewards and punishments (Krapp 43). Instead, he realized that much of learning takes place through the observation of others’ actions and subsequent consequences (Shaffer 290). Bandura’s renowned theories of observational learning tie in significantly to A Christmas Carol. Bandura says that “observational learning plays such a prominent role in human development because it is much more efficient than trial-and-error processes” (Shaffer 290). Clearly, trial-and-error did not work sufficiently for Marley until it



was too late for him to change his ways.

The conversion of Ebenezer Scrooge matches up neatly with Bandura's concepts. As Bandura taught, "the vast majority of the habits we acquire during our lifetimes are learned by observing and imitating other people" (Shaffer 290). Several instances in the story demonstrate the process of Scrooge's conversion. After observing himself as a lonely school boy, Scrooge's heart is drawn to the boy who had come caroling to his front step. He dries his tear-filled eyes and remarks, "I should like to have given him something" (Dickens 16). After enjoying a vision of his old employer, Fezziwig, Scrooge says that the man had "the power to render us happy or unhappy, to make our service light or burdensome.... The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune" (Dickens 19). The spirit inquires further and Scrooge explains, "I should like to say a word or two to my clerk just now" (Dickens 20). These two statements show that the scenes he observes spark a desire in him to change.

In addition to learning from the visions provided by the three ghosts, some visual cues become a part of Scrooge's education around the time of Marley's visit. One of the most symbolic of these comes in the form of metal chains. "The chain [Marley] drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail' and it was made... of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel" (Dickens 8).

In the conversation that follows his appearance, Marley explains to Scrooge, "I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it" (Dickens 10). Later on in his narrative, the ghost of Marley "held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again" (Dickens 11).

This image of the chain is not only shown to Scrooge on Marley's person, but also on the myriad

phantoms he views from his window as Marley leaves. "Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few... were linked together; none were free" (Dickens 12). The Oxford English Dictionary states that a chain can be "a connected series of links," but it also provides this obsolete definition: "A constraining force; a bond of union or sympathy; a tie" (OED). In addition to this, Cirlot, in his Dictionary of Symbols, explains chains as a symbol of not only close relationships (such as those of family members), but also as a symbol of "social or psychic integration" (42). He adds an interesting bit of historical information. "Amongst the Gauls there were comrades in arms who would enter into combat chained together in pairs so that if one died, his companion was bound to fall too" (43). I would suggest that the chain is the perfect symbol for representing the link between Marley and Scrooge. They were connected in many ways- as business partners, in their views, and in their treatment of humanity- which created a tie between them. It is a really a tribute to Marley's reformed character that he does not choose to drag Scrooge down to share his misery.

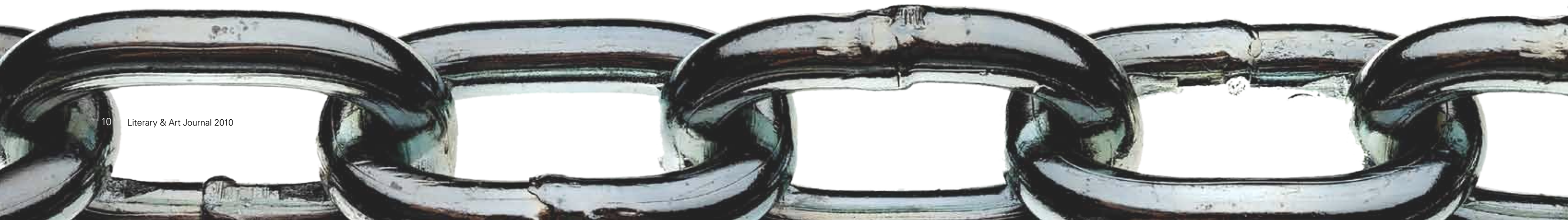
This redemptive opportunity emerges in the conversations which take place between Scrooge and each of the three ghosts. When Scrooge asks the first spirit why he has come, he replies, "Your welfare.... Your reclamation" (Dickens 14, italics added). Scrooge tells the next spirit "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it" (Dickens 25). Once the third and last spirit reveals to Scrooge the distressing images of what will be in the coming years, Scrooge pleads, "Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life" (Dickens 47). When he then finds himself in his own room the next morning, Scrooge experiences the elation of a second chance. He even cries out, "O Jacob

Marley. Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees" (Dickens 48).

In the case of Scrooge, he fits a lifetime of learning in one night because of the opportunity to learn by observation. Scrooge observes Christmas past, present and future- and it changes him. In the words of Hardy, "the hero is converted by seeing and understanding his defect and its origins. Insight and fairly explicit reevaluation set him free for a fresh start" (49). One might argue that because Scrooge is viewing himself in the past, some of the learning that takes place should be categorized as experience rather than observation. However, the experiences themselves have already passed without providing the needed changes. In seeing them from an objective point of view many years later, he is, though watching his own prior actions, learning by observation.

Jacob Marley offers Scrooge a priceless gift. As Marley says, "you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer" (Dickens 11, italics added). This chance to alter his course comes through the process of observational learning as indentified and labeled by psychologist Albert Bandura. Through the benefaction of one "linked" to him through both association and errancy, Ebenezer Scrooge receives the chance to start again. By employing the more efficient means of observation rather than drawn-out trial-and-error, Marley teaches Scrooge to choose a better ending for himself as well as those who will be blessed by his own beneficence. ■

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## CALIFORNIA

### Freeways

It is easy to tell  
when a freeway  
shouldn't be driven on.  
The number tells you.  
Avoid the 5 at 5:00.  
Only get on the 405  
before 4:05.

Still, they have a  
certain usefulness.  
Seeing your  
little old lady  
in Pasadena  
takes half the time.  
Then a jaunt to  
The Hills of Beverly  
and Surf City, USA.

No red lights,  
no cross walks,  
60 miles- per- hour  
all the way round.  
So go and drive  
whatever the weather.  
In a Porsche or a  
Disneyland car,  
you See LA.

### Giant Sequoia

One foot equals twenty years growth,  
three hundred feet tall-  
my few decades are ignorant!  
Teach me, I long to learn,  
sitting at your feet.  
Named for a Cherokee-  
last leader of a free nation.  
But wait, I implore, wait!  
Sunny Tennessee is far-  
far from misty California.  
Yes, a name, a great name  
carried on wind,  
a Trail of Tears.  
Sitting centuries, watching.  
Watching men, many good  
but not all, no, not all.  
Time moves on.  
You seem to think  
everything is known to you.  
You do not think.  
Listen and learn at the foot of  
The Great Master of Time.

### Half Dome

I itch all over.  
I can tell already  
I'm getting climbed on.  
Without thought, people  
grind stakes into me,  
use me to swing from ropes.

I have stood  
tall for countless  
millennia. Yet here,  
seen as a four  
thousand foot  
jungle gym.

I have signs  
that proclaim that I  
am dangerous.  
That isn't true.  
If those little people  
didn't try to scale  
me they wouldn't  
fall.  
Like you say for snakes,  
"Look, but don't touch."

## SOUTH CAROLINA

### Pawley's Island

The young sailor  
dressed in grey,  
"I must go my love,  
Lincoln is hunting  
our Southern blood.  
But to you and our Island,  
My beloved, Miss Pawley,  
I will return."

The maid so fair and tender  
turns to her soldier,  
trembles, cries,  
And I shall wait,  
patiently looking to the east.  
When at last this war is fought,  
together forever."

One, two, three years and more,  
then a ship, crippled, ripped  
lumbered towards the sand bar.  
He has come! Finally, reunion!  
Then all hope is drowned,  
"Medal awarded posthumously . . .  
bravery at Charles Town rewarded."

Miss Pawley is still seen  
on clear nights,  
a young girl,  
a white wedding dress,  
looking out to sea.  
Her sailor said,  
"I'll return and we shall wed."  
And he might yet.

# PLACES I'VE LIVED

written by Steven Sheppard  
designed by Kimberly Earl

## IDAHO

### Narnia

Dear Aslan,  
I understand why you loved  
the Pevensies. I really do.  
But Aslan, why do you hate  
Idaho?

Dear C.S. Lewis,  
Aslan did not kill  
the White Witch.  
She set her weather loose  
on a little town  
called Rexburg.

Dear White Witch,  
I have considered your offer,  
and I do not want  
any Turkish Delight.  
I want global warming.



# A PHOTOGRAPHER'S LIFE

DEBBIE MCPHETERS • MARY WINFIELD • JON MARTIN

Proposal. Research. Plan. Photograph.  
Time on the road. Mostly alone.  
Permission to photograph...still waiting...  
Finally taking Pictures.  
Can't disturb the wild turkeys. Full-body camo.  
Great white sharks. Hope the cage holds.  
Shooting honey workers in Nepal. Hanging off the side of a cliff.  
Africa's Great Rift. From a helicopter.  
Nepal monsoons. Chest-deep in the river.  
Bedouin women. Breaking barriers.  
Cotton. Cattle-drives. Rain forest canopy.  
Volcanoes - inside. Gorilla - 400 pounds - close-up.  
The Vatican - from the roof. Dolphins - from the water.  
Parisians eating dinner - from across the street.  
A million pictures shot. A thousand used.  
Shutter speed - 43 years and one-thirtieth of a second.  
Exposure to radioactive material. Passed exam. Again.  
Earthquake. War. Parasites. Elephants. Mobs. Customs.  
Lost family. Personal injury. Loneliness.  
Self-doubt worst part of all.

# Unfixable

BY ELYSSA KIRKHAM

THE NIGHT SKY WAS BROAD AND EXPANSIVE above me, pinned down by the weight of a fat moon. I clutched the chunky flashlight tightly in my hand, but did not turn it on, my path lit neatly enough by the moon.

Dirt and gravel coughed with each step as I wound through barrel cacti and prickly pears, past towering saguaros. It seemed I hadn't been going for more than twenty minutes, but I was unsure—aware of the need, the push to move on, move away, and leave the day behind. The cool light sapped what color was left from the landscape already devoid of it. It was soothing, aloe vera to my over-stimulated mind.

Out here, I know what to expect. Nothing new, nothing different – just the same path, my path, which I've followed deep into the Sonoran Desert for years.

I stopped suddenly, and dropped to my knees. Hunching over, I was breathing heavily, the hot summer air thick in my throat. The sweat on my broad shoulders felt sickly cold. Holding my hands up in front of my face, they shook slightly.

It was one of those things you don't think about much.

We lived outside of the Phoenix suburbs, far out into the desert in a small cluster of houses. Growing up in the hottest place in the United States, we learned the dangers of heat, the necessity of getting enough water. We knew about heat stroke, about sun sickness, about sun rashes. I can remember getting mildly ill a few times due to heat exhaustion, myself. It happens.

Katie got tired, got a rash, and Mom made her stay home from volleyball intramurals. The two days before we took her to the hospital, she did almost nothing but sleep.

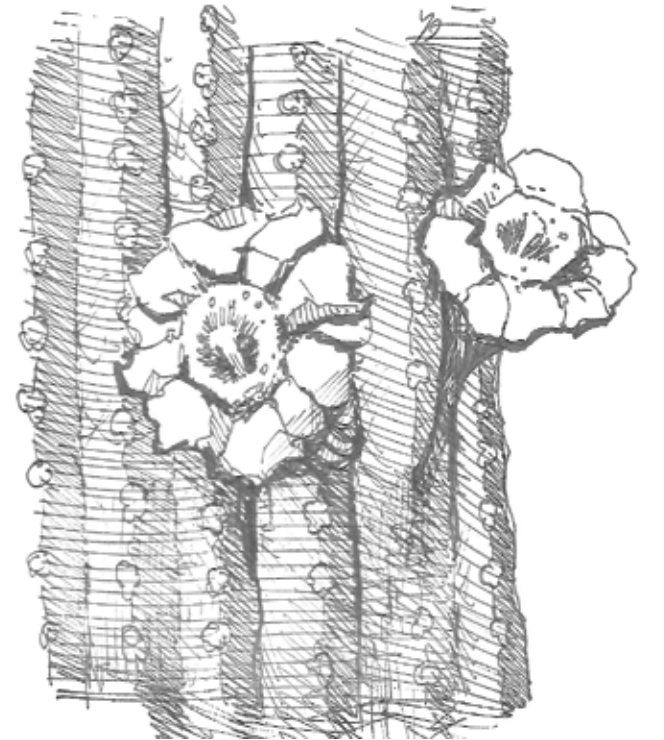
It's heat rash, we said, just too much heat, too much time in the sun doing suicides and spiking balls. She just needs some rest and rehydration.

I was on my side, face against the dirt, my sweaty skin picking up dust and small pebbles. My mouth was coated with heavy saliva. My breathing had slowed and I noticed the sounds of the desert at night.

A flutter signified bats flying overhead. There was a small rustle of movement from a few yards behind me. An elf owl hooted nearby. The animals were taking advantage of the coolness, the time when the desert rotates out of the sun's baking gaze for a few hours. This was the time of night when they emerged to gather, to drink, to hunt.

A moth landed on my shoulder, and I barely turned my head. Its large, glossy eyes surveyed me as it extended its proboscis to slurp up the salt and moisture of my sweat. After a moment, it took off again, spreading furred wings into the stars, the rash of holes and tiny tears in the fabric of night.

The first time I saw Katie in the hospital, all I could think was



how small she looked, this waif fourteen-year-old on those weird automatic beds. She had tiny hoses sprouting from the neckline of her hospital gown, hooked into her chest where the doctors had put a central line.

She smiled at me and called, “Hey Mickey. I hope you brought me some Sour Patch Kids.”

I frowned, seating myself in the chair next to her bed. “You were serious about that?” I asked.

“Uh, duh, I was serious. Nobody here will bring them to me. And I figured you would be the one person I could count on.” She turned her head and squinted at me from one eye, as if reassessing her trust in me.

It was the middle of the day. Dad was at work. Mom had left, after being there for more than thirty-six hours straight, for a much-needed shower and nap. But she hadn't gone before squaring me up, a hand on each of my shoulders, looking me sternly in the eyes.

“Mike,” she said, “You need to be brave, okay?” I nodded.

“She'll act like she's okay. You know Katie. She'll pretend that nothing's the matter, but you have to know that she is totally freaked out. So you can't be freaked out, too, okay? You just can't. Not in front of her, anyway.”

I looked up, met her gaze.

“I get it, Mom.”

She nodded, hugged me, and walked away down the hall, her



flip-flops smacking on the linoleum. Somehow, I knew that she wouldn't stop crying for the whole thirty-minute drive home.

Now I met Katie's eye, gave her a quick wink and a smile.

"Well, I promise, next time I'll bring you a five-pound bag if you want me to."

"I'll hold you to that. Don't think I won't. I'll refuse to see you if you don't have candy," she said. I chuckled. She laughed a little. Sitting close to her, I saw how poorly she looked. The rash had mostly faded, but she had dark circles under her eyes, and I couldn't help noticing how different her laugh sounded, hollow and leaden. Katie must have noticed I was staring; she plucked at the tubes running out of her.

"So, wanna know what these do?" I nodded. Katie needed to talk, I knew, needed to be chatting. It was what she always did, but now I didn't mind listening as she explained how her dialysis machine worked: her blood was pumped through the tubes, into the machine, a boxy looking thing on wheels with too many switches and buttons. The machine spun out the blood, separating the sludge of white cells from the rest, then filtered the declogged blood back into her body.

"When I first came in here, they said they didn't even know how I was standing up—that's how thick my blood was with white cells. Cool, huh?" I could have guessed that Katie, number one fan of the Discovery Health Channel, would find this all so fascinating. She rambled on for a bit longer, and I slowly stopped listening. She seemed so okay, so in control. I was having trouble believing she was really sick.

"Katie?"

She stopped short, looked at me. She seemed to register the bewilderment, the confusion, the burn-hot mix of anger and helplessness that simmered just below my cool facade.

"Are you afraid?" I asked.

She looked down at her chest, at the tubes there, fiddled with them. After a moment: "Yeah, Mickey. I'm afraid. I'm so out-of-my-mind scared that I don't even know what I'm scared of anymore, exactly."

I sat quietly and waited for her to go on. I suddenly realized I was clutching her left hand, that my palms were slick.

"Tell me how your date with Jenny went last Friday," she demanded. "I never got to hear."

So I told her.

I pushed myself off of the gritty ground, taking some of it with me; I was covered in dirt. I started again, running fast, sprinting almost. I was trying to outrun myself, run my bones right out of my skin, my life, run on as a ghost to the end of the earth.

I had to slow down to navigate. The path was defined, but formed by coyotes and other wildlife and it was overgrown and unsuited for human feet; it inclined slightly, and my breath came heavy and loud as I climbed. I forced it to come in rhythms, inhaled and exhaled in time with my steps.

My shin brushed a cactus; it immediately dislodged its pricks into my skin. I gritted my teeth, and glanced down. It was only a few spines; I could deal with them later, though I could already tell that the barbs they would leave in my skin would itch for days. My calves and thighs protested as I continued up the slope. The



burn, the pain of the needles; I welcomed the feeling. I embraced the small and concrete. I avoided the enormous and abstract.

Here's the thing about life-changing events, like moving across the country, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, or even winning the lottery—eventually, you adjust and adapt, because you must, and it all becomes normal, blasé and routine, simply the way life is.

Katie was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. Essentially, her body produced mutated white blood cells that reproduced madly, inundating her body with countless juvenile and ill-formed cells. Katie soldiered through her first round of chemo, losing close to fifteen pounds. She didn't much have to begin with. But she'd carried herself lightly, always, so she didn't seem that different.

I visited most every day, because I knew Katie was bored out of her mind a lot of the time and she preferred my company to Mom's fussing and Dad's silence. I tried to be normal, to tease her, and she made it easy. I would sneak her treats, until finally the toxic chemotherapy gave her mucositis, sores in her mouth and throat so painful that she stopped eating anything besides chocolate pudding, and they let her because she needed the calories. On good days, we would both ignore that we were in a hospital, that Katie had an IV infusing several drugs into her blood at all times. We pretended things were normal. On bad days, when I could tell Katie was in too much pain to ignore, I would sit in the corner as she slept or stared off into space, pressing her morphine button every six minutes. Still, Katie kept her long blonde hair, which had recently gone wavy as she hit puberty. And while she would never have admitted to being vain about her hair, she was proud of it, and I knew she was relieved that it did not fall out.

Before she even made it home from her first round of treatments,

there was talk of what would need to happen next: another round of chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, endless checkups and drugs to cure her. They were hopeful—because she was young and strong and could fight. But she needed a bone marrow donor and as her sibling, I was the most likely to be a match.

I went to the hospital. They swabbed, drew blood, asked me about my health. I had a one in four chance of being a match. I prayed for favorable luck more fervently than a gambler ever could, with odds better than most gamblers ever had. I went home that night and ran miles and miles, ran until I threw up.

A couple days later, the tests came back.

I wasn't a match.

My gait slowed as I neared the top of the rise. I knew what lay below: a gulley carved out of the loose, arid soil by the floods of the monsoon season. I paused to catch my breath and pulled the needles from my leg.

As I concentrated, I was startled by a noise. It was somewhere between a whimper and a yip. I cocked my head; it was different, somehow, from the various other noises of the desert at night. It wasn't the sound of a nocturnal animal going about its business. I heard it again, along with a strange hack.

I rose, my leg forgotten, and headed toward the gulley and the sound. I searched the edge until I found a suitable path down, half sliding on the loose gravel. The wash was about twenty feet wide and about seven feet deep. I paused until I heard the sound again, and headed up the wash in that direction.

Katie lost her hair to the second round of chemo.

But in the three or so months following it, she reclaimed strength. She gained back that weight, her appetite returning with ferocity. Her hair grew out an inch or so, in fine wisps; she refused

to wear wigs or even scarves, arguing that they made her look even sicker than just the baldness.

