



GREAT LAKE REVIEW

FALL 2016

The Great Lake Review
SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine
Fall 2016

The Great Lake Review is open to submissions throughout the year.

Please submit your fiction, nonfiction, drama,
poetry, and visual art as an attachment to:

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All of us at GLR would like to extend a special thank you to everyone at our favorite independent bookstore, especially Bill and Mindy.

THANK YOU RIVER'S END!

The Great Lake Review
SUNY Oswego's Literary Magazine
Fall 2016

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Adamo Ignis
Dana Rae Hagberg



How Do I Start

Scott Kesselring

INT. UNIVERSITY LIBRARY - COMPUTER LAB - NIGHT

PAN ACROSS SIGN

The camera starts on a sign next to the door that reads “24 Hour Computer Lab” and it pans to show the computer lab.

ON ALYSSA

ALYSSA (19), a confident, studious woman in casual clothes, sits in front of a computer with a black screen protector over the monitor. Papers sprawl across the computer stations next to her. Alyssa types furiously at her computer.

After a few seconds BRAD (19), walks in baggy clothes and large headphones. The muffled sound of metal music can be heard from his headphones as he walks over and sits right next to Alyssa.

BRAD

Uhhh can you move your stuff?

WIDE SHOT - ENTIRE LAB

Alyssa looks around, noticing the completely empty computer lab, and then glares at Brad.

ANGLE ON BRAD AND ALYSSA

Alyssa clears her papers off Brad's computer station.

ALYSSA

Sorry, I just didn't expect anyone to sit here. Since ya know, the whole lab is free.

Brad doesn't notice Alyssa so she turns back to her computer and continues typing.

(V.O.)
SUPER NAZI ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE 3:
HITLER's REVENGE

Alyssa jumps in shock as Brad's computer blares techno music and she looks over at his screen. The screen is a pixelated first-person shooter game with green zombies with Hitler mustaches running towards the player.

ALYSSA
Hey Brad, if you're gonna be
playing that piece of garbage that
I assume is supposed to be some
kind of entertainment, could you
please do it at another computer?
I'm really trying to finish this
important project.

Brad moves the right side of his headphones off his ear so he can hear Alyssa while she talks.

BRAD
Woah, sorry Princess, wouldn't want
to offend you with my "piece of
garbage". Didn't mean to ruin your
homework. Which by the way, how
come you're starting it at-

Brad glances at his watch.

BRAD (CONT'D)
-the great ol' time of 12:23AM?

ALYSSA
I didn't just start it, I've had do

ALYSSA (CON'T)

to do days of research to get to
this point. You know that!

BRAD

I do?

ALYSSA

Brad, this is for our Bio class.

Brad throws his headphones off.

BRAD

WHAT?!

ALYSSA

Yeah, for Professor Tulley's class.
It's the bacteria lab due online by
6AM. We've been doing work on it in
class for the past two weeks. Oh wait,
I forgot. You never come to class.

BRAD

Well shit I'm screwed!

Brad closes his game and opens up the internet and begins
furiously searching.

ALYSSA

This is what happens when you don't
make a schedule Brad. You should do
what I do! I color coordinate all
of my folders by academic building
and by-

BRAD

Done!

ALYSSA

What?! There's no way!

BRAD

Welcome to the age of the internet
Alyssa. All I had to do was search
this lab and I found tons of reports
online. All I gotta do is finish
downloading this, change the name,
and I got my A.

Brad closes his eyes and gives Alyssa a smug smile. Alyssa glances towards Brad's screen and sees the download bar filling up, so she leans down and shuts his computer off.

BRAD (CONT'D)

What the hell?! You just ruined it!
Now I have to find that same report
again.

ALYSSA

Oh no you don't. There is no I've
spent over a week on this to get my
A and you're gonna get one in a few
minutes. You're gonna have to do
some work to get your A.

BRAD

God for someone so smart you really
are dumb. How the fuck am I
supposed to do a lab report with no
lab?

Alyssa starts searching through her papers and throws a small stack covered in numbers, graphs, and diagrams at Brad.

ALYSSA

There. The whole class found the

same results so you can use mine.
Now you can answer all the lab
ALYSSA (CONT')

questions on your own!

BRAD

You're kidding me, you expect me to
do all this tonight?

ALYSSA

Join the club.

CAMERA PANS UP TO CLOCK

The clock reads 12:26AM.

FADE TO CLOCK

The shots fades to show the clock now reading 1:41AM.

ALYSSA (CONT'D)

There, finished! How far have you
gotten?

BRAD

Me? Oh I am tearing through this
thing. I'm on question 40 already!

ALYSSA

(beat)

The lab is only 27 short answer
questions. Brad how far are you
really?

Alyssa stands up and sees Brad's screen is a blank Word
document.

ALYSSA (CONT'D)

Are you kidding me?! Are you
serious Brad?! You've been sitting

ALYSSA (CON'T)

here for over an hour and haven't
done anything? I let you use my
notes, which by the way I DIDN'T
HAVE TO DO and all you do is sit
there? God I hope you fail you're
stupid lab.

As Alyssa turns to sit back at her computer Brad grabs her
arm.

BRAD

Wait please don't go! Alyssa I
really appreciate everything you've
done for me it's just...

ALYSSA

Just what?

BRAD

I don't understand it. Any of it.

ALYSSA

Well maybe you should come to class
sometimes and you'd actually learn
something.

BRAD

It's not my fault that I... nevermind.

ALYSSA

Huh?

BRAD

Don't worry about it.

ALYSSA

Uh...okay. Here, how about I help you.

BRAD

You don't have to help me, you've done too much already.