She managed to go back to school for a bit, in March. It had been seven months since she was diagnosed. She wanted to enjoy what was left of her freshman year of high school. I was finishing my senior year, and we would drive to and from school together. It was the kind of thing I would have complained about in the past, but now, I looked forward to the opportunity to spend more time with Katie.

She still needed a bone marrow transplant, but doctors were talking about other options and alternatives. Each checkup revealed no leukemic cells in her blood or her bone marrow, and we were hopeful. Katie was hopeful.

One afternoon after school, we went to Sonic to pick up some Happy Hour drinks. It was only April, but it was warm outside. We sat in the shade of the overhang, sipping our slushes and talking about the future. I would be going to Arizona State in the fall to study pre-law. She was quiet for a minute.

"Mike, sometimes I think maybe I'm being tricked." I looked at her sideways. "You know, like everyone is telling me I'm doing better and doing fine, but really I'm getting worse all the time."

I sighed. "Katie, do you feel worse, or better?"

She shrugged her shoulders a little. "No. Better."

"You're doing better. Great. You have to believe that things'll work out. I believe that." I didn't add that I had to, that it was the only thing that stopped me from going crazy and punching out walls every time I thought about how insane it was for a fourteen-year-old to have to deal with it all. We sat in silence for several moments.

"Mickey, here's the thing, if I ever get really sick, and you think I'm not gonna make it, don't drag it out. Just... just don't. I don't want that." The words pressed against my adam's apple, urgent and panicky. I put my arm around her neck.

"What makes you think I would want to sit around worrying about you for that long?" I joked.

"You know," she replied, "I didn't used to think that I would miss you when you left for college. I mean, you are such a turd. And I was looking forward to having the house to myself. And let's be honest, I can play Mom and Dad like Bach on the organ, and you're always ruining things," Katie said.

"Sorry I see through your little plans," I smirked. It was true that I had often stopped my parents from letting her go to certain parties or hanging out with people I knew were just no good. But I'm her big brother. It was what I was supposed to do.

"Whatever. I'm just saying, I'll miss you. It'll be weird when you aren't here anymore," she said. I gave her a squeeze with my arm that was draped over her still-slim shoulders. She was looking down in her lap, and I studied how her lack of eyelashes emphasized her youth, made her look so innocent and pure.

She punched me in my ribs. Hard.

"Ow!" I held my side, half laughing, half gasping for air. She had hit exactly where she knew I had a huge bruise from soccer practice.

"Quit being all smug just because I said I'd miss you," she ordered, and she took a long slurp from her straw.

As I maneuvered through the sparse shrubs and scattered



boulders of the wash, I could hear that I was getting closer to the noise. I had pulled out my flashlight; down here the moon had moved closer to the horizon, and the shadows were deeper and longer. I didn't know how late it was, but I was pretty sure I'd been gone hours now. I might have been concerned about worrying my parents, but not tonight. I knew I wouldn't be missed.

I swept the beam of light from side to side. I knew I must be nearly on top of the animal making the sound. The light fell on a bush that shook slightly. I moved cautiously around to the other side; a pair of eyes flashed green in the reflection. The feeble movement stopped abruptly, along with the sound. I moved closer, and saw fur and a small body.

It was a coyote pup. His short snout and head was covered in the fuzz of young mammals. He was coated in dust, and I could see he was breathing heavily and laboriously. He eyed me wildly as he lay on his side.

I made soothing noises and inched closer. The pup twitched his short legs a few times as I approached, but made no other movements. I was close enough now to touch him. I reached out and put my fingers next to his tiny black nose. He sniffed it a little, still hardly moving. From his sounds, the way he didn't move and his breathing, I was pretty sure he was hurt. I set the flashlight on the ground next to me, bulb end up, and started to extricate the coyote from the branches he was entangled in. If he was hurt, I would help him in whatever way I could.

The pup passively allowed me to pull him out. He looked bad, his left rear leg bent awkwardly. On closer inspection, I saw the soft flesh of his stomach torn. I suspected he had fallen from the top of the gulley wall — a long way for a small animal. I wasn't sure how he'd gotten the cut on his underside.

If I was Katie, or she was here, I might've known what to do. She had always wanted to be a nurse; it had been her lifelong goal. Things like organs and blood and bones fascinated her. And, with her illness, she only became more ambitious, planning to become a doctor, a surgeon perhaps. She would've kept her cool at the sight of blood. As it was, I was barely suppressing my gag reflex.

I picked up the flashlight again to take a closer look, whispering calmly the whole time. I tried not to jostle his leg too much. The gash was filthy, stuck with bits of gravel and small leaves, matted on with dried and congealed blood. I pulled out the water bottle I had with me, uncapped it, and poured a bit of water on the wound. The pup jerked and whimpered, making a weak attempt to snap at me. Enough of the debris had cleared away, however, for me to see that the cut was deep. I could see what I was pretty sure were intestines. Another organ, I couldn't even begin to guess what, looked as if it had also been shredded. My stomach churned a bit from the metallic smell of blood, and the sight of the innards.

I was pretty sure this was unfixable.

It was June, now. Katie had been in the hospital for three weeks, the last two of which she had been mostly unconscious in the intensive care unit. She had an infection, a bad one in her blood, and with her wiped-out immune system, not even antibiotics were helping her fight them off.

Now she was in something of a coma, kept alive only by the respirators and IVs she was plugged into. Her brain function had

all but vanished a few days ago. Doctors had told us to prepare ourselves to say goodbye. After all this, after all the months fighting cancer, she couldn't face a simple infection. The twisted irony was not lost on me.

But still she held on. And she had been, and the days were stretching out in an agonizing way, and the need, the insistence of keeping hope was becoming exhausting. She was unfixable.

Today, earlier this same night, we had talked it over. My mother was oddly stoic, she asked about what Katie would've wanted. I told her what she had said to me that warm April afternoon at Sonic; she wouldn't want to be strung out in limbo. And the pain. Looking back, I see how much she downplayed it, how each grimace was only a small hint of how ravaged she must have felt.

We agreed; tomorrow night, if there had been no improvement, we would take her off of life support. My skin prickled with the decision, but everything else went numb and blurry, until I had found myself at this trailhead, this familiar place, pounding out the path, trying to escape the loss, outrun the anger, grind myself into the earth.

I looked at the coyote pup. He seemed to be worsening. His eyes distant and focused on nothing. A bit of blood marked the fur by his nose. I didn't know how long he would be lying there, breathing, frightened and in agony. I couldn't bear it.

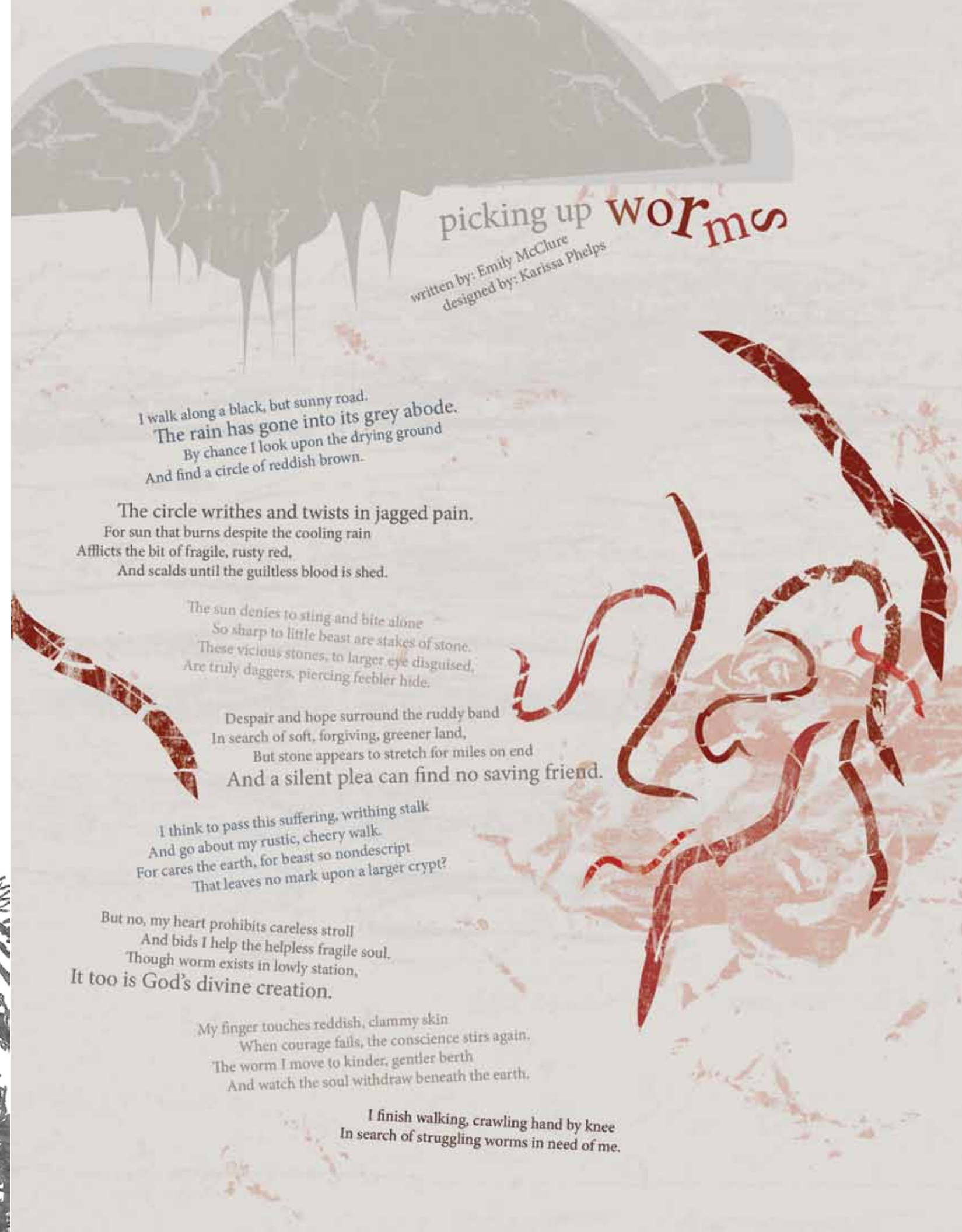
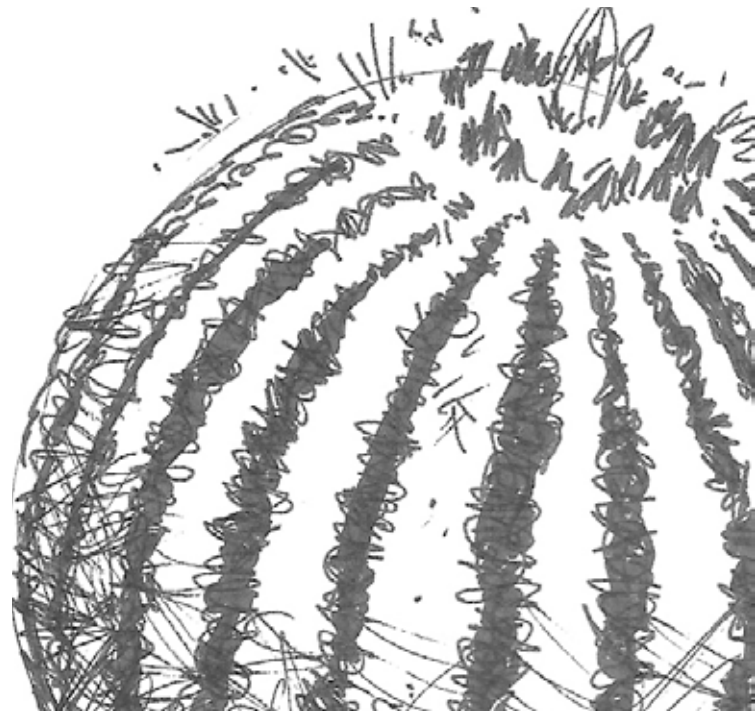
I clenched my fists and screamed as loud as I could into the desert air, an electrified and tortured sound that even I was startled to hear coming out of my mouth. Then, I was sobbing, and it sounded too foreign, alien, too loud and violent to be coming from me. It was both the choking gasps of air and an unending why, and another aloof but assured awareness that things were different — things had changed irrevocably.

On surface, I was shaken, crazed, incapable of dealing. But, underneath, I was all surety and knowing. I knew what was right, what must be done.

After a few minutes, my breathing slowed, my eyes cleared; I was back in control. My hands still shook slightly as I gently gripped the pup's neck, just below his skull. His eye focused on me, then flitted away, forward, and he breathed out in a long exhale.

With a quick motion and a snap, I ended his suffering.

And I was left alone with my own. ■



## picking up worms

written by: Emily McClure  
designed by: Karissa Phelps

I walk along a black, but sunny road.  
The rain has gone into its grey abode.  
By chance I look upon the drying ground  
And find a circle of reddish brown.

The circle writhes and twists in jagged pain.  
For sun that burns despite the cooling rain  
Afflicts the bit of fragile, rusty red,  
And scalds until the guiltless blood is shed.

The sun denies to sting and bite alone  
So sharp to little beast are stakes of stone.  
These vicious stones, to larger eye disguised,  
Are truly daggers, piercing feeblers hide.

Despair and hope surround the ruddy band  
In search of soft, forgiving, greener land,  
But stone appears to stretch for miles on end  
And a silent plea can find no saving friend.

I think to pass this suffering, writhing stalk  
And go about my rustic, cheery walk.  
For cares the earth, for beast so nondescript  
That leaves no mark upon a larger crypt?

But no, my heart prohibits careless stroll  
And bids I help the helpless fragile soul.  
Though worm exists in lowly station,  
It too is God's divine creation.

My finger touches reddish, clammy skin  
When courage fails, the conscience stirs again.  
The worm I move to kinder, gentler berth  
And watch the soul withdraw beneath the earth.

I finish walking, crawling hand by knee  
In search of struggling worms in need of me.



# Persephone

written by Laura Whitney

*Why'd you do it?  
I know, I know.  
Pomegranates are delicious.*

They are also healthy.  
Everyone agrees.  
They're in all kinds of juices now.  
Pomegranates can probably cure anything.  
I hope they cured you, too.  
Their properties are mythic, thanks to you.  
They'll help you be strong  
And skinny at the same time.  
Which is what every girl wants.  
No wonder you fell for it.

Our mother Eve fell for fruit, too.  
I imagine it was also a pomegranate.  
A white one.  
What is it with women and fruit?  
You could get them to do anything  
By offering them a piece of fruit.  
Apparently.

Did you need to escape from your mother?  
She does seem a little overbearing.  
She turns the earth into a wasteland  
Whenever you return to your husband  
After all.  
Growing up with a mother  
Who is the CEO of the weather and harvest  
Must've affected you, at least a bit.  
I bet you were pretty conflicted  
And misunderstood your role in society  
As a woman.

Did you think marrying a man  
More powerful than your mother  
Would fulfill you?  
Maybe you were actually in love with him.  
Or at least thought you might be  
After a while.  
Maybe you just weren't sure  
How to be anything  
But subjugate to someone  
so powerful.

So is Hell everything you expected, then?  
Does your husband treat you well?  
His work must consume him.  
Harboring souls and all.  
Do you get lonely  
Down there in the underworld.  
With all the wailing of dead souls around you,  
Their crying for what they lost,  
What they could never have  
Is probably pretty tiring.

*Oh, but that pomegranate.  
It was worth it, wasn't it?*

When you bit into that first seed,  
And the juice sprayed like sweet blood on your lips  
And filled your mouth  
With the flavor of ancient winds and earth.  
And it ran down your throat  
Like the caress of the lover  
You'd never have.

I can't say I blame you.  
If someone offered me a pomegranate  
In exchange for my soul  
I can't say I'd refuse.



## the farmer's lullaby

by emilio de marchi

The gloomy bread of subsistence,  
Dearer to heaven than to men,  
Is dispersed to the patient farmer.

In the frost or the sun, on the mountain, the hill,  
Or the plain, the woven stalks of grain move, each one  
Touched by the farmer's hand.

During the first light of dawn  
When rich men dream on a bed of soft feathers,  
The farmer already labors.

When August rears its heated head,  
Citizens migrate to cool beaches:  
The farmer remains behind.

When the hail destroys or harvests  
The crop, the wealthy blaspheme;  
The farmer repairs and rebuilds.

While the lord wastes the fruit of the fields  
In favor of his mistress's unbridled desires,  
The farmer gathers the harvest.

He gathers; bread, wine, fodder, and straw,  
Are plentiful for other men and beasts, o misery!  
But the farmer starves.

If the flag of fortune changes hands,  
The fortunate shriek with viciousness:  
The farmer hopes.

While the providence of God denies  
The desires of proud Sardanapolo,  
The farmer prays.

By many methods, O treasurer,  
You acquire villas, but do not promote  
Nor assist the farmer's efforts.

When he feels the hours of his day  
Have been completed, to the hospital  
Goes the farmer, and there he dies.

Upon the graves of wealthy kings  
Stand crosses of marble, bronze, and granite.  
The farmer receives no marker.

designer: nathan cowles

## How I BECAME the MOST CONFIDENT WOMAN ON Earth



WRITTEN BY: LAURA WHITNEY  
DESIGNED BY: MIKAELA PRONK

The first time I saw you, you were sitting in the front corner of our algebra class, cracking jokes and causing hysterics in a group of girls. I was captivated by your goofy smile and freshly-ground cinnamon hair and I watched you class period after class period, wondering if someone like me could ever be friends with someone like you, the funniest man I'd ever seen. I had no sense of humor, after all. But I must've had something, because you noticed me, too. And you actually tried to become a part of my life, and that surprised me so much I didn't have a chance to think before you began so sweep me off my feet.

Do you remember how we made up code names for all of our friends, just so that we could make fun of them in front of their faces and they wouldn't know about it? The way we could characterize them in just one noun, and create such beautiful metaphors with that noun, brought joy to your heart as much as it did to mine. Only you could understand what I said when I didn't say it.

There was the night when we were all watching Roman Holiday in the basement, and I was so depressed because the boy that I had a crush on was paying attention to another girl. And you were paying attention to another girl, too. I sunk into a numbed despondency, but then you gave up on that other girl and wrapped me into your solid, bony shoulder, which had never been comfortable, but I made a cozy home there in spite of its natural rockiness. That was the best Valentine's Day of my life.

I'd always spend twenty minutes chatting with your mom when I came over, before I even saw you. We made cinnamon rolls together and discussed different parenting techniques and the psychological ramifications of each style. I called her "Mom." You always wanted to watch either a ridiculous teen soap opera or the History Channel. I admired your deep passion for documentaries on unknown civilizations. I laughed outwardly but smiled inwardly at your emotional overflow for the ludicrous drama in your operas. I never paid attention to a word on the TV. I only paid attention to your breathing.

There was that time we were trying to get our friend to break up with his girlfriend, and we came up with infinite schemes to break them apart. Remember the night I sat on his lap and played with his hair and gave him Sweethearts that said "You and me," "I hope," and "Its love" while he was sitting next to her on the couch? We were cruel and I think everyone resented us. But you and I loved each other and we were having fun, and that was all that mattered. Besides, he did break up with her.

Remember the time when my family went to the natural history museum, and you came with us? My little sisters made fun of how excited we were at each exhibit, and how we were the last to get through the museum, because I'm certain we read every plaque, pushed every button, moved every slide. Who knew that we both absolutely adored the Stegosaurus? We held hands in the back seat on the way home, and my family didn't say a word. They had probably never seen me so happy.





XOXO

Your hand was always colder than mine, but I always loved to make it sweat by the time I regretfully had to let go.

We loved the same cartoon that we were both too old for. When I found the movie and bought it, you watched it with me right away. You jumped when I jumped, yelled when I yelled, laughed when I laughed, and cried when I cried. You fell in love with the same characters I did. And you really were excited when I got the keychain of the orange Tyrannosaurus, even though he wasn't your favorite character.

Do you remember that time a bunch of us were riding in my boyfriend's car, and we were listening to the CD I made for him, and on came a certain song and you said you could never listen to that song with anybody but me? It's true. It was my boyfriend's CD, but

"IT WAS YOUR SONG  
AND IT ALWAYS  
WILL BE."



Remember the day the girl you were in love with was in the hospital, and we drove around neighborhood after neighborhood and listened to the CD you dedicated to her, and you wept? I was the only person you could cry in front of, and you made me promise never to tell anyone that you cried.

Your niece was really sick, and you stayed home after school for days and days to take care of her and give your mom a break instead of coming to play with us. You read to her, held her and walked her to sleep. You fed her according to her strict diet to keep her healthy. You cried when you thought of how sick she was. When I watched you with her, I saw you with my future daughter, our daughter.

Remember when I was sick, and you wouldn't let me stay at school anymore because you were afraid I would pass out? I couldn't go home because all the wood floors in my house were being refinished and my house was full of toxic fumes, so you let me go to your house and sleep in your bed. Your mother blamed you for getting

me sick. When you got home from school and I was still asleep, you didn't wake me up; you just deposited your stuff in your room and let me keep sleeping. You didn't know how long it took me to actually fall asleep because your bed smelled so good. I think that was the best nap of my life.

Your little brother always gave me dirty looks when I came over, because he knew that you'd stop playing video games with him and pay attention to me instead. I always just smiled and said 'Hi.' He loved you so much. And I think you loved him more. You always protected him from the corruption which had stained your life and concept of the world. I knew he'd warm up to me once I became his sister.

Do you remember how sometimes I would call you when I was on my way home from your house after hanging out with you for hours? It was because a zombie always dropped from the stoplight outside of your neighborhood and tried to claw through my windshield with its chipped fingernails coated in dried blood so it could lick my skin off my flesh with its blackened fangs. Its torn muscles hanging from its bones and fiery orange and red eyes, along with its hoarse, rattling breath that it sucked through split and bleeding lips dripping with bits of drool and guts are what really terrified me. I knew only you would understand my breathless horror, because you hallucinated about your greatest fear as much as I did. And I knew that you wouldn't mind me calling.

Remember the time I was going to go on that date with that guy, but I had two dreams the night before that he tried to rape me and you rescued me? When I told you that, you wouldn't let me go on the date, but you let me hang out with you instead, even though you were having a guys' night out.

Then there was the time my best friend moved away for two years, and I went with you to a birthday party that night. I felt so empty and worthless inside I ate until I had to leave the party to throw up. When I came back to eat even more, you stopped me. You forbade me from eating more and hurting myself.

"THEN I KNEW MY  
BEST BEST FRIEND  
WAS ACTUALLY  
RIGHT WITH ME."



B.F.F.

I bought the sheet music for the song from that chick flick that I hated, but you loved, just so I could play it for you on the piano someday.

There was also the time we were standing by your car parked outside my house. You had cut your leg and were bleeding pretty badly but talking to me was more important than taking care of it. I realized I was in love with you, and when I told you, you asked me what I wanted to do about it, and before I could articulate an answer, you kissed me. Once I started breathing again, I laughed, and couldn't stop. I didn't tell you, but I was laughing because you had just fulfilled every dream an eighteen-year-old could have. You were the first person that I said I love you to every time we talked.

Do you remember every time we drove up the canyon and around the rich neighborhoods, in your clunker that I deemed your pod racer, because you didn't trust my truck or my driving at night? I knew it was because you felt you could better protect me if you were driving. Remember singing The Phantom of the Opera at the top of our lungs? I sang Christine and you'd sing Raoul and the Phantom, every word, every note, every harmony. We were beautiful together. Then we'd get out and sit on the back of your car watching the stars until we got too cold. I just wished that you'd hold me, tell me you loved me, kiss me, propose to me, and marry me every moment, every time. You never did. But I was never disappointed because you didn't need words or gestures to do it.

"EVERY ACTION, & EVERY  
PIECE OF YOUR SOUL,  
TESTIFIED, SHOUTED TO ME,  
THAT YOU LOVED ME."



Do you remember the time I told you of all the experiences and feelings I had never told anybody before? All my feelings of inadequacy, fear, resentment, and pure depression were poured upon you, and you didn't say a word, you just pulled me into your chest as I wept, for the first time I really remember weeping in my life. I had cried before, many times before, but never

had I felt so devastatingly empty as I did at that time, until you filled me with your silent and unconditional love.

I can never count or even imagine the sacrifices you went through for me. You taught me that it is not only okay to be passionate, but that it is wonderful to be passionate, and that life can only be lived by investing every piece of yourself into it. You taught me not to hold back. You taught me to follow my interests shamelessly. You taught me to say I love you. You taught me what it means to love.

I never ever had one doubt about you. You were the surest force in my life, not only for joy and love, but I was sure of your potential, your abilities, your brilliance, and I was sure that nothing and no one could ever compare to you.

Do you remember the weekend I came down from college and we went out for lunch, and you took me to my favorite steakhouse even though you weren't supposed to eat a lot of meat because you were having problems with your heart again? Do you remember what we talked about? Do you remember that you told me that you would always love me?

A few days after that, a friend told me that your girlfriend forbade you from speaking to me ever again because her jealousy wouldn't stand for it. I waited patiently, but after a while, I had to keep going with my life. I moved halfway across the planet and distracted myself with all kinds of cultural experiences. I saw great architecture, wonderful art, stunning landscapes, and excellent natural history museums, and I wished I could share them with you. Then one day someone had the guts to break it to me that you were engaged to her. I couldn't call you or talk to you because I was so far away, and I actually, for the first time, realized how far away you were, too. You had forgotten that I was the one who wanted to love you more. I hadn't run away, but I couldn't take it. I didn't understand. I was made for you; my heart had always told me that I was. This was truly emptiness.

I couldn't come to the wedding because I was still in the other hemisphere, but I suppose it was okay, because when I would've tried to say I'm happy for you, I may have thrown up. I didn't get an invitation anyway. ■







I HAD WAITED TEN MONTHS TO ENTER that room. This was the meeting that would declare me worthy to be a fully fellowshipped member of the church again. I sat on the stiff couch, waiting.

The couch sat against the wall outside the high council room. The cushions felt like they belonged on my grandma’s couch wrapped in plastic. I shifted to the left and to the right, trying to find a position to ease my tension. I looked around the hall and my eyes slowly found the ceiling tiles. Sixteen of the eighty-seven tiles bled with green discoloration. The bone-colored paint on the corner cinderblock of the wall clashed with the white caulking of the door frame.

Focus. Fading tiles and white caulking would not make me feel any less nervous. I needed to concentrate on this disciplinary council.

I struggled to know what exactly to expect from this meeting. I remembered back to my first disciplinary council which consisted of fifteen faceless men. I didn’t know any of them. I walked into the room of the Hinckley on the third floor at six-thirty in the morning. The four tables constructed a rectangle with a hole in the middle. The twelve high councilmen and stake presidency sat around the rectangle, waiting. The hole in the center of the rectangle was the only thing I related to in the entire room.

After four hours of recounting details, answering questions, and answering more questions raised from my answers, I was dismissed. Forty-eight minutes later, I was disfellowshipped.

Afterwards in the Stake President’s office I asked if I was going to be able to stay in Idaho to work through this with Bishop Stone. President Conner simply responded: “No. These wards are for endorsed students, and endorsed students only.”

I felt my false hopes of mild punishment decay as I sat in his office. These were the consequences of my actions. I knew that I would need to go through some sort of penance process, but sin numbed me in such a way to think it would be a few months of not taking the sacrament. I left the office. Two weeks previously I broke a commandment of God, and then twenty minutes after the fact I confessed to my dad, and then the bishop right after, and then the bishop again twice the next day, and then the stake president three days later, and then the bishop three more times, and then the high council for four hours. The entire time I thought I knew what would happen after the confessing finished. Hearing President Conner tell me I was no longer welcome in the student ward was final. I was stunned, and tears replaced my lack of words. Sin cut me off in a way I never anticipated.

I didn’t expect to be turned away that abruptly. So I drove home, to Maryland, two weeks later.

And now, after ten months, I sat on a stiff couch. How would this meeting be different? This time I knew most of these men. Bishop Taylor issued me my first temple recommend when I was twelve. Brother Matthews made it a point to find me and give me an update about his daughters, Kara and Erika, every time he visited my ward. President Lund’s daughter and I recently dated. He helped me plan dances when I served on the stake youth council and later he interviewed me for the Melchizedek Priesthood. President Jordan interviewed me and sent me on my mission. Twenty-three months previously I reported to all of these men about my mission experience.

They knew they were called together for a disciplinary council to decide whether or not a disfellowshipped member of the church had proven worthy of reinstatement. What did they think when they heard it was me, Eric, the son of John and Kaylene. I could feel their disappointment and their shock. Although, the couch didn’t seem so stiff when I thought about how much they cared; they were here out of love.

In my mind, I gleaned the admonitions of the first high council over and over. My eyes gradually found the picture of Christ centered on the wall just three feet away, a little off to my right. Did I know him well enough to use the Atonement? He stood in the middle of the dark wooden frame with the people on the right in the light, the people on the left in the dark. Where was I in this picture? Am I worthy enough to cross over to the right side? Could I have studied harder? Could I have prayed longer? What more could I do? Did I miss any promptings that would allow me to receive my temple covenants again? In the top left corner of the painting stood a faint white silhouette of the DC temple, could I ever go back into such a holy building?

The door opened. I stood up immediately to be invited into the room. Brother Swan slipped out.

“No, not yet Brother Stephens. I just need something from the office. Just a few more minutes.”

I slouched back onto the stiff couch. I stretched over the arm of the chair to see past the corner of the wall. The door glided shut when he walked back into the room. I heard him jiggle the doorknob to ensure it locked properly like it was a parent-teacher conference in elementary school, and they didn’t want the child who sat outside the door to listen. I shifted my weight back to center on the wood-like cushion. The hallway was deserted. I was alone. The breeze through the cracked door from the air conditioner in President Jordan’s office



supplied the chill that ran from my fingers to my wrists.

Had I done everything the original high council had asked?

I read most of The Miracle of Forgiveness, poring over President Kimball's words on repentance as if I were learning it for the first time. I prayed every morning and every night and as often as I could in between the two. I read the stories in The Book of Mormon. The stories about Nephi and Lehi, the Sons of Helaman, Ammon, Abinadi, and especially King Benjamin.

It took me three weeks to pull Brother Peters aside to ask him in private not to call on me to say the prayer during institute. I made every effort to sit through church without wanting to be somewhere else, every week not taking the sacrament. I met with Bishop Sheppard almost every week since the first of the year, twenty-nine times.

In April, Sister Lewis invited me to say the prayer in Gospel Doctrine, but my dad immediately stood up and began the prayer before I could shamefully decline. The only thing I remember is the look of confusion on her face as I jetted out of the chapel.

Only once I forgot that I wasn't supposed to sustain ward members in callings. I quickly retracted my arm as soon as I remembered my mistake. I felt dread seep into my veins like ice as I rested my hand in my lap. I didn't stop asking for forgiveness from God until the end of the first talk. I didn't care if anyone saw my retreated hand; I cared that I wasn't able to fully participate as part of my penance, and I forgot.

Am I ready yet? Ten months wasn't enough, I needed the full year. But that would take me to late October. If I did that, I'd miss the deadline for the Winter Semester. That would mean I'd miss twenty-one months of school—almost two years. I couldn't miss another two years of school. I wanted to graduate someday soon, not later.

If I wasn't ready now, could I ever be? I had to be ready. I wanted to be whole, to be able to fully participate in class, to be able to give a priesthood blessing, to be able to go to the temple. Is that desire to be a whole again enough to be ready?

Suddenly, the door opened again. I lost the thread of thought like a spider strand in the sun. This time President Jordan came over, and I stood up. He placed both of his hands on my shoulders; my knees bent slightly from the unexpected weight.

"Brother Stephens. Before we go into this room, is there any reason we should postpone this meeting?"

I remembered having concerns, but I couldn't recall any details. They seemed insignificant compared to the Stake President's heavy hands. "Not a one, President.

I am ready."

I entered the room, everyone stood up immediately. I avoided their eyes. I sat down.

"As you are aware Brother Stephens, you were disfellowshipped last year on October 19th. You are here today to explain to us why you feel you are worthy enough to be reinstated into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Please proceed. Also, please share with us your testimony."

Hesitation flooded my mouth. I swallowed as much as I could, and spoke.

"During the last three months of my mission and the year following I did not believe in God. During the last ten months of my being disfellowshipped I learned what it meant to have faith. My first disciplinary council told me there were two options on the table when they made their decision: excommunicate or disfellowship. The primary reason they decided on the latter was because if I were excommunicated, I would lose the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"For a long time I struggled to know the Holy Ghost's role. Their comment told me just how important that role is. I felt His promptings to testify to three of my friends about the love and care God puts into repentance. David ended up speaking with his bishop and is now married. Bryce came back to church and is preparing to serve a mission. Brandy came to church and recommenced her search for God. I cannot say that it is because of me that these things happened, but I can say that it is because of God that these things happened. I couldn't do that a year ago."

I then shared with them all I had done over the past ten months: my mistakes, my struggles, my triumphs, and my service. They asked questions, and I answered them.

President Jordon dismissed me after twenty minutes. I stood up and left the room with more speed than I anticipated. I paced the ten-foot stretch of hallway four times and sat down on the stiff couch once again. My knees weren't bouncing, and my fingers weren't tapping; I felt calm. A long eleven minutes later, the door opened, and I was invited back into the room.

"Brother Stephens, after hearing your plea, some discussion, and the promptings of the Lord through prayer, we have decided to reinstate you as a fully fellowshipped member of the church."

He began explaining more about remaining worthy to receive my temple recommend, and others of the high council gave me more advice. I couldn't hear very much of it. I had to celebrate.

After shaking their hands and awkward one-armed-

half-hugs, I bounced to my car in the parking lot. I couldn't wait any longer to report to someone that I was full again. Finally, after ten months, I could partake of the sacrament, offer a prayer at institute, sustain the prophet, give a blessing, and feel whole. I opened my phone expecting to see the missed calls and text messages from my friends and family whom I had told about the meeting.

There were no missed calls, and there were no text messages. No one remembered. My phone remained painfully silent as I drove thirty-eight minutes home.

Lynsey, my fifteen-year-old sister, wasn't even home on the computer waiting to talk to me when I walked through the door like she had done so many times before. She had slept over at a friend's house. My mom and dad waited up for me. My mother cried a little bit, and my dad gave me a hug. Then I went downstairs.

As I sat at my kitchen table eating left-over Chinese food that was prepared with a little too much fish sauce, I realized that people probably did remember but waited for me to tell them. It was a personal trip to Mecca, my journey. The mountains I climbed and the chasms I traversed were my own. People would hear about it when I told them.

The following Sunday, I sat in sacrament meeting. I listened to the prayers over the bread and water more closely than I ever had before. The young deacon with the crooked tie placed the tray before me. For the first time in ten months, I ate the piece of bread and drank the little cup of water.

I didn't feel any different. It didn't make any sense. I thought I completed everything required to feel different. Did I miss a step? I wanted to feel different. I remembered my actions that led me to being disfellowshipped, and then I did feel different. I felt drained and tired.

Two months later, I sat in my car in the church parking lot in Idaho holding my new temple recommend. It was lighter than I remembered. The perforated edges felt rough against the smooth spot of my middle finger where the tip got cut off while I was chopping garlic last year. It was a year since I cut my finger. It was a year since I was disfellowshipped.

The scar remained on my finger, a reminder that it couldn't heal properly. Could I ever be fully fellowshipped? My bishop in Maryland told me I was worthy. The high council told me I was reinstated. My bishop here in Idaho gave me a temple recommend. Then why did I feel so inadequate to hold a piece of white and green paper?

I tried talking to some friends about it. They couldn't

understand. How could they? I appreciated their efforts, but that was all they could offer.

I left their house to meet with a member of the stake presidency, to get the third and final signature needed to make the temple recommend valid. As I sat in his office, I answered the interview questions as they were meant to be answered. And then he asked the last question.

"Eric, do you feel worthy to enter the temple?"

I choked; I could feel tears leaking from my eyes. "I don't know. I was disfellowshipped last year, and just got refellowshipped in August. I finally was able to meet with my bishop today and get my recommend, but I just don't know if I can do it. I want to assume that is the same thing as someone feeling inadequate before they leave for the MTC or before they get married, but I don't know if it is."

He slowly got up and handed me a tissue box from his desk.

"Eric, it has taken me more than sixty years to trust the Lord. For a long time I could honestly say that I believed in Jesus Christ. Believing Jesus Christ when He says He can heal you is another thing entirely. The Atonement is a powerful gift that God has given us. There is only one sin, and one sin only for which you cannot be forgiven. You have not committed that sin. You can be forgiven. Eric, you have been forgiven. Your bishop, your stake presidency, and your high council in Maryland all have told you that you have been forgiven. You need to know for yourself that you are forgiven. I cannot tell you that will happen tonight or even if it will happen in the near future, but I do hope it is soon. You have answered my questions, and I believe you have answered them honestly. You belong in the temple. Go as soon as you can."

As he spoke, I felt different. For the first time I saw part of the forgiveness offered by the Lord. I belonged in the temple, despite how inadequate I felt. He signed the designated line and handed it back to me.

As I left the stake offices he called out, "I am going to put this into the computer right now. You should be able to get in as soon as it opens on Tuesday."

I loosened my tie as I exited the stake center. The wind was strong and cold against my hot face. When I turned the corner to go to my car, I looked up and saw the temple through the tree line. Its white walls stood graciously against the black sky. The Lord knew I was whole. What everyone else thought or knew didn't matter; just me and God. I wasn't numb. I wasn't cut off. I felt His warmth. After two and a half years I would be sitting in the temple on Tuesday. The wind wasn't so cold after that. ■



# Thicker than Blood

WRITTEN BY: SARA LORD  
DESIGN: KEVIN BURGESS

THE ROOM SMELLED LIKE STALE CIGARETTE SMOKE, cats, and dirty clothes. The aroma surrounded Katie in an uncomfortably intimate way, like the arm of a stranger around her shoulders. It was Cameron's room – her mother's room. Katie had no idea what she would call this woman when she finally saw her. She was always "my mother" in her mind, a term that to Katie represented the technicality of the relationship. There was no endearment in it, only obligation. Katie shifted the position of the big cardboard box under her arm. If it were smaller it would have fit there less awkwardly.

"So... this is it," Katie said to Aunt Jess, who stood a little behind her in the hall. "I guess I'll start gathering up some things for her then." Aunt Jess was a small woman, with short, graying hair and lines prematurely forming around her eyes. Those lines deepened as she smiled bracingly at Katie.

The crowded space reminded Katie of a dragon's hoard, but instead of a glut of treasure and bones, Cameron – Katie's mother – kept the assets of a woman adrift. Katie's eyes groped past cigarette butts and boxes spilling over with clothes to the heavily-curtained window. A slit in the curtain revealed several Connecticut oaks that almost sparkled in contrast to the dim, claustrophobic room.

Gently, Aunt Jess touched Katie's shoulder. "Are you sure you'll be all right here, by yourself, for a little while?"

"Oh yeah, I'll be fine."

It came out too quickly, and Aunt Jess frowned. "Really?"