ALYSSA

I know I don't have to..I want to.

Alyssa smiles at Brad and Brad smiles back.

ALYSSA (CONT'D)

Okay so you see this first agar plate? This is before we placed the E. Coli in. This serves as our control...

CAMERA PANS UP TO CLOCK

As Alyssa begins teaching Brad, the camera pans to clock showing 1:44AM.

FADE TO CLOCK

The camera fades to show the clock now at 4:20AM.

BRAD

So the gram stain shows that the Cholera vibrio grew the fastest during the three days?

ALYSSA

Exactly! See? You got this.

BRAD

All because of you, you're great at this! You should be a teacher!

ALYSSA

Well that's the goal! (laughs)

BRAD

That's good!

(beat)

By the way, I don't skip class
because I want to.

ALYSSA

Huh?

BRAD

I don't just skip class because I
want to. I uh...I open my dad's
antique shop in the mornings. He's
gotten real sick lately and I don't
want him to over work himself. So I
moved back home and commute to
campus. I had to change my schedule
to make them all evening classes.
This is the one class I couldn't
change the time for, so I'm just
trying to get by but it's hard when
you can't actually learn in class.

ALYSSA

Oh, I'm so sorry. I never knew.

BRAD

It's fine, no one does. I don't
really talk about it.

ALYSSA

So how come you shared it with me?

Brad just smiles and looks down a little embarrassed. Alyssa
blushes as well.

ALYSSA (CONT'D)

So uh...what game were you playing

ALYSSA (CON'T)

before? It must be good if you came
all the way here at night to play it.

BRAD

Oh this?

Brad turns back to his computer and opens the game back up.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Look at the bottom.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN

The bottom of the screen reads "Created by Brad Wilcox"

ON BRAD AND ALYSSA

ALYSSA

No way, you made this!?

BRAD

Yeah, it's been my side project for
the past year. I can only work on it
at school cuz I can't afford the
program.

ALYSSA

This is incredible!

BRAD

So it's not a piece of trash?

ALYSSA

Oh my god Brad I am so so-

BRAD

Don't mention it.

ALYSSA

Do you mind if I play?

BRAD

Sure!

Alyssa turns her chair towards Brad's computer and leans over to use his keyboard and mouse.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Okay, use WASD to move, click to fire the gun, and if you get to the final level press F when you find the real Hitler.

ALYSSA

What will pressing E do?

BRAD

It shoots a giant American flag to trap him so that Franklin D Roosevelt can run up and kick him.

ALYSSA

That's so funny! How did you think of this stuff?

BRAD

I don't know, it just kinda happens.

ALYSSA

You're so lucky! I wish I was as creative as you.

BRAD

Are you kidding, I would kill for your brains!

ALYSSA

Would you kill a zombie Nazi for them?

BRAD

I wouldn't need to, you're killing them all already! You're a natural at this!

ALYSSA

I try.

Brad and Alyssa laugh as

CAMERA PANS UP TO CLOCK

The clock reads 4:26AM.

FADE TO CLOCK

The shots fades to show the clock now reading 5:47AM.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN

In the game Hitler walks out wearing a standard Nazi outfit, but his head is about 10x the size it should be. An American flag flies towards him and suddenly he is on the ground wrapped in it. FDR walks from offscreen and starts to kick him as the game closes.

ALYSSA

Did I do it right?

BRAD

That's it! You did it! You beat the game!

ALYSSA

I beat it! I beat my first video
game!

Alyssa raises her arms and kicks her legs out in excitement,
but she accidentally kicks her computer and the screen goes
off.

ALYSSA (CONT'D)

Oh no...oh no oh no oh no what
happened? What did I do?!

Alyssa begins to push her monitor power button but nothing
happens.

BRAD

Hey, everything's fine. You already
finished the paper, just boot it
back up and e-mail it to her.

ALYSSA

I can't, because I forgot to save it.

BRAD

Why didn't you save it?!

ALYSSA

Whenever I do work in the library I
never save til I have to at the end
to e-mail it!

BRAD

Well we'll just redo it!

ALYSSA

There's no time! It's due in like

10 minutes. I guess I have to take
the zero.

Brad looks at his monitor, which now shows the lab, and then
back to Alyssa.

BRAD

I'll just put your name on my
report and you can turn it in.

ALYSSA

Brad, I can't let you do that.

BRAD

Yes you can. If it weren't for you
I wouldn't have even remembered
this assignment. Plus you helped
me learn biology, so this is the least
I could do.

ALYSSA

Thank you Brad!

Alyssa leans forward and gives Brad a hug. He seems shocked at
first, but then reciprocates. Brad then glances at the computer
tower underneath Alyssa's desk.

BRAD

Hold on a second.

Brad moves under the desk and plugs in a loose cord and
Alyssa's screen comes to life.

BRAD (CONT'D)

You just knocked the cord loose,
your paper is fine!

ALYSSA

Oh thank god!! Brad you're a life

saver! Thank you!

BRAD

What, no hug this time?

Brad closes his eyes and opens his arms for a hug. Alyssa steps into the hug and gives Brad a quick peck on the cheek.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Oh..uhh wasn't expecting that.

ALYSSA *

Oh no, was that a bad thing to do?

I'm sor- *

BRAD *

No not bad...just unexpected.

Alyssa blushes and Brad smiles back.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Maybe we could hang out again soon?

But instead of the library in could
be in a restaurant on Friday?

ALYSSA

I'd like that.

Brad and Alyssa smile and walk out of the library together.

FADE OUT

The Times That My Sister Was There

Mary McIntyre

Seven minutes after my birth, my twin sister, Rachael was delivered into this world. From the little stories that my family told me over the years, I've gathered that I was rushed up to the NICU. She got to sit under a heat lamp while my family waited for the news that I was going to be okay. My mom told me that she was one of the last people to hold me because by the time I was put safely into my dad's arms, everyone wanted to see me. Plus, my mom was exhausted from the chaos. Later, we were put in the same room and we met each other. That was the first time that she was there. Even though it was early October, our parents dressed us in warm coats. My mom still jokingly blames my dad because we sweat to death that day. My mom hadn't been outside in days, and when my dad came to take the three of us home, he had just been outside.

When we were toddlers, we were a team. She held the wooden kitchen table for me as I tried to take out the screws from the table. We stood on the white linoleum floor that my parents replaced the year before we left for college. The once spotless table now has a ring from a glass that was left too long, sparkles from my art projects, and dimples from who- knows- what. We got into all kinds of trouble together.

During my basketball phase, I played scrimmage games in an empty gym, which was connected to our church. The gym was brand new, and had bleachers that once got covered in eggs from a science project gone wrong. Despite the fact that the gym was new, it was always dusty. I ran around the court missing every shot and looked ridiculous in my light blue jersey that came down to my knees.. After every loss, (which happened frequently) she picked me up and I hopped onto her back. She carried me to the car, giggling all the way.

In middle school, I was a complete mess. I wore plaid every single day and usually had high water cargo pants on because I hated change and I loved being different than everyone else. One of my many problems was my locker. The fairly new blue locker was probably my worst enemy. I could never open it, consequently, I was almost always late to class for the first week. I gave up after twisting the lock for what seemed like the thousandth time. I was running

out of time, so I went down to the other end of the school to ask Rachael for help. With minimal hesitation, she ran down to my end of the square building and opened my locker with ease. I was on time to class that day.

I asked a boy to the prom in my junior year. I borrowed my sister's royal blue sweater and her favorite silver necklace. With the help of my family, I bought a cake. Rachael helped me draw a gavel on it because we were both on the mock trial team. When I waited for Mike to arrive to the team meeting, I caught Rachael watching me through the thin, rectangular, glass window on the door. I beamed with pride as she smiled and waved. After he said yes, she told me that my teammate, Cam, blocked her view while I asked him. Therefore, she couldn't take our picture. When she showed up, I was finally able to stop shaking.

In my senior year of high school, I was invited to play a song at my guitar teacher's recital. I showed up early, the collar on my striped shirt was crinkled. I kept watching for her to come through the door. She walked in late with her new boyfriend. They talked all through my song, and my guitar solo was pitiful. After it was over, I asked if I could ride home with her and her boyfriend. She said, "No, you're lame," and promptly walked outside, never looking back. When I got home and I took the stairs up to my room, I finally sat down and cried.

Rachael wanted to take her boyfriend to an extreme ropes course in the Adirondacks in the middle of the summer before my first year of college. It had been our thing for years. I asked if she would still hang out with me, and she told me that she wouldn't. When they packed up the car, my mom asked me if I would be fine at home, and I lost it. The tears raced down my face as my mom tried to convince me to come along. My mom thinks that I didn't hear her correctly, but I know what I heard. I stayed home and watched an old Disney movie on the semi-new couch, our dog curled up at my side.

I was cut from the varsity field hockey team for the second time right before the beginning of my senior year. The first person that I called was Rachael. My parents were working. She was too, but she was closer and I hadn't known she was at work until I called her. Rachael was nervous about leaving her

job, but she knew that I was in trouble. I didn't have a driver's license, and it was starting to pour. My best friend, who was also cut, ran under the bleachers with me to try and dry off. Suddenly, Rachael's car pulled up into the parking lot, and somehow, the rain let up. It was a day before tryouts were officially supposed to end, so she was furious. She drove me home as the rain picked up again. Once the garage door was open, I flopped down on the couch and we sat there. Holding each other up as we cried.

I didn't know that Rachael had gotten me a present when we were both going off to college. Out of excitement, I had already given her tiny, metal heart that I had found in a shop in Skaneateles. I presented it to her with the poem that came with it. The day before I left, she put a small bag into my hands. Inside, a silver photo frame with a picture of us hugging was nestled in tissue paper. The frame, with "Sisters" written on it sits on my desk. Even though she is two hours away, it's like she's there. And we are home.

Branch Distortion

Marissa Miksad



Cut the Boy a Break

Alex DeSacia

There are days when the chest binder
is just a tad too tight.

Is it worth the pain every time he breathes?
Or does he take the risk of being seen as his dead identity?

Can his wide hips be noticed easily?
How low can he make his voice go?

He cannot slip up.

Everything has to be perfect.

He has to be cautious of how others are perceiving him.

Is he “boy enough” for them?
Can they see beyond the compression shirt and flannel?

He cannot slip up.

He has to make everything perfect.

He has to pass to be able to survive

because one of the scariest experiences is just living when you’re trans-
gender.

He feels sheer terror as he steps into the men’s room
simply because one careless mistake can give him away.

One small slip can give him a bashing just like the one he endured the
other day.

He cannot stroll home from school without a fellow student shouting
“TRANNNY!” through the open window of their run-down pick-up
truck.

And though many of them know,
he cannot slip up.

He cannot give them something else to meddle about.

He cannot skip a day of trying his ultimate best to be as masculine as possible.

A day of rest would be a day of ridicule

because he will no longer be playing the part of transgender in the eyes of those who cannot understand him.

In the eyes of those that cannot feel how hard it can be to breathe will see him as “giving it up.”

Those who can’t feel the bruises on his back from being pushed around the hallways cannot allow him to take a break.