Katie wondered if she should have come sooner as she noticed, again, the early aging on her aunt's face. Long years taking care of Cameron had worn Jess out.

"No worries." Katie asserted. "You go bring her some dinner and I'll meet you at the hospital when I'm done here."

"Well... if you're sure." Aunt Jess fingered the keys in her hand.

"I'll be fine." Katie guided her back through the narrow, yellowed hallway to the tiny kitchen with L-shaped counters. Opposite of the kitchen was a carpeted living area, where the couch decomposed in front of a fossilized TV. "Drive safely."

"I will. And – thank you." Aunt Jess gave Katie a quick hug before she reached for the knob of the front door. Through the dirty kitchen window Katie watched Aunt Jess's little green Taurus drive away. She'd only opened contact with her aunt in the last four months, but she already felt Aunt Jess had earned more of her

love than her mother had in years. Katie was glad she had offered to gather things for her mother's hospital room, to give Aunt Jess a little less to do.

But Katie sighed, deciding not to kid herself; it was also so that she wouldn't have to see her mother quite yet. She dragged herself back to the disarray of Cameron's bedroom. All of the floor space was taken except for a shuffling path from the unmade bed to the door. Katie dropped onto the bed, having no idea where to start. For now, Katie sat on her own in an oppressive tangle of quilting squares, boxes thrust full of paperwork, and glass unicorn figurines.

She waded across to the other side of the room and picked up one of the figurines. The 8-inch unicorn stood reared up on its hind legs. Both front hooves were once poised in the air, but one had broken off. As she held the figurine, she realized it was lighter than she remembered, and bittersweet memories began to edge heavily into Katie's mind. She put down the glass unicorn and turned away from it, and from the memories. It had belonged to her as a child. Her mother must have taken it with her when she left, although that didn't make sense with all of the things she had left behind. Like Katie.

Wondering again where she should start, Katie stared around the room. She leaned over the side of the bed and extracted a shoe box from the wreckage. It contained a mostly-empty pack of cigarettes and prescription bottles of mood-stabilizers. Holding her mother's bipolar medication was surreal; Katie never fully understood her mother's illness, yet a tangible symbol of it lay in her hands.

Underneath the medication rested a pile of letters, neatly wrapped in a rubber band despite their obvious age. Katie pulled the first one from the bundle box and turned it over. Her own name, in childish scrawl, stared back at her. She pulled the letter out of the envelope and unfolded it. It was dated the year she turned ten.

Mommy, I miss you! Daddy says you live near Grandma now that you don't live with us. Is that fun? Do you play tea party with her? I want you to be here to put braids in my hair. Daddy says he needs more practice with ponytails before he does braids. School is good. Miss Shell is reading my class a story about a mouse who talks and fights with swords. I don't know what the book is called but the mouse's name is Martin. I like it a lot. Do you have kitties at your house? I miss you Mommy! I love you.

Katie flipped the stack of bound letters and pulled

the last one from the bundle. Cameron, I haven't heard from you in months, again, and I don't know why, she wrote the year she was sixteen. You're supposed to be my mom, and I'm hurt that you won't even take the time to write me. What am I supposed to do?

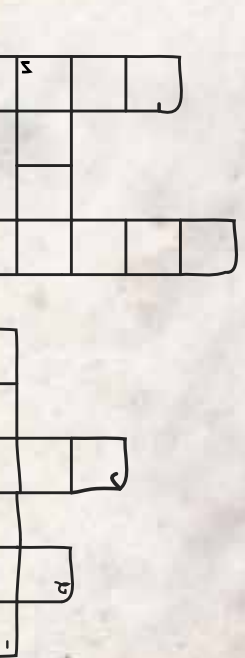
Katie still wasn't sure what the answer to that was. She folded the letter again. She had been so fed up with the whole situation that when she never received a reply to that letter, she had been almost relieved. Soon after the divorce was final, Cameron left for Connecticut and months, or even years, stretched between letters to her daughter. But when each letter came, bloated with affection and promises, Katie held on to it with childish belief. Finally, as a teenager, she gave up on her mother. It was like stitching a wound closed when the only anesthetic was knowing that soon it wouldn't hurt any more.

For the next five years she made no attempt to contact her mother. Dad's job moved the family from the West Coast to the East; Dad remarried. Katie fell in and out of love, and went away to college. Katie never told her mother any of it. She forgot about Cameron, mostly, and moved on. Jenny, Katie's stepmom, helped her with that, in a way. She took her shopping for school supplies, taught her how to put on make-up. Little things. "Mom" things. But although Katie loved Jenny – called her "Mom," in fact – Katie was never very close to her. Sometimes, when Katie would see her friends with their moms, sharing inside jokes and being creative and girly together, she would have to remember that her heart was stitched up. Katie reminded herself that she had a good life, and she could let herself forget again. That went on for years, and it was okay.

Then, as cliché as it was, Aunt Jess found Katie's profile on MySpace. Jess sent a gentle, hopeful note, asking to initiate a relationship with her grown-up niece. Katie tried to make her reply as encouraging as possible – Jess sounded so nice, and so sad about never making herself a part of Katie's life – but Katie left no question about how she felt about her mother.

Feel free to update my mother on how I'm doing, Katie remembered writing, but I do not want messages from her relayed to me. I would be happy and eager to hear that she is doing well, etc, but I'm not ready to talk to her again. As a child, I was so hurt by her leaving, by how she'd write pages and pages of letters, and then nothing for months or sometimes years at a time, and then try to step back into my life after all of the hurt she caused. I realize now that that was just part of her





cycling through mania and depression, but I can't do that again.

Yet somehow, just months later, she was here, and about to reconnect with her mother.

She pulled her cell phone from her back pocket and punched the first speed-dial number. Katie sat through two long rings before Jenny's voice came on the line.

"Hello?"

"Hi Mom...how are you?"

"I'm doing all right. Hang on a second, – honey," her stepmom called, "could you turn that down?" The football game in the background quieted. "Okay, I'm back. How are things going? Is everything okay?"

"Um, yeah, mostly." Katie was never really sure how to talk about her mother to Jenny. "It's hard, but I'll be okay. Can I talk to Dad?"

"Sure, here he is." Katie closed her eyes against her bleak surroundings and waited for the few seconds to pass.

"Hello?"

"Dad, I'm so frustrated." Katie imagined him there, scratching at his salt-and-pepper beard as he listened. He would be in the cluttered living room, sitting in his big, tan recliner with a Chargers t-shirt on. She had grown up in that two-story brick house, primly nestled amongst the skinny pine trees. "So frustrated. Why am I even here?"

He slowly exhaled. "Because you thought it was the right thing to do?" Dad's voice crackled slightly over the phone, and re- realizing that he was a thousand miles away hurt enough to make Katie's eyes prickle with tears.

"But I haven't seen her in more than ten years. I haven't written to her in five. I've spent ages in counseling, and I still don't even know what to call her – Mother? Cameron? I can't call her Mom. Jenny has earned being called that way more than my mother has." Katie swallowed hard, and held the phone tighter. "There are so many memories here, Dad." Or, Katie thought, things that should have been memories, if her mother could have stayed. "I know she left us for a good reason," she continued, shrugging helplessly. "Her illness left her with nothing to give, even to me. But part of me is still that little girl who doesn't even know what manic-depression is. All the little-girl part of me knows is that my mommy left. It's not fair."

"No, princess, it's not. But remember – you decided to be there."

Katie pressed her fingertips into her forehead. "I know. But what else was I supposed to do, you know?"

"Yeah, like that old Garth Brooks song, 'Blood is Thicker Than Water'."

"But 'love is thicker than blood'." Katie shook her head. "I have Jenny. I don't need another mom." Katie knew what Dad would say next.

"Jenny is great, yes. But Cameron is still your mother."

She talked to her dad for a few minutes longer, changing the subject, and then had him pass the phone back to Jenny. "Don't worry," she told her stepmom, "I'll call again later, when I can talk more."

"Okay. Have you seen your mother yet? "

"No, not yet. But I'm headed over to the hospital soon."

"Well, I hope things go well. I know you'll do the right thing. I love you."

"I love you too, Mom."

Katie closed her phone with a soft click and resolutely set the box in the middle of the unmade bed. She noticed a crossword puzzle book with a pen tucked in its pages. Katie took a deep breath and set it in the cardboard box. Then, after eyeing it for a moment, set the broken unicorn in the box as well. When she finished collecting pictures and knickknacks and magazines—things to make the hospital room seem homier—Katie mechanically put the box in the car and backed the car out of the driveway. She usually got lost when she drove to new places, so she paid close attention to the street signs, nearly hidden by the low-hanging branches of the numerous trees. It distracted her from feeling like she was going in front of a firing squad – and from wondering how much it was going to hurt.

The smell at the hospital was like her mother too, from long ago when she worked nights at Sharp Memorial and would let Katie wear her nurse's cap. That was at least fifteen years ago, maybe more, but Katie remembered it every time she walked into a hospital. She stepped into the elevator and pushed the button for the eighth floor. Katie leaned back against the elevator wall and tried to smile at the other woman there, holding a bunch of get-well balloons.

"Visiting someone?" the woman asked.

"My mother."

She made a sympathetic face.

"That's so hard."

"Yeah," Katie murmured.

She glanced at the bright balloons in the woman's hand. "Are you?"

"My daughter had surgery. I'd bring one of those big

singing cards, but she'd never forgive me." The woman grinned.

Katie laughed politely, and the elevator doors opened. "Nice talking to you."

"Best to your mom."

Katie slowly walked out into the sterile hallway. Could she actually call her mother "Mom" to her face? She moved toward the bleak, graying door of the hospital room where Aunt Jess and her mother waited. Daddy's voice replayed in her head – Remember, princess, you're the one who decided to be there. Katie admitted to herself that, like usual, he was right. She took the last heavy, hesitant steps toward room 845, the room with Cameron Hendershot printed in sterile letters on a form posted outside.

Katie took a deep breath and knocked softly as she opened the door.

The room was less crowded with medical implements than Katie expected, and the afternoon light poured in from a respectably-sized window. Cameron was staring out that window from her place on the hospital bed. She had gained weight in ten years, and recently dyed her hair black, but Katie immediately recognized the large eyes and round nose and prominent chin. She saw them on her own face every time she looked in the mirror.

"Uh...hey."

Cameron rolled over, her eyes immediately filling with tears. "Hey, baby," she squeaked.

Katie stiffly put down the box by the door and stood next to it awkwardly, avoiding her mother's hungry eyes. "I brought you some things." Katie reached in and pulled out the glass unicorn.

"That's broken," Cameron said, hesitantly.

Katie cleared her throat and set the unicorn gently on the table by the bed. "Yeah, I know." Her eyes flicked briefly to Cameron.

"Where's Aunt Jess?"

"Talking to the doctor, honey. Trying to find out when I can go home."

"Oh." Katie looked around for a chair and scooted it a few inches further from the bed before she pretended to make herself comfortable in it.

Cameron held out her hand to Katie. "Baby, I'm so glad you're here." Katie clenched her hands tighter and moved them deeper into her lap. The room felt oppressively silent, although the tone of the heart monitor punctuated the quiet hum of machinery and air conditioning. Cameron watched Katie for a long time while Katie stared at the linoleum. Her mother

finally drew back her hand and lay back against the pillows. Katie was writhing internally; she wanted nothing more than to wrestle down the fragment of compassion she felt. She wanted to run away, to be angry, to be weak. The persistent beep of the heart monitor counted the seconds of unhappy silence. Beep. Beep.

"Do you know what happened on Valentine's Day of '87?" Cameron asked finally, still staring at the ceiling. Beep. Beep. Beep.

"No."

"I found out I was pregnant with you."

"Oh."

"It was one of the best days of my life, you know."

Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

They both looked up as a soft knock sounded at the door and Aunt Jess stepped in.

"Oh, Katie, you're here."

"Hey Jess," Katie said, "Let's unpack the box, yeah?"

Katie could feel Cameron watching her as they took paraphernalia from the box and arranged it in the room. The crossword puzzle and pen went on the nightstand, the extra blanket at Cameron's feet. When they were done, Katie stared at the empty box, feeling a little empty herself. The hospital room became warmer with Cameron's things in it, in a way that had failed in the cluttered bedroom. Now able to absorb the pieces of her mother that the things represented, Katie realized that she really knew nothing about Cameron. She hadn't really done anything to Katie; it was the void that hurt so much.

"Cameron, take your medication," Jess suddenly said, catching sight of the tray by the bed. "How are you feeling today?"

"Good, I'm doing good." Cameron reached and took the little cup full of pills off of the tray. She dumped them all in her mouth at once and drank a few gulps of water to wash them down. Katie could see this was a familiar procedure for her, and began to feel pity forming deep beneath the hard layers of hurt and unease.

For the first time since she'd arrived, Katie met her mother's eyes directly. "So...will you tell me about the day I was born? I've never heard it from you."

Cameron's face split into a wide smile.

"Sure, baby. Sure." ■





# One Small Step

by Brittany McPheters

A SCHOOL YARD. CHILDREN. LITTLE REDHEAD in Osh Kosh B'gosh. Superman backpacks. Crossing guard with the nice smile. A big STOP sign. Fast cars, loud horns. The little first-graders giggle and skip toward the road. A slow boy hurries happily toward the nice lady. Dad's weekend. He's waiting for me. Gotta hurry. Dad's weekend.

Little Aaron runs and runs. Little brother, Andy, far ahead. Andy, perfect little boy. Blonde, tall, strong, smart – fast. Andy runs and runs – stops – at the curb. Aaron runs and runs and runs. One small step. A horn. Andy yells, a little redhead girl cries. The nice crossing guard gasps – runs.

The businessman gets out of his fancy car. So sorry – he's so sorry. I was late he says – very important meeting – so sorry. Little Aaron won't wake up. Andy – is he asleep? Crossing guard – I don't know. Red lights, blue lights – a stretcher. Dad holds Andy. Mom cries. Dad's pretty wife holds little sister – Melissa – too young for school, just a baby. She is crying.

Little Aaron won't wake up. Not for another four months. Four months of doctors and jello and hospital chairs, big words. Cerebral. Non-responsive. Stability. Comatose. Melissa cries a lot.

Mom blames Dad and his pretty wife. She is called Mom, too. She smiles. Old Mom doesn't smile – she cries and yells. Dad is sad. Melissa cries. Andy brings Aaron G.I. Joes. New Mom explains – he can't play now. Andy – well I won't play with Melissa. She eats them. New Mom smiles.

Four months.

Comatose.

Non-responsive.

Little Aaron is awake.

Therapy – Brain damage.

Retarded.

Retarded. Such a strange word. We use it every day. Don't be a retard! That's retarded. Out of context. Wrong. Fear. People look away. FEAR.

Six years later, Brittany – Me. Aaron is “mentally

handicapped.” Politically correct. Whatever – he's retarded. Like a child with facial hair. Naïve, innocent. He has the mind of a six-year-old. In twenty-four years he has only aged six years. He is twelve years past his life expectancy. He is getting worse. He has seizures a lot and gets sick real easy. He's thirty years old and can't live alone. Andy is twenty-nine, married to a Southern Belle, four beautiful kids and a house payment. Melissa is twenty-five, married to her high-school sweetheart, three great kids and a house payment.

Aaron was engaged once – Jennie. He'll always be single. He gets up at 5:00 every morning, works eight to ten, development group until three, TV, empty the dishwasher, TV. There is no change.

People fear him – teens mostly. They laugh at him – they're scared. I was scared too. Not anymore. I know him now. Aaron knows everyone in town. He's the smartest guy I know. He says 'strangers are only friends I haven't met yet'. He isn't afraid to be himself in public – with everyone. He is fiercely loyal and will never say a negative word about anyone. Everyone loves Aaron and he has friends everywhere. Aaron compliments everyone. He tells me I'm beautiful. I am lucky to have Aaron.

People feel sorry for me that I have to deal with Aaron and my life is so hard – just put him in a home somewhere. NO! He is a blessing. I wish you had an Aaron. You're the one missing out. Handicap isn't contagious, but his love is.

We should all be like Aaron. He leaves people better than he found them. He feels no hate toward the businessman. Do we forgive as easily? No – we hold grudges.

Different is GOOD. If we didn't have people like Aaron, who would we learn from? There would be no one to remind us of simple kindnesses, pure love. Those who are different are to be treasured and loved – they are reality; we are fake. ■

# Afraid of the Dark

by Mandy Slack

MY MOTHER RUINED ME. IT WASN'T LIKE SHE drank alcohol, or told me I was fat. It wasn't anything bad even, depending on how you look at it. I'm sure that when she told me all her morbid tales, she had the best of intentions, but she ruined me – probably forever.

My mother was afraid of almost everything, and somehow had made me the same way. She wasn't afraid to say what she wanted to say, but she was afraid of things like mice and sickness and old men. She would look at me with a furrowed brow, her nose scrunched up, the wrinkles on her face distinct. She would tell me what diseases mice carried, what would happen if I didn't wash my hands, and that if I drank too much Pepsi, my bones would eventually rot away. She would look at me with that face, cock her head to the side and say, “I'm serious, Janae. I'm very serious.” She always had food stuck between her teeth, usually something dark, so it was hard to take her as seriously as she wanted me to. If ever I saw a mouse running in the corner of the living room just below the light switch, I could never turn that light off again. I held my sleeves over my hands when I opened doors and held telephones at least an inch from my face.

Her worst fear, the fear that had been passed down to me to the fullest extent, was her fear of the dark. She always warned me about all the scary men that lurked around in the darkness and what they did. She turned on news programs about girls that had been raped or kidnapped when they were walking around at

night. Then she warned me to never, ever walk alone at night. This was never a problem in Orchard Hill; I had five sisters and a brother, so walking alone wasn't even an option. We did everything together, day and night. Sometimes we would swim in the creek at night, and even then, with my brother Chris at my side, I would imagine a man with long arms reaching out from behind the oak trees. My mother had scarred me.

It wasn't until I left Orchard Hill that this really became a problem. I was away from home for the first time, with a real job for the first time. I lived with my Aunt Daphne and Uncle Grant, along with a household of boys – my two cousins Ben and Josh, and Ben's best friends, Andrew and Keegan. I lived with plenty of people, but it wasn't the same. Instead of always being at home or near it, I worked at my new college in the café which was fifteen miles away from my new home. I was close to my aunt and Ben, but I couldn't imagine myself calling them from their duties, simply to walk me an eighth of a mile to my car. I could have asked the people I worked with, and I tried to, but it never worked.

“Hey Hugh,” I said to our cook, who was engaged. He wore a glow-in-the-dark plastic ring on his wedding finger – the kind that you win at arcades when you don't have enough tickets for a better prize. His dirty-blond hair was always greasy and his clothes always had a few stains on them; but he still avoided all girls, other than his fiancée, like the plague. He would never look me in the eye. I knew he wouldn't walk me to my car, but I was



just scared enough to ask him.

“What?” Hugh looked at me for a nanosecond, then stared back down at the stove he was cleaning. Gina, my only other co-worker, was somewhere nearby, but was always on the phone the minute we locked the doors. She would always wave at me with her pinky and then walk off in the opposite direction. I could hear her high-pitched voice in the background as I prepared to humiliate myself.

“I have a question for you.” I leaned against the counter, trying to figure out how to phrase my words. He was pushing his finger closer and closer to me, as if reminding me that he was taken. “So, I was just wonderin’... how long have you been engaged?”

“Three months.”

“That’s sweet,” I replied, trying to think of what to say next. “Her name is Jenny, right?”

“Right.”

“Hmm...” I nodded and paused some more. “So, Hugh, what would you do if Jenny got hurt, huh?”