No! He can’t take a break!

They shout through words like

“Tranny,” “he-she,” and “freak of nature!”

He cannot allow himself to slip up for one small second

because the ones who do not know his secret can never find out.

The violence he faces everyday forces him to either stay in the closet or be as out as he possibly can be.

Lingering in between will leave him vulnerable for slashes of hostility.

No one can understand the complexity of the problem he faces every single day.

The body dysphoria he feels when he looks in the mirror outweighs the need to take a deep breath.

The simple need to “play the part” for the judging masses can leave him skipping meals just to try to make those wide hips a bit smaller.

The violence he feels now is brutal.

But, oh God, he cannot allow them to see the “F” on the birth certificate he is trying so hard to hide because he will never hear or feel the end of the shaming.

So, he cannot take a break.

He cannot take off that too-tight compression shirt that is holding down the femininity that shouldn't even be there.

Breathing doesn't even compare to the absolute definition of being able to pass or not.

He cannot allow his already strained voice to rest because a single high-pitched "hello," can give his whole preferred identity away.

Slipping up is not an option for him because the chance of violence against him so high.

Hundreds of transgender people are murdered with rage, beaten with irrational hatred tattooed on the attacker's knuckles.

If it's not the fist, it's the voice spewing out poison towards those who just want to be who they were really meant to be.

Hundreds of transgender youth are found with a noose, woven with hatred, around their necks.

So,

No.

He cannot slip up. He cannot take a break.

Everything has to be perfect.

Because the meaning of survival for a transgender individual is simply being able to pass.

So, please,

cut the boy a break.

Reach out and help your fellow brothers.

Your sisters, your friends.

The act of using one's preferred pronouns is not of profound difficulty.

A preferred name is just as valid as the dead name that was stamped on them at birth.

You may not see it, but a gash the size of a gorge can be found in the center of his soul where the violence stuck much too deep.

Lift him up with the respect he deserves and with the terms he wishes to hear every day yet he is starved of.

Cut him a break and call him handsome.

Cut him a break and use his preferred pronouns.

Cut the boy a break and leave him seeing the hope shining at the end of that long and dark tunnel.

At times, he can be found hiding under the single shield he has left after a relentless war against his only dream and all he will need is a hand to pull him up.

Cut the boy a break.

LaPort's

Sara Costello

“Two chocolate chip pancakes with extra Italian toast please...and a chocolate milk!”

Eleven words that left my lips once a week almost every week for the first ten years of my life. We would walk into LaPort's diner, sitting at the first available booth we could find. The dirty tan walls surrounding us just felt right, like we were meant to be there every week. Annette, Laurie, or Sarah would fight over who would get to serve us even though the place was packed and there was really no time for bickering. There was the booth of “fun old folks” that were always just finishing their meal. They'd go to leave, talking to my dad about the Bills' game or the latest St. Mary's Church gossip. We would order and talk about the plans for the day while we waited.

My dad would adjust his hat every so often, sometimes playing with his cherished American Flag pin that was stuck in his one of many Turkey Trot t-shirts. My older brother, Zach, would play with his hat, wanting to be just like dad. Cc, my older sister, would laugh, sitting crisscross-applesauce in the booth, rocking back and forth. After Kevin was born, we'd sit him in the most likely unsanitary, dark brown to cover the stains, plastic high chair. He'd wiggle around, obviously uncomfortable, and cry when he realized he wasn't getting all of the attention. The food would finally come and we would link hands and pray, smiling and giggling at each other because we knew we were going to have a good day.

For that first decade of my life, these Saturdays represented stability and safety. It was time spent with dad while mom stayed home and had quiet time to herself – a true treat in our household. We did the same exact thing every week. Sometimes we'd have to add a few errands, but we had a staple to-do list that we never strayed from. As I grew up, things kept changing in my life, like starting school and doing sports, but I could always count on my Saturdays. The fact that these cherished days could be taken away from me never crossed my mind. Even when my parents announced their divorce, I thought I would still have these set plans. They warned us that some things would have to change, but I didn't realize that by some things they meant *everything*.

Early mornings in LaPort's were only the beginning of the weekly adventures. I'd take my last buttery bite of toast and chug the rest of the magical chocolate milk. My sister and I were convinced they used a secret potion to make it taste *so* good. Though the breakfast always satisfied, I was ready to run out the door. I'd rip the bill and money out of my dad's hands while he'd ask me to do the mental math of what change I'd get back. I'd just roll my eyes and keep moving. One of the waitresses would watch and laugh as they walked to meet me at the register. They'd let me pierce the stake that sat next to the register through the bill as they got my change, then continue to laugh as I'd scurry back to the booth.

"How much change did you get back?"

"Nine dollars and fifty-two cents."

"Is that the right amount?"

"I don't know *dad*; mental math is just *so* hard."

"How are you supposed to learn if you don't try?"

"Well, I've learned that the candy machine is only twenty-five cents for a handful and I just gave you two quarters. That means two handfuls."

"You got all the tricks don't cha?"

He'd ruffle my hair as he gave me the two quarters and watch me skip to the machine next to the door. I'd have to make the hard decision of the candy combination I wanted for the day - they had Chiclets, Skittles, and Mike & Ike's. I'd be so excited that I'd miss the quarter slot a few times and wouldn't get it right until Zach threatened to do it for me if I didn't hurry up. We'd all walk back to the car, holding hands as best as one can with handfuls of candy. My dad would warn us to look out for the people who "whipped around those corners with zero cares in the world," and kept looking back and forth until we reached the navy blue Durango he seemed to have forever. I'd have to stretch my legs as far as they could go to climb in, trying to go as fast as possible so we could start the journey.

“Sara, you need to share that candy with your brothers and sister,” he would say as he looked back to make sure we were buckled in.

“But *dad*, Cc doesn’t like candy, Kevin doesn’t have teeth yet, and I don’t like Zach.”

“That doesn’t mean you can’t make the offer, Sara Joan. Now is everyone buckled in?”

He had already looked to see and knew we were, but he always did the little things to show his love. It was just *his* way.

At the age of ten, the ground beneath my feet shook and crumbled, letting me fall into a black pit of confusion and hurt. I always viewed LaPort’s as my place - it was never going to change unless I was the one to do it. I know that’s a naïve concept, but it had always been the same and change didn’t seem to fit into the equation. But slowly my beloved small town diner started to crumble too. We were only there every other week now - my mom tried to take us her first weekend alone with us but it just wasn’t the same.

I noticed the people staring at my sister and the visible effects of being born with an extra chromosome. I became aware of Zach’s absences and how he never wore a hat anymore, as if he couldn’t even fathom doing something my dad would do. I saw the fake smiles on people’s faces as they passed by and said hello. I stayed away from the candy machine because it probably hadn’t been cleaned since its installation twenty years ago. I could taste the grease on all the food invade my mouth with every bite. I watched them pour the chocolate milk from a bland off-brand carton into my glass. I couldn’t look away from the stains on the walls and would never step in the bathroom tucked in the back left corner of the diner. My favorite place slowly lost its magic and my hope started to fade a little more.

“But *dad*, I want to listen to *Circle of Life*! *Phantom of the Opera* scares me; I don’t want to listen to it.”

“Sara, we’ve listened to *Circle of Life* two times, Zach

should get a turn listening to what he wants.”

“School of Rock taught me that three is the magic number - that means we *need* to listen to it again. If we don’t we’ll have bad luck forev-”

“Okay, that’s enough Miss. Drama Queen. One more time and that’s it. There’s no need to bring School of Rock into the argument.”

“*You’re* the one who made us watch it dad.”

“Well...ya got me there, didn’t ya?”

Our car rides were filled with a lot of bickering and singing. Most of the bickering was centered around what would be playing through the speakers and the volume at which it was played. My personal preference was always *Beauty and the Beast* or *The Lion King*, while Cc fought for *Phantom of the Opera*, and Zach wanted to jam to Queen or Styx. My dad always made sure that we all got to listen to our favorite songs off of each C.D. In our heads, he did this because he wanted to show he loved and cared for all of us equally, but I think deep down we all knew he just wanted us to shut up and stop arguing.

We’d drive around the back roads of Lockport, singing at the top of our lungs, only taking breaks to beg our dad to turn up the volume. We’d always pass the huge red brick mansion, slowing to a crawl and sticking our noses to the windows to gawk at it as if we had never seen it before. We’d see the house that put faces on their trees, pointing them out while hoping to see a new one. We’d loop around neighborhoods and whiz by abandoned factories, with nothing, but more roads to explore ahead of us.

The road would eventually take us back to Pets Plus, Lockport’s not-so-glamorous family owned pet store. This is where we would buy two of our dogs, a cat, and way too many hamsters. All of our pets were purchased on one of our Saturday outings, usually after we mustered up our best pouty faces; maybe some fake tears, and made a phone call home to mom.

“Mom you don’t get it, this one is at least 72% more fluffy than the last hamster.”

“I pinky promise that I’ll feed it this time!”

“I love you so much mom, don’t you love me?”

She would end up caving and we’d bring the new family member in the car, screaming out names that we wanted to use, one after the other. One of us would be cradling our new pet, thinking that if we even slightly loosened our grip, they would be gone forever. When we got home, my mom would give me a look that said something along the lines of, “I hate this but I have to pretend it’s okay because I love you.”

We’d gloat about the critter to mom, forcing her to hold it even though she clearly did not want to - almost every hamster we got ended up pooping in her hand before we could get it to the cage. She’d just roll her eyes, clearly trying to hold back a grin while we all giggled under our breaths, no one wanting to be the first one to crack. As we all stared at each other, someone would finally burst out laughing and soon everyone would follow. We’d stand there on the black and white tiles of the kitchen, shaking with laughter, cherishing the good times we spent, all *together*.

I haven’t stepped foot into Pets Plus in ten years. In fact, I’ve signed three different petitions to close them down for animal abuse. Like LaPort’s, the car rides and pet store visits lost their meaning. Our car rides grew shorter as did our patience for each other, so we would just listen to whatever was on the radio and try not to blow up on whoever was in the car.

Zach stopped coming around, saying he had too much school stuff to do or hockey to play, but I knew that he really just couldn’t stand being around my dad. Kevin spent the time reading, checking out of whatever small talk we were having, hoping his comics would suck him in so he might be able to live in a world filled with magic and wonder instead of passive comments and lack of eye contact. Cc would stare out the window, still sitting crisscross-applesauce while rocking back and forth, forever stuck in the mind of a seven-year-old. I picked up Saturday morning shifts at the café I worked at because I’d rather wake up with the sun and deal with floods of cranky people that needed their morning latte than avoid eye contact with someone who used to be my best friend but had slowly turned into a *stranger*.

All these changes clouded my mind, filling me with pain

and sorrow. I couldn't see that my dad still wore his Turkey Trot shirts, American Flag pin, and the baseball hat I got him in Boston. I couldn't hear Cc still singing along to whatever was playing in the car. I didn't pay attention to Kevin while he tried to explain why Marvel is better than DC. I'd focus on whatever book I was reading, refusing to look out the window at the trees with faces or the red brick mansion. I ignored the sad looks my dad would cast in my direction and slammed the doors before his "I love you" could reach my ears. I refused to accept that things might be able to go back to normal, or we could make a new normal.