Hugh looked up at me, his light blue eyes piercing my face as if I had just threatened to hurt Jenny. He was so awful; I couldn’t believe what I was asking him. I wanted to shake my head and tell him never mind, that it was just a joke, but I just watched his face twisting in an inhumane way. His mouth was straight, so far from a smile that I wondered if he even knew how. I tried to picture him on his wedding day, smiling over at Jenny, maybe even crying. What would he do with the stringy ponytail that always hung on the back of his head?

“What kind of a question is that?” Hugh asked me, his voice quiet. “Look, Janae, you seem nice and everything—”

“No,” I said, attempting to laugh. “I wasn’t, I just had a little—”

I looked at his cold eyes again and decided against any further words. There was no way Hugh would walk me to my car, not without getting the mistaken, hugely mistaken, impression that I was in love with him. “I just heard this study about engaged men who lost their fiancées or something...” I trailed off. “That’s all.”

Hugh eased up a little, but still didn’t smile. “You can talk about it with someone else.” And then he stomped off.

I stood by Gina for a few minutes, just before the clock hit ten, hoping she’d have a momentary break in her conversation. But she went on and on and on, only stopping to breathe occasionally. She kept eyeing me, obviously wondering why I was so close by. When it was finally ten, she sauntered out the back door, waving her pinky and mouthing goodbye. I stepped out behind her, but she was gone before my foot hit the concrete. Hugh

followed me, but he slipped away, mumbling something as he walked opposite of the direction I had to go. In an instant, they were gone, and I was in the dark. Alone.

I folded my arms and held myself tight, trying to figure out what to do. After a few moments of trying to think if I had any friends that could come rescue me (I didn’t), I gave up on thinking and walked out to the courtyard, alone. Pictures of knives and dark-eyed, mustached men filled my mind as I walked along. Then I wondered, could criminals see fear, like some animals could smell it? I stood up straighter, smiled, and even started whistling, but then I thought that might appear too inviting. So I just smiled and even hopped a little, the way I did when I was in preschool. Then I wondered if maybe I looked eager, like I was beckoning someone to come over and take advantage of me. So instead, I just slumped my shoulders, pulled my chin into my face, and stuck my finger in my nose, trying to appear as unattractive as humanly possible.

The wind started to blow, dark and chilly, making the bushes wave like a hundred pairs of hands. I shuddered with the thought that somebody could be hiding behind the bush and I thought it was only the wind. I wanted to pick up my phone and call Ben, who was really my only friend, but then I realized this would distract me too much if someone were behind me. These thoughts went through my mind over and over again, making that five minute walk feel like hours, days, maybe even months. When I reached my car, I imagined someone hiding under it, waiting for me and pulling at my ankles. I unlocked the door and slid into the car as quickly as I could, holding my purse safely on my lap until I’d locked all the doors and was safe. I checked the backseat, just to be sure, then started my car and let Johnny Cash’s voice fill the air.

I spent the whole drive home calming myself, just like I always had to do. I knew it was pathetic, my fear, but it was something I couldn’t change. If it had been something like a monster in a closet, I could have done it; but these monsters were too real, monsters with real pictures in the newspaper or on the television. I sang along with Johnny at the top of my lungs, trying to forget the eerie, empty feeling of the darkness. When I finally pulled into the drive and saw Andrew sitting on the counter, I felt safe.

“Hey,” he said when I walked in. “How’s it going?”

Instead of replying, I dug a spoon out of the drawer and took a bite of the Rocky Road ice cream he was working on. Andrew always ate from the container, which he got in trouble for. Lucky for him, he was attractive, and charismatic at that, so he typically got

whatever he wanted. He had eyes that looked like milk chocolate; he always squinted them at whoever he was listening to, trying to make the speaker feel like he really cared about everything that was said. He was tall, and he had rosy cheeks that gave the appearance that he had just been out in the cold or running a race. Daphne always said he would make a good politician because he was so engaging and easy to look at, but to me, he was just a pompous idiot.

“You look...disgruntled.” Andrew said to me, his mouth full of ice cream.

I took a bite of ice cream and looked at him, then before I could stop myself, I told him about my fear of the dark, not even worrying about how ridiculous I might have sounded.

“It’s so scary and I can’t help it,” I said, shaking my head as Andrew squinted his chocolate eyes. “Even when I get to my car, I wonder if somebody’s hiding under it so they can grab my ankles and pull me down. And it’s even worse when the wind is blowing, like it’s...like it’s calling them, or something. You know?”

Andrew nodded slowly and said, “I do.”

“Oh right,” I rolled my eyes, regretting telling him the story. I tried smiling. “You’re scared of the dark too?”

“Well, guys get shot and jumped, you know. But that’s not what I’m talking about.” Andrew took a big bite of ice cream before he continued. “I used to have this spawn toad . . . you know what those are?”

“Of course I do,” I said sarcastically. “I love spawn toads.”

Andrew ignored my statement.

“They’re special toads that have these shovel-like feet and they dig themselves into dirt and stuff,” he said, a little bit of ice cream spilling out of the sides of his mouth. The beads of Rocky Road made him seem more human. “Well, when Ben and I had an apartment, you know, when we lived in Seattle? Did you know we lived in Seattle?”

“Yeah,” I nodded, silently willing him to finish his story. He was such a slow talker.

“Anyway, so we had one of these toads, and one day we just let him hop around on the carpet, which was stupid because he kept pooping and leaving these stinky little brown spots. But this one day, he had a hair in his mouth, so I tried to pull it out and then...” Andrew paused, smiling. “Then his guts started coming out. So we just started pushing them back in and he was okay.”

I laughed, mostly out of horror, and completely forgot the purpose of the story. I tried to imagine the situation; the picture horrified me. Andrew tried not to laugh, but short, high pitched giggles escaped from his throat, ruining his macho facade.

“I’m serious, Janae. This is very true,” he went on.

“But it gets worse. After that, I kept having these nightmares that I had hair in my throat and whenever I would pull it out my insides would come out with it. So now, whenever I have a hair in my nose or in my throat or something, I can’t even pull it out.”

“What do you do with it?”

He shrugged and raised his eyebrows at me. “Swallow it.” “So now you probably have a hairball in your stomach.” I suggested, jumping off the counter. “Andrew, that’s sick.” “You’re missing the point. The point is, I know how that feels. Having that constant fear that won’t go away. Having it next to you like a shadow,” Andrew said animatedly, looking up as he said that word: shadow.

“Are you mocking me?” I asked, squinting my eyes in his fashion. Nothing about him was serious, ever. He smirked as he spoke and always had a half-smile on his face, like he found himself funny. He tried to make up for it by squinting his eyes, attempting to make me feel important, but it didn’t work.

“I’m very serious, Janae,” he said, sounding like my mother, but lacking the sincerity. “It still haunts me to this day.”

“That’s too bad.” I grabbed the ice cream and put it in the freezer. “I hope you’re alright.”

I shut the freezer door and began making my way out of the kitchen.

“Are you mocking me?” he retorted, half-smiling in that evil way of his. I shook my head and forced a smile, then made my way to my room.

“Sleep tight, Jay!” Andrew called. As I stepped into my room I could hear him race down to the basement, making the whole house pound.

“Janae, don’t forget to lock the doors!”

I stood over the box of dirty aprons and froze. Here it was again—ten o’ clock. Before I could move, both Hugh and Gina were gone, leaving me alone in the empty café. I ripped off my apron, zipped my jacket tight, and made my way into the dark abyss. The wind was heavier than the night before; it felt almost as if it were warning me of what waited ahead. Despite the warning, I walked out to the open courtyard, where I was once again fresh prey for any predator.

The world was silent; the only sound was the rushing of trees and bushes until I was almost halfway across the courtyard. Then I heard, ever so slightly, a light whistle. It was a wolf whistle, but it was so faint that I couldn’t tell from which direction it was coming. I slowed down for a moment and listened, then heard it again, just a bit louder. I almost turned around, but thought better of it; instead, I walked quicker and clutched my phone, thinking of all the people I should have called.



Then I heard my name. It was a man – it was most certainly a man, but no man I knew. The boys were playing at a local theatre, just like they did every Thursday night. I knew Grant was at home watching the ten o’ clock news and Hugh was probably already nestled next to Jenny. When he yelled my name again, I felt a rush of fear flow through my entire body and started running. He said more, but the heavy sound of my heart was all I could hear. Please God, I begged in my mind, please not me, please not me. I ran faster and I could see flashes of my life, of things I’d done and things I wished that I had done. I regretted leaving home and all the sweet Georgia peaches. Life was good there, with the juice of the peaches running down my chin and onto my shirt, where the darkness wasn’t as frightening because I wasn’t alone. I imagined my sister Sarah and her beautiful, silky blonde hair that I’d always wished I had. I clutched my phone tightly, wishing that she would call and I could just see her name one last time.

“Janae!” the voice called. It was much closer, almost directly behind me. One moment, I was still running, but then the next, he was in front of me, his hands on my shoulders. He had stopped me. I tried to speak, but words wouldn’t escape my throat, especially when I looked up into his face.

“What are you doing?” Andrew asked, bending down and clutching his knees with both hands. “Are you okay?”

I stared at him, wondering how to react. I stood still, shocked, yet eternally relieved. I had a million questions in my head, then forgot them all at once. What to do, what to do, what to do?

“I was,” I started, trying to figure out how to end the sentence. I looked around, hoping for some sort of inspiration, but nothing came. I smiled awkwardly.

“I was just testing your strength!” I claimed, still breathless.

He smiled, but I was sure he didn’t believe me. I wanted to cry—of embarrassment or fear, I wasn’t sure. I bit my lip to steady myself. I could not, for the life of me, figure out why he was there or if I really had reason to not be scared anymore.

“You,” he said, breathing hard and smiling, “you won, I think. I never knew you were such a runner.”

“I’m not.”

“You are. You’re really fast. I had a hard time catching up to you.”

We started walking then, both of us silent. I couldn’t stop wondering why he had come, but I also knew that I couldn’t ask. It was too odd and too nice. We’d been living in the same house for three weeks and I saw him on every family visit, but he was just Andrew Emory,

Ben’s egotistical, handsome best friend. He was good at playing the drums and he had a petite, blonde, Barbie-like girlfriend. To him, I was just Ben’s snobby, peach-picking cousin from Georgia. Could I be snobby after this?

“I thought you guys had a show.”

“We just finished.” He looked at his watch. “I’m sorry I’m late, but the guys before us took forever.”

“No, it’s okay.”

“The show went well,” he said, answering the question I should have asked. “It’s getting better because I think we’re kind of getting a fan base. It’s weird and I never really expected it, but I think we’re actually growing on people.”

“That’s good.” I nodded, wanting to say something nice but having no clue what would measure up to his act of kindness. “I’m glad.”

“Actually, I wanted to ask you.” He turned to me, an excited look on his face. “Ben showed me some of the pictures you’ve taken and I think they’re really good, so I was thinking you should take the pictures for our CD cover. We’re almost finished.”

“Yeah,” I nodded. “I could do that.”

“How much would you want us to pay you?”

“You don’t have to pay me,” I insisted. “It’s just a hobby anyway.”

Andrew shrugged, and said, “Whatever you say, Miss.”

He went on talking about the band and the CD, still not answering my unspoken question. When we finally got to my car, I was ready to get in, but Andrew held his arm up.

“Hold on,” he said, pulling up his pants. He pulled himself face down on the pavement and looked under the car, searching right and left. When he stood up, he had a big black spot in the center of his green tee-shirt. He smiled, not noticing the spot.

“Safe.”

“Thank you.” I stepped forward and unlocked the door, checking the backseat as I did. He stood behind me, waiting until I was sitting safely behind the wheel.

“I guess I’ll see you at home,” he said, slapping the door gently before he walked away.

“Wait,” I said before I closed the door. He turned around and squinted his eyes at me, ready to listen. I hesitated, then smiled. “Why did you come, Andrew?”

He shrugged his shoulders and smirked in that evil way I hated. “I know how it feels. You know, having that constant fear that won’t go away.”

He smiled, tapped my door with his knuckles, then left. I shut the door and turned the key, letting Johnny Cash’s voice fill my ears. ■

## ANYTIME

Katy Carpenter

“HEY, KATY, HOW WAS YOUR DAY?”

Melissa asked as soon as I stepped inside the front door of our apartment. I paused as I looked up at her tall frame before closing the door behind me. She was smiling that large, child-like grin of hers. As I took my coat off, I quickly evaluated the real reason why Melissa was asking me how my day had gone. She asks me that same question everyday so that I will, in turn, ask her how her day was after responding with my short, brief, “It’s was fine, thank you.” I’ve learned, however, from one too many conversations with Melissa that the simple, gratuitous “How was your day?” response would turn into a forty-minute play-by-play reenactment of her entire day from the time she woke up until the present moment (she often includes future references and plans for the rest of her day as well).

The usual rundown of Melissa’s day includes the difficulty she’s having in her beginning ASL class, the complexity in writing a two-page, double-spaced reflective paper that she’s been procrastinating for the last three weeks, or the things she talked about on the phone with her mother after her only class of the day was over. It’s a hard-knock life for some people, I guess.

“It was fine, Melissa, thanks,” I said, barely smiling up at her as I walked into my bedroom. Before shutting the door behind me I looked back and saw the arch of her smile weaken with my indifference and lack of a counter-greeting. I pushed the look on her face out of my mind: I had a phone call to make.

I was about to interview my grandfather for an assignment in one of my creative writing classes. I was admittedly not excited about it. It’s no small secret to virtually everyone who knows me that I hate talking on the telephone. My negative feelings regarding the interview weren’t helped by the fact that I’m well-aware

that I’m a very uninteresting topic of any conversation for the elderly. They typically want to know about my husband, children, and life as a housewife more than anything else. When I inform them that I’m single with no husband, no children, not even the title of an interesting-to-discuss divorcee, they tend to ask (with the delicacy of a wild boar) what I’ve done with my life: “Oh not much, really. I’m about to graduate with a bachelor’s degree in professional writing. I’ve won awards for my writing, in fact, and was even asked by the head of a writing guild in Phoenix to submit one of my children’s stories to a publisher. Oh gosh, what else... I worked for an online marketing company for almost a year doing freelance writing and editing, but that, of course, is only marginally interesting. A popular religious magazine has requested my portfolio for consideration regarding an editorial internship after I graduate, and I’m going to New York to meet representatives from Random House Publishing and Time Inc. in a few weeks for potential jobs ... So not much, really. You’re right, I’m pretty much worthless without a man. Thanks for the reminder.”

Of all the elderly people with whom I’ve been privileged to converse, my grandfather is probably the least likely to give me a hard time about my wasted life. I still didn’t look forward to our chat, though. Don’t get me wrong—I love talking to my grandfather—I just hate being compared to all of his granddaughters my age (there were six girls born within two years of each other) who have gotten a start on their families. Papa never could seem to grasp why I’d still be alone, despite my reminding him more than once that I’ve never come close to receiving a proposal of marriage. “Hi, Papa? Hi, this is Katy ... Yes, today is the day of our interview. Did you forget? ... Well that’s okay ... Do you still have time for it? ... Perfect, let’s get started ... Oh, I’m fine, how are you?”

I listened as patiently as I could while he gave me the rundown of his day. He went over to Chad’s, my newly married cousin, to give him some advice on a leaky sink. Then my father and Papa’s other son, Steve, came over to chat, so they all went to dinner together. The Golden Corral is his favorite place to eat, so it was no surprise to me that it was their destination tonight, too.

“I just don’t think he’s going to be around much longer, Katy,” I’d heard my dad say more than occasionally. “We need to do what he wants to do, anytime he wants to do it, while he’s still here for us



to enjoy,” Dad was right; grandma had passed all-too-quickly and left me with so many things unsaid and undone. I never felt the need to complain about spending time with Papa, even if it was the same activity over and over again, but I don’t exactly miss the redundancy of it when I head back to school after spending Christmas break at home. Papa’s ideal family time includes eating dinner with us at our home and then meandering to the living room with all of us gathered round to listen to his jokes and stories. Papa’s stories are always fun and entertaining to listen to—he has a God-given talent for storytelling—but they’re often the same stories again and again.

“You told us that story last time and the time before,” my mother will remind him with strained patience, her short legs barely touching the floor as she sits on the large leather couch. “It sounds like you’re running out again.” My mother always claims that she doesn’t mean to sound curt or rude or impatient to my grandfather, but I can’t help but notice that this is the only person to whom she ever sounds that way besides, perhaps, my father. And it’s only when my grandfather is around that she sounds terse to Dad.

I noticed that Papa’s voice sounded heavy tonight, although that has been the case for the last three years. I asked him how he was feeling.

“Just as good as ever,” he replied less enthusiastically than I would have liked. When I didn’t respond right away, he confessed: “Maybe a little tired, I guess. Your dad and Steve left a while ago and I’m just sitting here by myself. Seems too early to go to bed, but I don’t know what else I’d do with the rest of my evening. I’m glad you called.” The lighter, carefree voice I remembered from before Grandma died rang through in his last remark, and I was suddenly glad I’d called, too.

“I’ve missed you, Papa. Did you get my postcard?” I’d sent my grandfather a lousy postcard from my summer break in Alaska about three weeks after arriving back in Rexburg for my last semester of school. I’d scrawled a couple of illegible lines about my summer and said goodbye with a promise to talk to him soon. I guess later is better than never, but it didn’t seem that way right now.

“I put it right there on the side of my fridge with the other pictures of the grandkids,” he said, his voice lightening even more. “So what did you want to talk me about, Katy?”

We proceeded with the interview. I asked him

questions about receiving the draft to WWII when he turned 18 years old: How did you react when you received the draft notification? What did your parents say? Were you afraid? What was your biggest concern? How did you get that shrapnel in your foot and back, again? He loved them all. I steered clear of questions regarding the men he might have killed—he doesn’t know if some other human being died at his hands, but thinking about that possibility, I learned years ago, always makes him somber and regretful—because I wanted the new lightness in his voice to remain. I did my best to focus on the answers to his questions rather than the buoyancy his voice had suddenly acquired. If it hadn’t rung so deeply in the telephone I would have sworn he’d inhaled helium.

“Wow, Papa. Thank you so much for telling me those stories. I really think I have something to go off of with my story now. This is going to be great!” I frantically finished scribbling as many notes, dates, and names as I could remember.

“Well, anytime, Katy, anytime.” He sounded hopeful at the prospect that I would call again soon.

“Well, I mean, this is enough to get started, Papa, but if it’s ok with you, I’m probably going to need to call you again soon to get more details and such for it to, you know, keep going.” I struggled to sound coherent. “My story, I mean. I eventually want it to be longer.” I vainly hoped I didn’t sound like a complete idiot.

“You just call any time of day you want to, Katy: morning, night, doesn’t matter. You just call anytime. I’d love to talk to you anytime.” I could almost see the outline of the branding iron in my mind as it burned the word “anytime” directly onto my still heart. It jerked into a sad but steady pulse with the touch of the red-hot defibrillator.

“I will, Papa. I’ll start calling you more often. I promise.” The words rang hollow in my ears, but trickled down into my chest where they began grafting new flesh onto the dull gray, cauterized mass that I’d somehow managed to pass off as my most vital organ.

“Well, I know you’re a busy girl with all that school work you have to do, so I understand that you’re much too busy to call too often. You’re probably real busy right now, so I’ll let you go.” Papa’s voice suddenly sounded hoarse and tired again. I’ve often wondered if it sounds that way because he stopped singing when Grandma died. Papa used to play his guitar and sing to his grandkids all the time—anytime—but he doesn’t

play his guitar anymore, and I can’t remember when I last heard him sing.

No, I wanted to say; Not yet. But all that came out of my mouth was a mumbled, pathetic “Thanks, Papa,” as he talked about everything I had going for me in my future career as a writer.