I started hanging out with my friends more than my family, skipping the meals and parties where we had to all be there and pretend everything was okay. I'd spend most of my time thirty minutes away in Buffalo, hoping those thirty minutes would take away some of the pain.

"Sara, you're always coming to the Buff, why don't we come to you?"

"It's really okay, my mom will stop at the mall and wa--"

"No, we're coming to the Port, suck it up girl. We wanna see all the places you love!"

"Guys, it's *really* okay. I'll just come to y--"

"So are we picking you up at your mom's or dad's?"

"...Mom's."

I finally took them into LaPort's; the dirty tan walls of 48 Pine Street greeting me like an old friend. I led them to my favorite booth in the front corner, Carly coming over to take our order. I took a deep breath, looking around at the familiar paintings on the walls, seeing the memorial for Sarah above the giant stove. I locked my eyes on the old candy machine, putting my hands in my pockets, and smiling when my fingers met two quarters.

"Earth to Sara, are you gonna order anything?"

"Two chocolate chip pancakes with extra Italian toast please...and a chocolate milk.

Gathered for Nature

Marissa Miksad



Recognition while Fishing on the Lake at the Cabin

Joe Sigurdson

I caught the hangover early on
and starting killing beers and
felt better.

I went fishing while my friends
slept in the cabin.

Alone, floating on a kayak,
I rocked one back and glared
into the top of world.

This will kill you someday.

Yes.

Paddle on,
cast the line.

The Morning After

Max Hlat

You're awake. You know you're awake, but it's taking time for your eyes to open. You can tell you slept in way too late, because of how comfortable it is to keep your eyes closed. Just open them. Your eyelids slide open, and you can feel every inch of your eye get burnt by the sun leaking in through the window. Who the fuck forgot to close the blinds?

Your. Head. Is. Pounding.

You lie there and try to remember how dumb enough you were enough to drink the punch last night. You know the rules, and that was so stupid. What was the reason? Oh, right. She offered you a drink. Her. The girl with the Star Wars shirt. She probably had no idea how strong that punch was. You remember getting bummed when you saw her leaving with another guy, and to cheer you up, your friends offered you more drinks. They're good friends, but fuck 'em. Those drinks really screwed you. No, you shouldn't say that — maybe they're just bad in social situations.

When does the diner close? You don't have the energy to make your own breakfast, but you also don't want to deal with people. You take a deep breath. You are so fucking hungry, but your stomach can't handle much at this point. Did you puke last night? You pray it wasn't in front of a girl — Star Wars Girl. Get your mind off her and focus on yourself, on your terribly aching forehead.

The party wasn't super fun, but it wasn't super terrible either. You consider that maybe the party was actually pretty decent, but when she left with that other guy, it put a damper on things. You feel like you know that guy. You think about how much of a dick he is. You try and make yourself feel better by making fun of him in your head, but the more you think about it, the more you actually think he's a decent guy. Is that better or worse? You want to hate this guy, but it's actually pretty difficult. Fuck that. You decide he's probably a dick.

You rise from the bed like the most disheveled vampire ever. You really need to go to the gym more. You're glad you cut your hair a week ago, because it would've looked like absolute shit. You don't really feel like showering.

You sit for a little bit, contemplating just sitting with your

covers on, staring at your Star Wars poster for the day. You decide you need to do something, because you hate wasting your days. It doesn't have to be a big thing, but just getting up and moving around. You might have a bad day. Shit.

You think of the night before. You can hear the music in your head and feel the breeze from whatever idiot opened the window. You looked around the party at your friends. You didn't know what drinking game they were playing, but were curious anyway. There were way too many rules for you to get interested, but Star Wars Girl was playing, so you joined anyway.

There's still this morning to think about. You look into the mirror. Holy shit you need to shower. You look awful. You hate standing so much, but the feeling of the comfortably hot water going down your back is irresistible. You wash a little bit but the water is what seems to be reviving your head back to rehabilitation. The throbbing in your head seems to be letting up. You stand there and let the water pour on you. You don't care about wasting the hot water today. Why should you? You're hungover as fuck.

Back at the party, the cards on the table were really unorganized and, for some reason, bothered you. You wondered why a game that was supposed to get people drunk was so complicated. You could have suggested a different game, but didn't want to be that guy. As they explained the rules, you would flirt with the girl a little bit. You remember that you were actually pretty decent at flirting last night, something that, in your eyes, is uncharacteristic for you. You never remember being this good at flirting, yet she was laughing and putting her hand on your arm. You thought so hard about keeping your cool. It was no big deal just an arm touch. People touch people's arms sometimes. You tried to keep this in mind as you talked with her, but realized how you weren't paying attention to the rules. You used this as an excuse to ask her for help to see if that can get the two of you talking some more.

You still feel like shit the more you move around your apartment. You don't even feel like lifting your feet above more than a drag. You feel like there's a vise grip on your temples, slowly getting tighter and tighter. You have such a terrible feeling

in your stomach and a tickling sensation under your jaw as if you're about to oh, shit. You are. You run to the toilet, and whatever was left in your stomach ejects out and into the toilet. Well, mostly in the toilet.

You think about the game more and more. Right as Star Wars Girl started telling you the rules, the guy came up to her, and she left to go into the other room with him. You could only think, Great, she's in another room with him and I have no idea what the rules are for this game. You didn't expect that, did you? You still tried to have fun with your friends despite being a drunk idiot. You thought drinking more was a good idea, but that just made you think about how you were going to flirt with her next, which was when you realized that overthinking how to flirt wouldn't work.

You now sit in the bathroom, thinking about the party, then your mind wanders to the cleanliness of the bathroom. You're sitting on the tile floor. You have moved away from the toilet, because the smell is still there. Despite being alone, you say out loud, "Today's going to suck." You're still sitting around, even though you already told yourself to do something. You wash your face, head still pounding and a gross taste in your mouth. You brush your teeth with your extra special "I Just Puked" toothbrush. You make sure not to use too much toothpaste, because the mint will upset your stomach and you remember how rough it was the last time you had to dry heave.

You continue to think back to the party. Star Wars Girl focused more on having a genuinely good time than she did on whatever guy she could get with, and you realize you should take note of that. Part of what made her so cool was that exact detail about her, so maybe you should do the same sit back and have fun.

Okay, maybe you regret a few of those late night shots. Mixing is never a good idea, and you know tequila is your enemy. Your friends sat in a circle, the different shots were on a spin wheel, and you were asked to spin the wheel. Whatever the arrow lands on was the shot you have to take, and you just knew it was going to land on tequila. Your night couldn't take anymore of that shit. You kept chanting, "No tequila!" while your friends would

chant, “Tequila!” You weren’t surprised when the wheel gave you that dreaded shot. Fuck those guys. You manned up and drank the poison, knowing full well that you’d regret it in the morning.

And that’s where you’re at—slugging around your bloody apartment like a dickhead. You arrived home last night and apparently decided to throw everything that was on your couch around the apartment to make room for you to sleep despite having a perfectly cleared bed. Eventually you made it up there but don’t remember how or when. You don’t make too much sense when you’re drunk. Hell, you barely make any sense when you’re sober, but we’ll ignore that for now.

It takes you way too long to get your shoes on. You think you’re probably still kinda drunk. You decide against driving and walk to the diner instead. Your decision to go to the diner gets better and better the more you think about how long it’s been since you’ve had a Belgian waffle. You can picture the bacon, fresh off the grill, still sizzling on your plate in front of you.

You feel the fresh air flowing through you, and it starts to make this morning beautiful in a strange way. The autumn winds and rustling leaves give the pain in your body a sense of ease. You look around more than you have in the past. This is one of the first times you’ve ever walked down that street in awhile and you don’t know what’s different about it—you just know something is different.

You look at the diner in the distance, thinking about how shitty this morning had been going. You cycle through all of the events leading up until now as if the diner is the end game, and it’s in sight. The girl, the shots, the loss of memory, the couch, the puke, the headache. It’s all terrible, and your entire day is probably ruined by it. Brunch better pull a pretty solid miracle out of its ass if you’re going to even smile.

You enter the diner, and a young waiter who’s a year behind you in high school shows you to your booth. It’s a lonely booth in the corner by one of the doors that leads into the kitchen. You sit down with your back to the door and look at the menu. You see your true hangover medicine listed as a combo pack: Belgian waffles with a side of bacon. You’re transfixed with this, and your thumb rests right next to it in anticipation.

“We’re actually out of some ingredients that make the waffles and the grill for the bacon broke like ten minutes ago,” says a pleasant voice behind you. You’re heart broken your dreams have just been ripped away. “The house omelette is pretty great here, though, if your stomach is willing to handle all that egg after last night.”

Wait. What did she just say?

You turn around to see her. Her! Star Wars Girl! She works here? You didn’t know that. You say hello to which she laughs and responds with, “I hope you had a good night. I had to leave early because my brother, a.k.a. my DD, had to wake up early.” Her brother? That’s who that was? “My shift is actually ending really soon, and I’m starving. Do you mind if I join you in, like, ten minutes?”

You smile and nod. You’re going to have a great day.

Difference

Marissa Specioso



The Man with the Blue Feet

Dariah Spriggs

At home, warm flames of a fireplace
kiss my face.

But the flicker of that flame
takes me back to the shiver
of the man
who sits, capped in white,
clenching a cup of misfortune,
asks only for change.

And I,
like everyone else,
in hats pulled over their ears
and coats wrapped around their shoulders,
with pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters
jingling in the pockets of their jeans,
like some sort of Christmas carol,
look straight ahead and pretend not to notice
the man with the blue feet
who uses snow as his blanket.

Eddie

Jarred Lyndaker

It is about an hour past Eddie's bedtime, and I just got up from working on my project. I find him passed out on the couch with SpongeBob reruns playing on the flat-screen. The kid is practically comatose in his hand-me down Tom and Jerry pajamas, which used to belong to his Uncle Caleb.

I watch him for a moment, drool stringing out of his mouth, which is caked in the orange "cheese" from the torn Cheetos bag, the torn carcass of which lies crumpled on the carpet. He's not supposed to get into snacks without asking, but it's too late and I'm too tired to bother with any discipline. I hoist him up in my arms, which is getting a lot harder to do lately, and make the journey upstairs to tuck him in. Laying limp in my arms, in those pajamas especially, he is the spitting image of his uncle.

I used to carry Caleb to bed like this all the time when he was Eddie's age. I carried him to bed a time or two after he reached the drinking age, but he wasn't nearly as precious-looking then as my son looks now. That's one of the reasons I'd like to keep Eddie away from alcohol when he gets of age and starts wondering. I'll tell him there's lots more to life. I'll tell him that you don't need it to be cool or to feel cool. But, if he's anything like his Uncle, well, I might as well be talking to myself.