Papa wished me well, and I told him I loved him as I remembered an aphorism I’d heard from the poet James Richardson: “Some silences are harder to take back than words.” I detected tears in his voice as he told me he loved me, too.

I hung up the phone and wandered into the living room. Melissa was sitting on the couch, going through family pictures on her laptop. It became uncomfortably apparent to me at that moment how lonely Melissa really was, even though home for her is only two hours away. Her head tilted upward from her computer screen as I walked into the room, and she bore a hesitant smile before quickly looking back at her pictures.

“How was your day, Melissa?” I asked, sitting next to her on the sofa. She needed nothing else. Nearly an hour later, the large, child-like grin had long since returned to her face with the addition of my own in its reflection. ■

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## THE ANCIENT LANTERN

By: Cassidy Jo Wadsworth

NIGHTTIME TERRIFIED ME. MAMA HAD KNOWN this, and had never, even when miles away at the hospital in Cedar City, settled down for the night before calling to ensure that my door was open and the small ancient lantern had been lit outside my room. It was a beautiful lantern, although rusted with decades of age. In 1865, it had entered Nevada Territory, swinging from a covered wagon. When Mama had inherited it, she had put it in the barn with the other storage—until the night I had to move into Brett’s old room, and would not go to bed without a light. Then she had sent Daddy out to rummage for it.

The shutter was punctured with designs that threw

enchanted patterns of light across my walls at night. Daddy, though he grumbled to Mama about the inconvenience, had still seen that it was lit when she was no longer able to do so herself. Never again had I suffered for light. As I lay awake making pictures with the patterns, the night sounds of my parents had filtered in from their room next door. Daddy used to massage Mama’s shoulders, or rock her back and forth in bed when the pain became too great, always at night, after Davy, my little brother, and I were supposedly asleep. Then, and only then, would Mama surrender to the pain, and then so quietly that I could hardly hear unless I lay completely still and almost stopped breathing. Her groans and Daddy’s soothing, coupled with the rustle of bedclothes and creaking of springs, became as familiar to my nightly routine as the hundred-year-old lantern hanging on the hook outside my open door. Only a few times did I hear Mama weep; then I would weep for her too. I learned to cry quietly at a young age.

Tonight, after the funeral supper, they laid Davy and me on my bed without a second glance, and shut the door. Not one of them had thought to light the lantern. So now I crouched on my belly on the hardwood floor, my nose peeled to the lighted crack beneath the door, squeezing away from the suffocating darkness behind me, and pleading with God harder than I ever had in all my eight years to intervene between us and the adults seated out-of-sight around our kitchen table. Little Davy, his face tear-streaked, lay sprawled asleep on the bed.

This had happened once before. We had watched them put Mama in the ground beside the names of our two older brothers and cover her box with dirt; then they had led Davy and me away. I had been six, and Davy only four, and we had kicked and screamed at them to uncover our Mama, to stop tormenting her. How could they be so cruel? Didn’t they understand that she couldn’t breathe in that long hole? Didn’t they see Daddy trying his hardest to keep the tears from falling as he watched them shovel the soil on top of her? She had gone on another long trip to the hospital, but this time Daddy had brought her home in a box. Was it some new treatment to deaden the pain? Why wouldn’t they let us see her? Even Brett, who was home for the funeral, had cried to see them cover Mama. But he hadn’t done anything to stop them.

I had hated them that day two years ago. I had hated them for taking Mama away from us, for



making us leave Daddy alone among the frightening tombstones, staring at the pile of dirt on top of Mama and the horrid box.

After they had taken us home, Mama’s older sisters put us to bed. They had shut the door and neglected the lantern, and I had been too sad and scared to cry. I had just sat by the door and trembled, livid at them for daring to sit in my house while Daddy was up on the hill without Mama.

Then Daddy and Brett had come home, and my heart leapt to hear Daddy’s voice. “Where’s Lottie?” he had asked, instead of accepting their invitation to join them at the table. Then he had ordered Brett to see them to the door. They hadn’t wanted to go, but no one dared argue with Daddy when that tone of finality sounded in his voice (like a “gavel,” Brett had said of it, though I didn’t know what that meant). So they had finally left us alone.

Daddy had opened my door then, picked me up, and held me, rocking me on the bed as he had used to rock Mama, telling me that everything was going to be all right, that he would take care of us. Though I had believed him, I had cried against his chest until I fell asleep.

I had awakened once that night to find my door open, the ancient lantern newly lit and hanging inside the doorway, its patterned shutter throwing the usual comforting shapes across my dark walls. From my parent’s bedroom, I had heard Daddy rocking on the creaky springs, trying to deaden the pain. Tears had quietly run down my cheeks as he had wept on the other side of the thin plaster wall.

Today it had been just the same as at Mama’s funeral. Except that I was older and understood why they were covering Daddy with dirt. I also knew why he was in the box. It was not to relieve the pain, even though they told me his heart had been hurting him that day he had left to brand calves.

After the funeral supper, it had happened all over again: the closed door, the forgotten lantern, the frightening darkness. But tonight Daddy could not rescue me, as he had the night of Mama’s funeral, and every night since, for the past two years. Tonight he would not be coming home from that lonely place on the hill. He was beside Mama. They had both left me alone in the dark.

Tonight it was not Daddy who sat at the table with the rest of them and talked about what life should be like now. It was Brett—the eldest of the five of

us, and the only one who looked even remotely like Daddy. I could not remember Brett living at home, just as I had no memory of my other brothers, both killed in a hunting accident before I could walk. Brett lived at school, Mama had told me once. She had said it proudly, for not many boys from our town left farming for school. But even after he had graduated four months ago, he had not returned home. Daddy had said he was interning for a firm in Dallas. I hadn’t known what that meant, but I had been glad Brett wasn’t moving back home. He had last visited to see Mama buried, and had left the following morning. I had been relieved to see him go.

Brett’s dark features had always frightened me, for we hardly ever saw him, and I was used to Davy’s soft blond hair and bright blue eyes. Davy did not fear him, but I avoided Brett whenever he came home. He seemed less a member of the family than our brothers in the nearby cemetery. To me, his visits were intrusions.

His resemblance to Daddy made it all the worse now, for I knew that he was not, could never be, the man my father was. He didn’t know about the lantern, and I knew he wouldn’t care. If he had cared about us, he would have lived with the rest of us; he would have come to check on us tonight. But Brett was a stranger. I could not trust him to help us now. Davy and I had no one anymore.

I forgot all of this in the wake of their voices. Mama’s sisters were talking now, everyone else silent. Stifling the quiet sobs so I might hear, I leaned up harder against the door, heedless of the floorboard splinters that barbed into my bare knees as I moved.

“They can’t stay here, you know,” I heard Aunt May say.

Aunt Edna interrupted her. “Well, I can take one of them, but not two. This is not Cedar City or Las Vegas, and Royal and I barely make enough to scrape by ourselves, let alone have any left over for children.”

“If you’ll take Lottie, I’ll take Davy. He would get along with my little boys.”

My head jerked toward Davy so fast that my neck popped and began to burn. I wanted to take him, climb out the window, and never come back. Daddy, they’re going to take us away! They’re going to break us apart! Daddy, Mama, where are you? I stuffed my fists against my mouth, trying not to scream; but there was no silencing the palpitations of my heart, or the desperate breaths of air that sucked in through my

nostrils and escaped between my clenched teeth. The darkness closed around me, choking with its unseen fingers.

Through the panic in my head, I heard Brett interrupt. What was he going to say? Of course he would agree with them! He may be an adult, but he was still the youngest person at the table. They would have their way. Fear balled in my stomach and clogged my throat, and I felt a sudden burning hatred towards Brett for being too weak to stop them, for not caring enough to even try.

He cleared his throat, and the room stilled. When he spoke, I almost could not hear him.

“I don’t think that’s the way Mom and Dad would have wanted it.”

He said it with a quiet finality, one which I remembered so well in Daddy’s voice. Shock tingled through me, and I heard it topple the adults in the kitchen like silent preserves jars after an under-table jolt. I knew what they were thinking. Brett did not belong here. He had no right to speak, and even less right to disagree with them.

Aunt Edna was the first one to regain her senses. “Brett, there is no other way!”

“I called Joy last night,” he replied. “We’ve decided to get married right away instead of waiting for the job at the firm. In fact, we’ve decided to drop Dallas altogether. We’ll be moving back here to take care of the kids. They will stay here, and they will stay together.”

Aunt Edna began to argue. “Brett, you’ve worked for years to get your license! You can’t just throw it all away!”

“The license will not expire very soon. Perhaps I will open a practice here. The farm will support us until I can get my feet under me.”

“People here can’t afford a lawyer’s fee. You will never be as financially stable here as you would be in Dallas!”

“If there is a service to be had, Edna, people will pay for it. Not only here, but in Pioche and Caliente as well; even in Cedar City. I won’t suffer for clients, and I can be my own man out here.”

I heard Brett stand up from his chair. “I appreciate your offers, but the kids will not be going with you. Now, I have a family to look after, and I’m sure you all need to get back to yours.” Again he used Daddy’s tone. I knew that Brett’s dark eyes were set and unflinching, just as Daddy’s had been when he talked that way. He

stood straight, like Daddy, with his shoulders back and an almost reckless challenge in his face, one which none of the other adults would answer. As the image etched itself in my mind, I knew Brett had won.

I hardly noticed as they rose from the kitchen table and shuffled out the door, muttering under their breaths but not daring to argue with him. My heart had all but ceased to beat, and I sat frozen, my hands still against my mouth, but the tears ebbed.

Suddenly the door jolted against me.

Brett peeked his head through and looked down. “Lottie!” he whispered, taking me up. “Can’t sleep?” He was strong, and I felt light in his arms. I no longer feared him, and did not cower away, but settled against him with a sobbing breath of relief.

“You’ve been crying,” he said, feeling the wetness on my cheeks.

Then he spotted the lantern. “Oh,” was all he said, and set me gently on the bed. Feeling around in his pockets, he produced a cigarette lighter, and soon the familiar and ancient patterns splashed across my room.

“Mom and Dad used to light it for me, too,” he said softly. Then he looked at me and smiled sheepishly. “The dark doesn’t stay frightening forever, Lottie. But I don’t think it will hurt you to have the lantern for a little longer. Mom and Dad would want things to stay the same now.”

He sat down on the bed, wrapped a blanket around me, pulled me onto his lap and, hugging me against him, began to rock gently, back and forth. “It’s going to be all right, Lottie.”

His words rang true in the silent night, punctured anew by the glowing lantern. Snuggling closer against him, I watched the lit patterns flicker across the walls until my eyes closed in sleep. ■

# OUT BACK

Author Unknown

## THE JAPANESE MAPLE

THE RED LACY LEAVES CAST PINK SHADOWS on my bare, freckled arms and legs. I sit on a soft mattress of dead leaves from the past several years. When was the last time anyone raked under here? It’s



impossible to say. Three flat cement slabs stacked on top of each other the width and length of cinderblocks serve as the perfect throne in my Japanese maple palace. I am queen over the land of Backyard, and my servants are the baby spiders the size of grains of sand. My soldiers are the black ants that aren’t much bigger than the baby spiders. My field hands are the potato bugs that are as big as my pinkie nail.

Next to me sits a tiny plastic tea cup—cream with a small pink flower painted on one side—and a matching plate. The cup holds two tablespoons of rainwater from the wheelbarrow that sits beside the house. Specks of dirt float to the top, pieces of beauty bark and tiny rocks sink to the bottom. I pretend to sip the water, letting it touch my lips and run down my chin to absorb into my pastel pink Ariel and Eric T-shirt. I put the cup back on its plate and wipe my lips clean with the back of my hand.

I stand. I am the only one in my family short enough to stand in the Japanese maple palace. I am seven. The top of the dome branches barely grazes my head, working as a comb on my copper hair. I look up through the thick branches and leaves. Too thick to see the sky, I gently spread them apart with my fingers.

“Yup. Looks like rain,” I say, though no one is there to hear me. “I better gather enough food for the rainy season.”

I don’t know how I know when the “rainy season” is, for every season in Western Washington is rainy season. I part the wall of leaves and prickly branches and run to the deck to get a Cool Whip bowl that had held apple slices earlier in the day. Just off the deck is a planter box with a small patch of chives poking up through the sienna brown dirt. I grab a handful, throw them into the bowl, and run back to my palace in just enough time to evade the first signs of raindrops.

“It’s a real feast,” I say as I eat the chives. I don’t particularly like them, but they are edible, which is good enough for me.

Outside my little fortress the rain gets heavier, beating down all around me. For a few seconds I am safe, but as the leaves get wet and begin to sag, my roof leaks and wets my hair.

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## TRAMPOLINE GAMES

“MARCO!”  
“Polo!”

I am kneeling in the center of the trampoline with my eyes closed. My four cousins Jason, Brianne, Nicole, and Pamela, and my sister Stephanie surround me. I can feel their every move, but I can’t tell where they are. The July sun has already fallen behind the trees, homes, and fences that surround my backyard, but the air is still thick, heavy, muggy. “Marco!” I yell.

“Polo!” everyone responds, but I still can’t tell exactly where they are. I thrust my body to the left, but no one is there. I lunge forward, but once again, I do not touch anyone. Someone moves behind me, but I barely miss his or her leg. Nicole giggles, but I can’t tell from which direction she is laughing.

“Marco!”

“Jason, Brianne, Nicole, it’s time to go,” Aunt Nancy hollers from the deck above us. They protest, but Aunt Nancy shakes her head. “No, we have to get up early tomorrow for baseball.”

Stephanie, Pamela, and I are left, but Marco Polo isn’t nearly as fun with only three. Soon Pamela, too, leaves. Stephanie joins the adults in the living room—it happens more and more as she approaches her thirteenth birthday, now only a month away, and wants to feel older. Although I am nine and we still have much in common, she likes to pretend that she is a great deal older and wiser than me.

The shadows in the backyard become larger and the sky deepens to a navy. I get off the trampoline and lay beneath it on the cool grass. I feel more out here than inside where, even with four fans blowing, the humid air reaches ninety degrees. I pinch the grass in my toes and spread my arms out wide, then turn to lie on my stomach. The blades of grass tickle my nose and cheeks, but I just lay there, absorbing the cool, clean scent of the freshly cut lawn.

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## ROCKET’S RED GLARE

THE FOG IS THICK, BUT WE CAN STILL SEE TO the other side of the yard. The Kay and Bryan girls huddle together on the deck while we wait to welcome the year two thousand. This year will be busy. I will become a teenager. Justin will return from his mission to Los Angeles, Aaron will go on his mission the following week to Tokyo. But that is only if we make it through this New Year’s Eve alive.

Aaron sits on the roof, waiting to “drop the ball,” which is really a glow-in-the-dark Nerf football on

a string that reaches from the chimney to a rock on the opposite end of our backyard. Brother Bryan has a “fireworks” show, which is really two dozen model rocket engines wired to a board that spell out Y2K. He has spent all afternoon working on the presentation, which has only expanded his ego and made him giddier as the clock ticks toward midnight.

I can see my breath in the night, and a shiver spreads through my body. Only a minute left. Soon, thirty seconds. Finally Aaron drops the ball. It bounces slowly down the rope. Around us, neighbors are setting off fireworks and singing choruses of “Auld Lang Syne,” but we are still waiting for our ball to reach the end of the rope. At last it arrives, but our light show does not go off. Brother Bryan and Dad, disappointed, realize the battery to set off the display isn’t strong enough.

I hear the roar of an engine as Aaron pulls the Jeep into the backyard. The fireworks around us have stopped, but the Kay and Bryan girls are still clutching each other in the cold January air.

“No, Kevin. Not the car,” Mom says, but Dad doesn’t seem to care.

Dad touches the wires to the car battery, and in one giant blast, the rockets spring from the board, never revealing the neatly crafted Y2K, and shoot toward the deck. Eight of us, all girls, dive for the deck as the model engines barely miss our heads and land on the other side of the house.

“Happy New Year!” Brother Bryan shouts jovially. I look at my watch. It’s 12:14.

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## THE OLD AND THE NEW

MASSES OF TANGLED BLACKBERRY BUSHES strangle the practically dead raspberry bushes that separate my yard from the greenbelt behind our house. We haven’t been able to pick raspberries for two years because the thorny blackberry bushes have overtaken almost half of the yard. But Justin, home from his mission this week, is ready to tackle a new kind of devil: the infamous, berryless vines.

I open the sliding door one day to find Justin, machete in hand, swishing back and forth like a samurai warrior. He has been out there all day but has made little progress. Very little. A small patch has been cleared, but he has not yet reached the raspberries. Three days later I spot the poles that once marked the

raspberry bushes. All I see is a brown, tangled mess. The blackberries have murdered my raspberries.

Justin spends weeks outside trying to salvage what he can of the once wonderfully landscaped yard, but we soon find there is no hope. Mom and Dad surrender to bulldozers and Rota tillers. We build a gray brick wall stretching almost all the way across the yard so that our backyard now has two levels. An antique barrel and an old hand pump serve as a channel for a small rock waterfall from the top level to the bottom level, where we have a small pond. Dad fills it with goldfish, but they never last long between becoming a delicious snack for our cat, and getting sucked up into the pump.

We keep the three maple trees, including my Japanese maple palace, but we get rid of the apple tree and seven or eight rhododendron bushes. We also demolish our small bird cemetery, where three of our birds were once buried. Painted rocks had even served as headstones, but now the bird corpses are lost and have been covered by a metal shed.

After weeks of sore limbs and dirt-crust-ed fingernails, the work is done. I miss the old backyard, the one that looked like an exotic jungle, but we are at last able to relax in a beautiful yard without worrying about blackberries conquering the trees and grass. The bulldozers have moved out and the pallets that once held the bricks have been taken to the dump; birds, squirrels, and occasional deer return to find homes in the woods just beyond our property line. We spend our summer nights sitting on our deck next to candles sipping homemade strawberry lemonade, admiring our work, our masterpiece.

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## OCTOBER

THE LARGE RED MAPLE TREE IN THE CENTER of the backyard has become brilliant since the school year began four weeks ago. The yard is littered with leaves, but the trees seem to have millions yet to shed. Mom assigns me the task of raking the backyard, a job normally tedious in the usual Washington rain, but while October just begins, the sun still shines through the leaves. I have four hours of homework to do, a lot for the first month of tenth grade, but I stay outside as long as I can while the sun hangs just above the horizon, refusing to completely disappear.

To and fro, back and forth, I swing the rake as I



gather the leaves. There are too many to count. The vibrant yellows and browns and reds and oranges gather to a pile slowly, for I am in no hurry. In my ears the wind whips, but the whistling sounds more like music, and for a few moments I am lost in a trance. I hear the gentle notes of a song I played in band that very morning, “October” it was called, and it is the most beautiful song I have heard. The warm notes seem to manifest themselves in the colorful leaves. The yellow is the euphonium, gentle but bright. The orange is the flute, lively and powerful. The red is the oboe, prominent and warm. The brown is the bass clarinet, my instrument, deep and soothing.

I awake from my dream and see that I am only raking leaves, but it still seems much more than that. The autumn wind pulls a few more leaves from the branches as I finish raking the leaves in a pile in the greenbelt. Although “October” is only in my mind, it connects me to the leaves, to the trees that have grown as I have grown.

BEGINNING AND END

JULY IS NORMALLY WARM, BUT THIS JULY IS unbearable. The muggy air makes breathing nearly impossible, and I can’t contain the sweat dripping from my forehead. My white breathable cotton skirt makes the heat somewhat easier to deal with, but I still feel sticky. Although I am glad it is Saturday and I don’t have to work, I long for the air-conditioned daycare where I teach twelve rambunctious toddlers in order to have enough money to return to BYU-Idaho in the fall.

Small, round tables and plastic chairs from the church building fill our backyard. Guests are all around, sitting, standing, trying desperately to hide from the early afternoon sun in the shade of the trees. On the steps between the lower and upper levels of our backyard sits an archway decorated in white tulle and red and yellow daisies. A path of red and yellow rose petals leads from the deck to the archway. Long rectangular tables on the opposite side of the lawn are piled with fruits, vegetables, cheeses and crackers, punch, bottles of water, and a three-tiered cake. Aaron and Justin stand at the grills, ready to spring into action when called upon.

Stephanie pushes PLAY on her CD player as eight-year-old Sierra walks out of the house, down the deck

steps, and to the archway where Brian and Bishop Van Gieson stand. She smiles at Brian, soon to be the only father Sierra has ever known. Sarah follows in her dress of cream and red, a bouquet of yellow and red daisies in her hands. This is the moment we’ve been waiting for. After nearly ten years as a widow my oldest sister is giving her little girl a dad. Tears stream down my cheeks as the sun beats in my eyes, but the sun is not responsible for the tears. My heart swells with excitement and joy at the thought of a new addition to the family.

The ceremony is short; the kiss at the end is long but delicate; and Sarah, Brian, and Sierra all seem to be glowing—and not just from the sweat running down their faces. I realize this is the beginning and the end. It’s the beginning of a new relationship, a new marriage, a new family. It’s the beginning of a new way of life. It’s the end of years of sadness and pain and loneliness. And it’s the end of my adventures in this backyard.

HOME

CHLORINATED WATER SHIMMERS IN THE scorching August sun. At the proper angle I can see excess sunscreen oil floating on the surface, a sure sign that at least one of the pasty Kay kids will burn. Probably me. We haven’t all been together in years. We are no longer children being raised by our parents, though one cannot say we are adults either. More like heathens. Even the so-called “parents” forget civility as they lower themselves down the ladder into the four-foot swimming pool. Ten of us over the age of twenty, though not one capable of acting his or her age. We resort to childish behavior, flipping a switch to “survival of the fittest” mode.

A year has passed since Sarah’s backyard wedding and my parent’s move from Washington to Utah. This backyard is much different from the luscious Washington green. In Washington our yard was enclosed with a dark, rotting fence on one side, but thick green trees and towering rhododendron bushes on the others. Our Utah backyard is fenced in all the way around. Houses and trampolines and pools peek over the fence, making me feel exposed to nosy neighbors. Only a few trees line the fence in sporadic places, and the rest of the yard is grass. Brown, scratchy grass. But as we splash about in the pool,

playing “Chicken” on Justin’s and Aaron’s shoulders and creating whirlpools, I try not to think about being in Utah instead of Washington. I’m not ready to accept the change.

“AHH!” Mom screams and flails her arms and legs as Justin hoists her up out of the water. With a grunt, Justin swings her over to Aaron’s open arms. They’re playing catch. Mom is the ball. Though she calls for help, fits of laughter, side-aches, and the possibility of drowning from inability to breathe forbid us from joining the Kay Lifeguard Squad. Sierra, nine, and Talmage, nearly three, stare wide-eyed at the sight, unable to comprehend how anyone could do such a thing to “Honey Gram,” wondering how come their parents don’t jump in to save her.

Finally, Mom says between gasps for breath and bursts of laughter, “Okay! Stop it! Ouch!” Two more tosses, and the boys thrust Mom into the water with a splash. She emerges from the water coughing, but laughing all the same. A knot twists in my gut from laughing so hard.

Our pool play comes to an end as Mom announces we need to get ready to take family pictures. Women in bright pink, men in navy, little girls in purple, little boys in light blue. It had only taken us three hours to find a color pallet, no thanks to Target’s forty-five shades of red and blue and purple and yellow, all in different sizes. We dress in our shirts and khaki pants and attempt to look like we haven’t been playing like barbarians in a swimming pool all afternoon.

Mom reminds us to stand up straight and not to make silly faces, but we can hardly resist when Dad sets the timer on the camera and runs like a fugitive to join the group before the flash. Eventually Mom recruits a neighbor from across the street to take the pictures for us, but now the four grandchildren under the age of four have had enough and have become fussy. Amid the cries and complaints of the grandchildren, the children and spouses cannot be disheartened. We poke fun, pinch, tickle, and tease. Though we try and try, not one of the pictures turns out perfectly.

Through the taunts and laughter and squeals and wails, Sarah says to her nine-year-old daughter, “Why don’t you tell everyone what I told you today?” Sierra’s face flashes magenta and hides her face behind her mom’s arm as fourteen faces look to her. Sarah looks up at the now quiet group and says, “We’re going to have a baby in April!”

Screams from the girls and shouts from the boys echo through the backyard as we embrace one another.

“How are you feeling?”  
“Are you sure you’re up for it?”  
“It’s been ten years since you’ve been pregnant!”

Everyone has endless comments and questions for the expectant mother. While the girls continue chatting and speculating on the sex of the baby and the precise due date, Dad and Justin get on their hands and knees to inspect a wasp nest under the deck. Aaron’s eyes twinkle with mischief as he fills the kiddie pool with water from the hose. He makes eye contact with Stephanie, Brian and me, and then nods in Dad’s direction. Sinister grins spread across our faces. Aaron hands the hose to Brian. Brian unleashes the water on Dad’s backside. Instant melee. Water flies across the yard. Dad chases Justin around, somehow not noticing that Justin had nothing to do with the plot.

I pause in the midst of the commotion around me, as though a special effects team has slowed time for me. I watch the scene spread before me—Dad and “the boys” wrestling each other for the hose, Mom and “the girls” trying unsuccessfully to stay relatively dry and keep the grandkids from getting pummeled in the battlefield.

We are in a new backyard, one very different from the one in Washington. But the sounds of twelve Kays and three Sandstroms fill the empty unfamiliarity. But for the first time in a year, I start to feel that perhaps, with time, this new backyard could fulfill the same purpose.

And I am home. ■

ONE OF GOD’S OWN CHILDREN

By: Brian Brock

LEROY MATHESON TOOK A GOOD LOOK AROUND his kitchen and despaired. It was dirty. It was dirty and cluttered and it made him depressed to think that he was probably going to die soon with a dirty kitchen. His mismatched dishes lay in heaps where he had not placed them. His beloved glass jugs that were once



full of sun brewed iced tea were now nearly empty, though he had not had a drop of tea for himself. Trash populated the floor like people in a big city, so crowded and colorful that there was hardly room to step. He tried to find a clean glass to drink from, but there weren't any, so he ran cold water from his tap and drank out of his cupped hands. The water felt good on his dry throat, but it stung his cut lip. He hadn't had a cut lip or a punch in the mouth since he was twenty-one. He was twice that old now, and not the young, strapping black man he used to be.

Leroy could hear the television in his living room, the volume turned up far louder than he ever had it. He could hear the opening music to CNN, and he hoped to God that the stories wouldn't upset his guest. Timidly, like a mouse exploring the home of a ginger cat, Leroy ventured from the kitchen to the living room. His rough, black hands twisted in fear.

It had been two weeks since the man had come, white-skinned, stumbling and dangerous, through the unlocked front door with a bottle of Wild Turkey in one hand and a silver revolver in the other. He was wearing nothing more than an oversized pair of jeans still dripping from the night's heavy rain, and without a word he beat Leroy worse than he could ever remember having been beaten as a young man. The man was younger, maybe twenty-five or so, and stronger than Leroy had ever been. After the beating, came the demands. Food and drink. Every phone in the house (there was only one). The remote to the television. And every morning another beating, but not as bad as the first. This had gone on for two weeks.

Leroy wondered what would happen first. Would the young man kill him, or would Leroy kill himself? It was a silly question, really. Leroy was too afraid to take his own life. Besides, Reverend Greene said suicide was a sin.

From the door to the living room he could see the back of the couch. Above the top of the couch he could see the big white man's head, shaved with Leroy's own razor, tattooed with eyes on the back. Leroy believed those eyes could see him, tattoos or not. He had been caught more than once reaching for a knife or a heavy lamp, and the repercussions had nearly killed him. It was like the devil himself stared out of the back of that man's head.

"The police continue their search for American Magee, convicted murderer and arsonist," reported the anchorwoman. Leroy heard the man on the couch

chuckle. "Magee escaped police custody while he was being transferred from Sanwatch County Correctional to Parker Valley Prison. As he escaped, he seriously wounded two officers, one of whom is still in intensive care at Sanwatch Community Care. Police are pushing their search northward, where they believe he will try to cross into North Carolina. Police Chief Paul Eckerman is optimistic about finding Magee, who he says has left an easy trail for authorities to follow."

"No, you dummies," growled Leroy under his breath. "He's done headed south! Monk's Corner. He's in Monk's Corner!"

American Magee (which the anchorwoman said was his real name) must have heard him, or he saw him with the devil eyes tattooed in the back of his head, because he turned and glared at him.

"Hey, old man!" he said, "Did I tell you that you could come in here?"

Leroy fell back a few steps into the doorway. He hated it that Magee called him "old man," but what could he do about it?

The eyes in the front of the man's head were nearly as bad as the ones tattooed on the back, but they were different in that they were red with heavy bags underneath. Leroy was sure this man didn't ever sleep. He hadn't since coming to his home.

"Sorry sir," Leroy pleaded, "I was just interested to know what was on the news."

Magee eyed the old black man for a moment, like he was suspicious the man was going to knife him when he wasn't looking. He clicked off the TV with the remote, and traded it for the silver revolver that sat next to him on the couch.

"Ain't nothing on the news," he said. "You got any music around here?"

Leroy shook his head. He had never been a man for a lot of music. It was fine, but he loved silence. Silence he was never going to have again except in death, he was sure.

"Just a couple of records, but I ain't got no record player anymore," he answered Magee. Then a thought occurred to him. A stupid, irrational thought. "Can I ask you something? I always call my mamma on Fridays," Leroy lied. He usually called her on Sundays, and she wasn't really his mamma, but his dead wife's. "She's got to be real worried since I haven't called in a few weeks, so why don't I pick up the phone and call her?"

The killer called Magee said nothing at first, but

glanced at the phone on the wall next to him. Leroy wasn't sure if the man watched TV all day because he was bored, or if he did it because he could easily keep an eye on the phone from the couch. Magee scratched his bristly chin with the barrel of the gun in his hand. Leroy thought the killer would hurt him for asking, but he seemed to actually be considering it.

"You say you usually call her on Fridays?" he asked. Leroy nodded. "Go ahead then," he waved with the gun. Leroy let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding and walked to the wall where the phone hung beside the picture of his wife and a corkboard rustling with business cards and appointments.

Leroy wasn't sure why he was calling his wife's mother, whom everybody called Mamma. She was a godly woman, a church-going woman, who probably never missed a service in her life. She was motherly to everyone who set foot in her house, and often the first person many of the people in that part of town went to for advice, but as Leroy dialed her number, he wondered how in the world the woman would be able to help him, especially if the killer was far too close for him to ask for help without being overheard.

"Hello?" answered Mamma after three and a half rings. Leroy could hear Wheel of Fortune on the television in the background.

"Hey Mamma," Leroy stammered. Now that he was finally talking to another living soul besides Magee for the first time in two weeks, he wasn't sure of what to say. "How are things?"

"Thank the Lord, I'm making it," she answered. She always answered that way when people asked how she was. "And how're you doing, child?"

Leroy scratched his head and tried to think of how to answer. He wanted to say he was miserable, that he was a prisoner in his own home, where the warden was a white man with eyes in the back of his head and a gun. He wanted to say that he'd rather be dead, but he was too scared to die.

"I'm feeling under the weather, and the house ain't in too good a shape," he answered. It made him feel lame to complain about the state of his home at a time like this, but what else could he say? Magee was right there, listening. Like he always had been for the past two weeks. Living with Magee was like keeping a snake underfoot, hoping it would leave before it bit him.

"That's a shame," Mamma answered. "I know it's hard without a wife. Tell you what, child, I'll be over soon to help you."

Leroy straightened up with shock. He stammered, trying to find words to discourage the woman from visiting, but none worked. He tried turning her down, and he even said something about having company, but Mamma would not be moved. And like that she hung up. Leroy stared at the receiver dumbfounded, trying to understand how the conversation could have ended so quickly and disastrously. He had just killed his wife's Mamma.

"What'd she say?" asked Magee. Leroy shrugged and lied about it being a normal call, that she wouldn't expect his call until next week, but he racked his brain for how he was going to keep that woman from coming by for a visit. For an hour nothing came. But she did.

Magee was sitting at the kitchen table, right where Leroy usually sat himself, scratching something obscene into his forearm with a safety pin when Mamma knocked on the front door. Magee jumped at the sound, throwing the pin aside and grabbing the gun from off the top of the coffee can. His heavy, bloodshot eyes glared at Leroy, who had been pacing in the hallway, unsure of what to do.

"Hey, old man," Magee whispered as he appeared at Leroy's shoulder, "Them better not be the cops, or you're going to die right before they do!"

And he shoved Leroy towards the front door with the silver gun pointed at the man's black, leathery neck.

Leroy thought he was killing both Mamma and himself when he opened the door. To him, the creak of the hinges was like the voice of a coffin lid. He was surprised by how sweaty he was now that he was about to die. He had never considered that he might smell like funk before he started to decompose. He was so convinced that the next sound he was going to hear was a gunshot that Mamma's voice actually made his heart jump into his throat.

"How you doing, Leroy?" she asked. She was a big black woman with kind eyes and a flowered dress. Her straight, glossy hair was quite obviously a wig, and she was very round—because she was so full of love for God's children, Leroy had heard Reverend Greene say.

"Mamma," he stammered, trying to swallow his hammering heart back into his feeble chest, "how're you doing?"

"Thank the Lord, I'm making it," she said as she pushed past him and the startled Magee into the filthy house.

She was in the kitchen before either of the men had the wits to say anything.



“Oh my,” she said, wagging her head at the state of the dishes. “Lord have mercy, this won’t do. No, sir.”

“Hey, lady!” shouted Magee, who’d finally gotten over the shock that the woman had walked past him as though he were of no consequence. He waved the gun in her face, his eyes about bulging from his bald, tattooed head. “You sit down right now, or I’m gunna—ow!”

Mamma slapped the boy full in the face. Leroy cringed. He wasn’t sure what he felt more of: fear that she was about to be murdered in front of his eyes, or surprise at how strong the old woman appeared to be.

Magee didn’t shoot her. He just stood there with his mouth open. He even looked like his puffy, red eyes might even start to cry, something Leroy would have thought to be impossible. For a moment, Leroy thought Magee looked more like a boy than a convict.

“Don’t you talk to your elders like that!” Mamma shouted at him. With every forceful word, Magee’s gun seemed to drop a few inches closer to pointing at the floor. “My name ain’t ‘Lady!’ Boy must be stupid or something. You call me Mrs. Cromedy, or Ma’am, you hear?”

The white boy finally straightened up from the blow Mamma had dealt him. “Yeah,” he answered her.

“Yes Ma’am!” she corrected.

“Yes Ma’am!” he answered again.

Leroy ran his rough hand over his balding head. He had never seen Mamma talk that way to anyone before, and he had never seen the dangerous, murdering white man bow to authority before. He wondered if maybe he had been knocked unconscious or something and was now dreaming.

He sobered up quickly as he watched the expression on Magee’s face change again. Mamma had turned her back, and as soon as she did, it looked as though the man regained his senses. He was cowering before nothing more than a matronly black woman. He leveled the silver pistol at the back of her head. For a moment, Leroy thought that the bullet was going to go out of that gun and pass through Mamma’s skull and into the drywall behind it. Then another bullet would probably kill him, too. And just like that, they’d be murdered.

Mamma must have seen the glint of light on the pistol out of the corner of her eye, because she rounded on that white boy so quick that Leroy nearly missed it.

“Don’t you point that thing at me!” she roared. Her heavy hand came down on top of Magee’s wrist, and

the gun veered wide and fired. The bullet splintered the wood floor at Leroy’s feet, who nearly fainted. Mamma stood above the white man like a bull elephant, mad and unafraid. It was like she never even noticed that the gun had gone off. Again and again her open hands came down on Magee’s face, who tried to fend her off and forgot about his weapon in the struggle. Soon the killer’s face was red and stinging, and he was pleading, “I’m sorry, Ma’am, I’m sorry!” again and again.

Finally the blows ended, and Mamma stood triumphant and glorious over the boy like Jesus over the money changers He thrust out of the temple.

“Now you quit all this nonsense! And you go and wash those dishes before I beat your hide with them. Boy needs to act like he got some work ethic!” she ordered.

Leroy watched the white man with the tattoos of eyes on the back of his head walk dejectedly to the sink and start washing dishes like a chastised son. After watching for a few minutes, he realized that he had not actually said anything to Mamma since she arrived.

“Thanks, Mamma,” he whispered to her. She just waved her hand dismissively at him.

“Don’t you worry about it, child. I can see why you’re having so much trouble with the house now. But all that’s going to change. This boy ain’t nothing but one of God’s own children, and like all God’s children, he’s going to work!” she said.

A few hours later, Mamma moved some of her things into Leroy’s house. She said she wanted to stay so she could keep a closer eye on the boy, who was never any trouble so long as the big woman was around. Soon the house was clean, and meals were cooked, and the laundry was folded, and nobody was murdered. Then Leroy was able to go back to work. When his boss asked him where he’d been, Leroy just said he’d been sick, which was close to the truth anyhow. Leroy had been sick with fear of death. When he came home, there were full jugs of sun-brewed iced tea waiting for him.

Within a couple of weeks, Mamma had Magee going to church as well. As a child of God, she would say, the boy ought to know God’s word. Reverend Greene was delighted to see Mamma so engaged in the work of the Lord, and made a special mention of her efforts in his sermon. “The woman, having tasted of the sweetness of Jesus, has brought another child of God to the springs of eternal life, so that he too might

drink.” Leroy about died when he saw Magee blush under the gaze of the congregation.

Two weeks after Mamma first walked through his door, Leroy was beginning to feel that they had the makings of an unusual, frightening family. But it had become so routine that the morning Magee left, it actually came as a shock.

“I’m sorry Mrs. Cromedy, but I got to get out on my own, you know,” he explained with a duffel bag in his hand. The bag actually belonged to Leroy, who was standing nearby, listening with a cup of coffee in his hand, but he was fine with the bag leaving if Magee was going with it.

Mamma just wrapped her arms around the killer’s neck and kissed him once on the cheek. She was still dressed in her long nightgown, and she was crying.

“You don’t have to go, child. Are you alright?” she asked.

The boy just nodded and said, “I’m making it. I’m fine, I just need to go out on my own now, is all.”

Mamma wrapped him up in a tight, warm hug she had never given Leroy. He watched in amazement as Magee started to cry a little.

“You just call me Mamma, you hear? And I know you got to leave. All babies leave some day,” she whispered to him.

Magee kissed her on the cheek and called her Mamma, and picked up the duffel bag and the silver gun and went out the door. Mamma and Leroy watched from the window. Only Leroy jumped with surprise when the cops came.

As American Magee made his way across the lawn to the road beyond, there were shouts and commotion as uniformed officers with guns and batons appeared from the sides of the house. The surprised Magee squeezed the pistol’s trigger again and again, but no shots went off, and soon he was being wrestled to the ground by four men. Magee started calling Mamma’s name, who stood unmoving from where she watched at the window.

“Mamma, where’d all them police come from?” Leroy asked.

“I called them this morning when I saw the boy packing up to go,” she answered. Her eyes were dry.

“And why didn’t he shoot nobody?”

She smiled. “Because I took all the bullets out his gun.”

She dropped a fist full of bullets onto the wood floor, where they clanked and tinkled like little bells.

“He’s just one of God’s own children, and all

God’s children need a little tough love now and again,” she said.

Soon Magee and the cops were gone, and Leroy was heading back to the kitchen, wondering what he should have for breakfast. Mamma was right behind him.

“Why don’t you cook us up some grits and eggs?” she ordered.

Leroy knew that tone. It was the one she used with Magee when she wanted him to know that she wasn’t asking. Leroy opened his mouth to remind her of whose house it was, but he stopped and thought for a minute. He thought about his time with Magee before Mamma came. He remembered how she stood him and his silver gun down like they were nothing but a kid and his toy, and how he had cowered before that gun like it was a venomous snake that would have delighted in nothing more than to bite him. He thought of Magee. Then he thought of Mamma.

He started cooking some grits. At least he knew that Mamma wouldn’t hurt him for fun, and that she would leave eventually. All in all, it was safer to live under Mamma’s rule than under a white killer’s, right?

“Besides,” he thought to himself, “I’m just one of God’s children. A little work is good.” ■



■ ART GALLERY

- photography
- painting/printmaking
- digital illustration
- graphic design



Hockney-Jossie; Levi Price

■ PHOTOGRAPHY



Train; Bridgette Hall



10:30:10; Levi Price



Steve; Bridgette Hall



■ PAINTING/PRINTMAKING



Rexburg, Idaho LDS Temple Stained Glass Window, Bridgette Hall



Sleeping Beauty, Heidi Searle



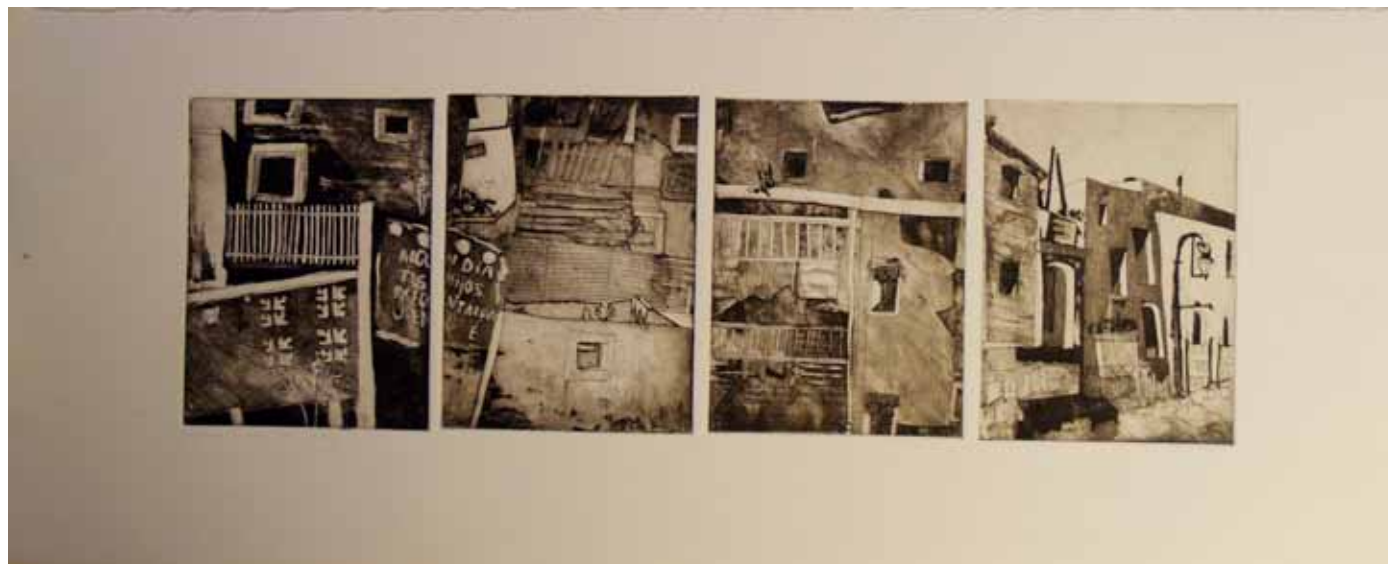
## ■ DIGITAL ILLUSTRATION



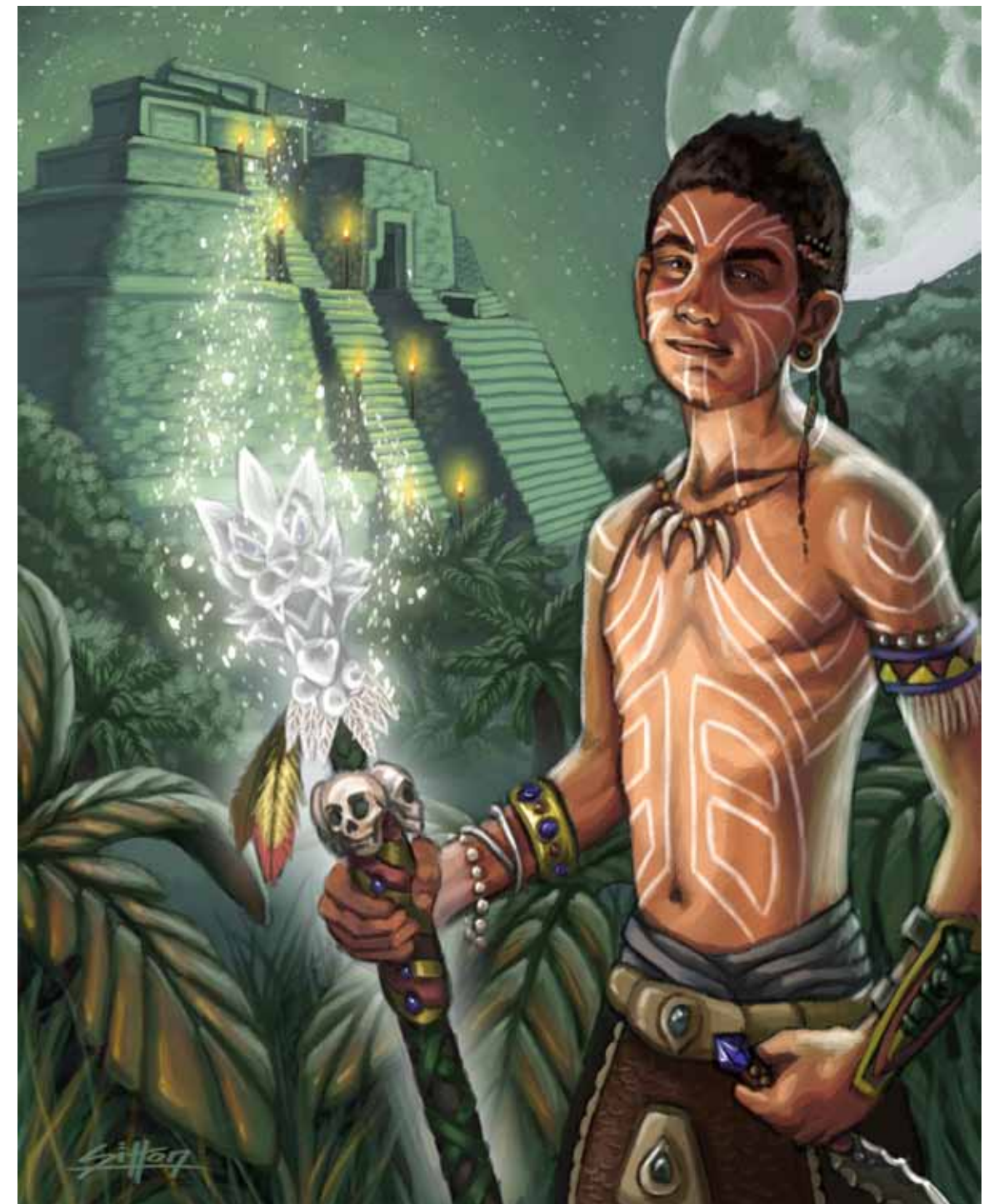
*Untitled*, Brennyn Torres Carmen



*Bird*, Bridgette Hall



*Untitled*, Brennyn Torres Carmen



*Conjuruer*, Stephen Sitton

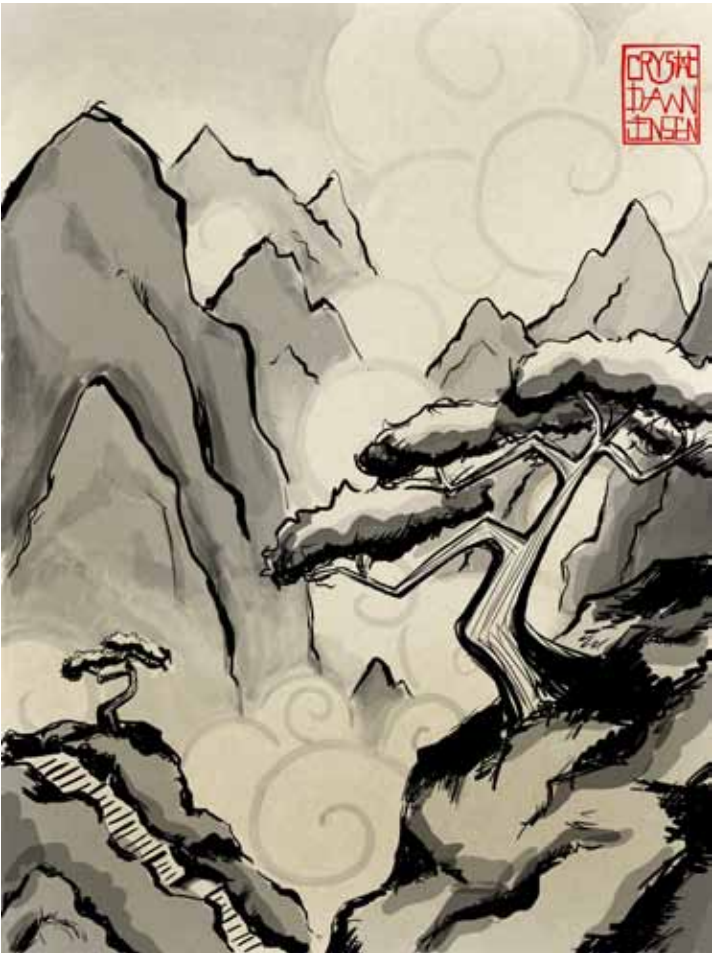




*Au Revoir Mon Amor*; Stephen Sitton



*Untitled*; Dustin Clark



*Chinese Landscape*; Crystal Burnham



*Desert Slumber*; Crystal Burnham



*Monkey Love*; Stephen Sitton



*Midnight Snack*; Stephen Sitton



## ■ GRAPHIC DESIGN

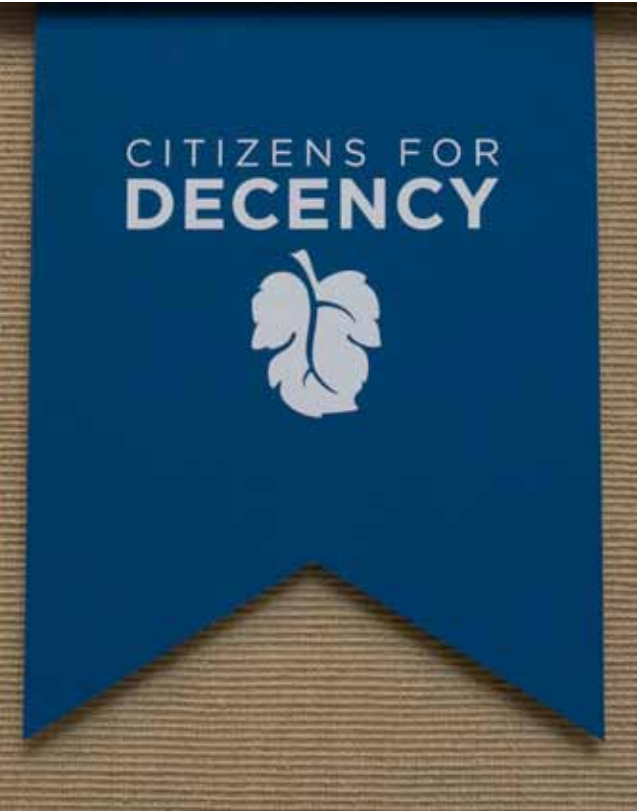


Puppet Show Invitation; Bridgette Hall

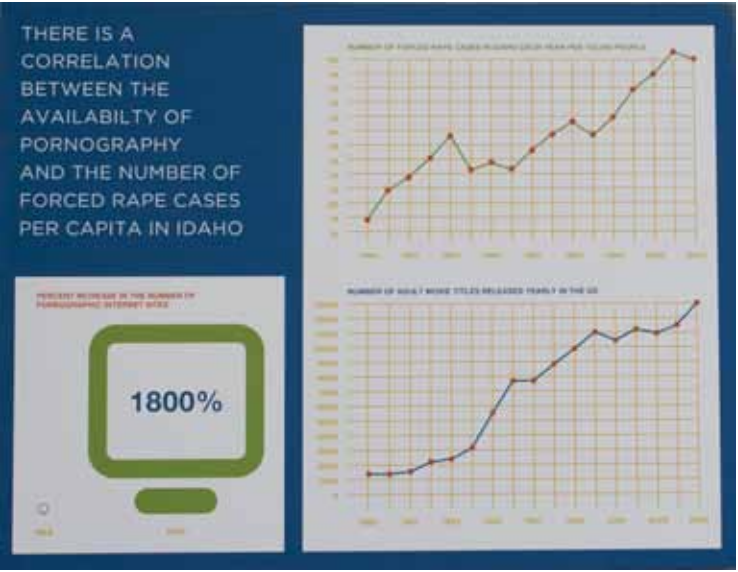




Citizens For Decency; Brian Talbot, Nic Bingham, Jennifer Dogget, Jessica Jensen, Kelly Stevenson, Joe Turner



50 Info Cards; Brian Talbot





# CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Heather Baird split her growing-up years between the two major metropolises of San Diego, California and Preston, Idaho; she now resides in the quiet town of Sugar City, just north of Rexburg. Heather enjoys writing in just about any form; essays, research papers, grocery lists, poems, blog posts, novels, and family letters all thrill her.

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Katy Carpenter is originally from Arizona but has lived in several other states, including Alaska. She graduated from BYU-I in December 2009, earning a BA in English with an emphasis in professional writing and a double minor in business and creative writing. Her ultimate dream is to move to New York and start her own e-publishing company.

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Jeffrey Farnworth was born, and has spent most of his life, in Rexburg, Idaho. He served a mission in upstate New York, in the New York Utica Mission, and has spent the whole of his college career (thus far) at BYU-Idaho. He declared himself an English major because of a fascination that he has with language. In November 2009, he married his high school sweetheart and they have been happily married ever since.

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Justin Haxby was born and raised in Montana as a logger’s son. “We were blue collar, and trailer park,” he says, “but I always felt like I didn’t belong.” In the 8th grade his sister taught him what onomatopoeia was, and he was hooked. He got into all sorts of books and started writing. He is married to a wonderful woman who loves and understands his obsessions. Together they have a one-year-old boy.

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Emily Hess grew up in Denver Colorado, not a part of Denver or a suburb, actual Denver. She is now a super senior majoring in ceramics at BYU-Idaho attending her 11th semester, but more importantly, she graduates in April of 2011. She enjoys making pots, binding books, and writing stories.

Jeffrey G. Howard graduated Magna cum Laude in April 2010 with a B.A. in English – Professional Writing and a minor in German. He has presented papers at several academic conferences and original poetry at the National Undergraduate Literature Conference. He was raised on a farm in Pasco, Washington and served a two-year mission in Catania, Italy. He is currently completing his first work of young adult fiction.

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Lindsey Kay grew up in Western Washington, but now calls Syracuse, Utah home. She is the youngest of five children, and her family has always been supportive of her writing. She has been at BYU-Idaho since 2005 studying creative writing and has recently decided to go into English Education so she can share her love of writing with others.

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Elyssa Jean Kirkham grew up in Las Vegas, NV, where she learned to appreciate the beauty of the desert. Upon learning to read at age five, she decided become an author/illustrator. She graduated in 2010 from Brigham Young University–Idaho with a degree in English, emphasizing creative writing. Elyssa currently resides with husband Chris in Salt Lake City, UT, where she is an intern at the New Era.

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Sara Lord, California-born and North Carolina-raised, will graduate with a Bachelors of Arts in English this December. She enjoys adventures, whether it’s traveling to Paris, experimenting in the kitchen, or learning how to swing dance. She also enjoys reading classics, going camping, and sampling unfamiliar music. More of Sara’s work is forthcoming in the November issue of Salt Lake Magazine.

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Emily McClure grew up in Tazewell, VA, the seventh of eight kids. Her parents made it a point to read to their children and tell them stories; she and her siblings are avid readers. This is her senior year at BYU-Idaho as an English major, and she’s hoping to work with a publishing company as a book editor once she graduates.

Brittany McPheters is an Interior Designer with a penchant for prose. She has always loved to write. Her mom is a writer as well, so she must get it from her. She loves words and the images that can be created by combining seemingly unrelated pieces. She writes whatever she thinks young people would like to read, except she doesn’t include the smut. She believes that “young people need to know there is good literature out there for them without worrying about what it contains.”

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Debbie McPheters is a wife, mother of six, and grandmother of nine. She was raised in the Denver, Colorado area, received an Associates from Northwest Nazarene College, married Wally, joined the church at age 25, raised children (the three youngest have or are now attending BYU-I), and now works full-time on campus. She started writing children’s stories because she loves story-telling. She took Creative Writing with Bro. Stewart (along with daughter, Brittany), and tried poetry as her “stretch writing” and loved it.

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Skyler Meeks was born in Walla Walla, Washington, and was raised in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Currently a junior at Brigham Young University-Idaho, Skyler is an English major with an emphasis in creative writing. Skyler listens to hip-hop music when he writes, but also enjoys a little bit of folk music. Recently, he has taken up tailoring his own clothes. Also, he has an affinity for chocolate chip pancakes and loves peaches. Most of all, Skyler misses Oregon rain.

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Andrew Edmund Rice hails from Bellevue, WA, and comes from a large family. He’s classified as a “Junior” at BYU-I. His academic aspirations are pointing toward Construction management. He served a mission in Guatemala, and tries to find joy in the simple things in life, like swallowing and the principle of leverage. “Knowing what I know now, I would do it all again,” he says. His future goals are: be happy; grow a beard; play the harmonica.

Tatiana Schow grew up on a farm Idaho, and that’s her first love. She also enjoys writing, reading, anything outdoors, sports, family, and spending time with her husband and little boy. When she was a kid, she loved “The Little Matchstick Girl” by Hans Christian Andersen. She found herself reworking it in a narrative poem format, and “Burning at Both Ends” is how it turned out.

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Steven Sheppard was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan and grew up in El Segundo, California. Although he grew up in Los Angeles he really likes Idaho and if possible wants to stay in the state after he graduates from BYU-Idaho. He started writing short stories and poetry in 5th grade for his teacher. He served an LDS mission in South Carolina. He is a senior majoring in Sociology.

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Mandy Slack was born in California, but raised in Palisade, Colorado. She is the sixth of seven children and has ten nieces and nephews. She grew up working in her dad’s firewood lot, where she spent hundreds of hours thinking up stories to write. She served in the Albania Tirana Mission, where she learned to speak Albanian and to love the Albanian people. She is now a junior studying English-Creative Writing.

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Laura Whitney says, “In the second grade, my teacher assigned the class to write a short story about Christmas. She asked us to try to make the story at least two pages; mine was nine. After school, my teacher pulled me aside and told me that I had a gift that I should work on and use for the rest of my life.” After working as a nanny in Germany for a year, she discovered a deeper purpose to her writing. She graduated in July of 2010 and is now working on having adventures with which to fill future pages.