We tried getting Caleb to slow down. It wasn't our parents fault. They told him, too, and really went at lengths to set an example. Dad only drank at parties and Mom had a glass of chardonnay at night when Caleb went to bed, but when you're in high school, the people that know about life get treated like they don't and the people who don't get treated like they do.

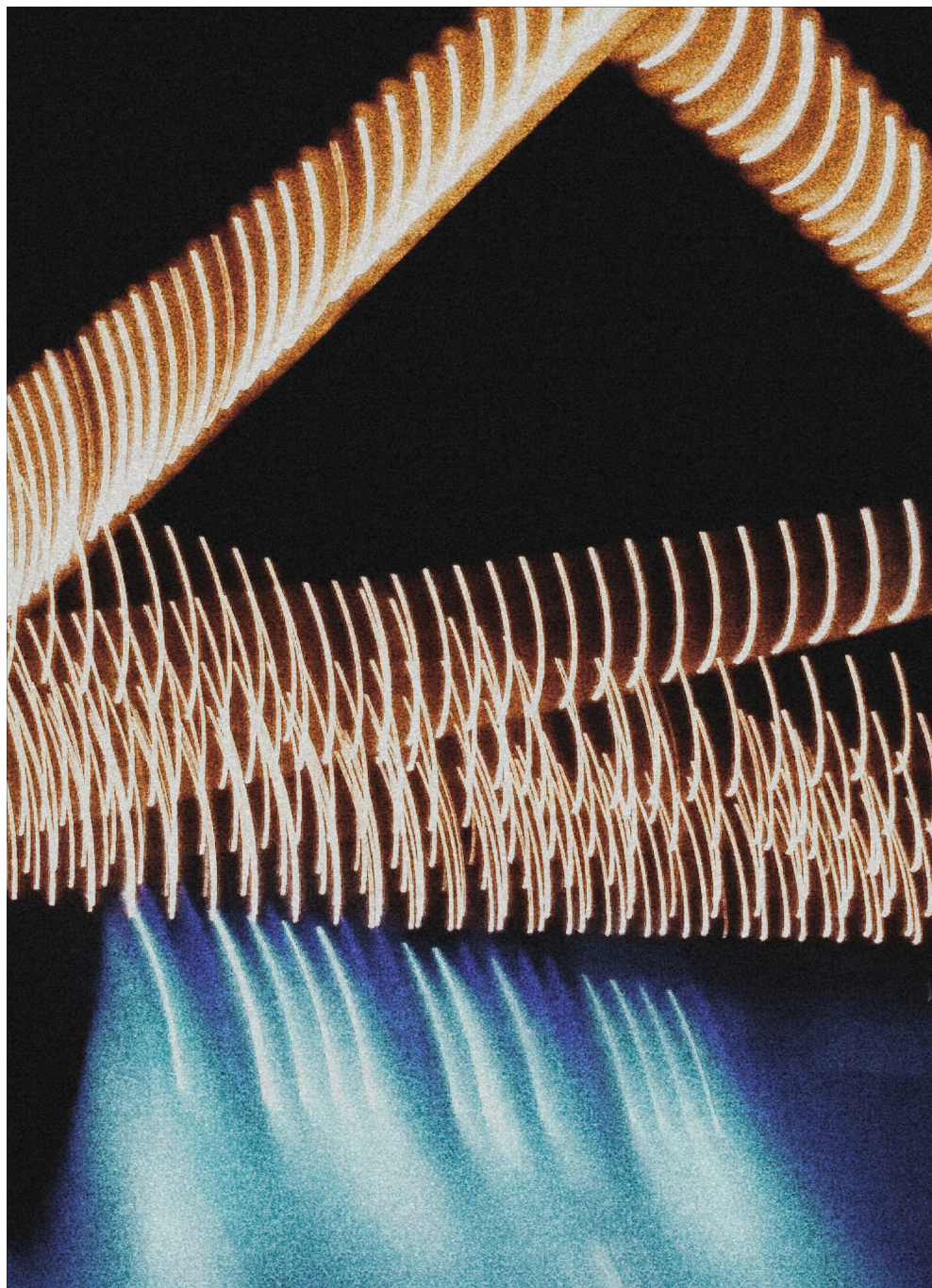
I reach the top of the stairs and turn into Eddie's room. I must be careful getting him through the doorframe. He's a lot longer than he used to be. His room has glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling, and Eddie loves them. They help him sleep. Caleb used to drink Nyquil to sleep when he was old enough to buy it. He got addicted to that also. It was what caused the accident—not the booze. He thought his tolerance was too high, famous last words, then fell asleep at the wheel while getting smokes at three in the morning. He swerved right into oncoming traffic.

I don't really believe in anything, but sometimes, I silently pray to whatever holds sway over our short lives. I pray that Eddie will know better. I pray that he won't be enticed by the high school ideas of being "cool." I want him to grow up knowing that he is good enough on his own to do and feel as he pleases. If I have my way, he will grow up needing neither friend nor substance to be who he wants, to feel what he wants. But I know the futility of it. At least he doesn't have trouble sleeping.

That's a start.

Music in Lights

Marissa Miksad



Amaranthine

Elsa Nieder

Pink strings of Christmas lights hang like LSD stars
Magenta light casts over the disheveled landscape of my bed
Shade that beckons him to the mountains of my sheets
Carnadine passion sets the wasteland ablaze

The lights over the door are blue
Because I used to watch another through the keyhole
Where now I meet him close to midnight
And the two share me like their name

Where red and blue entwine is the purple shade of dawn
Cold placidity of the rain upon the forest fire
My bed becomes an ocean in amethyst sunlight
And time a boat that rides the violet waves

Grinding

Wilson Castro

Characters:

(Only one speaking role in this play and 1 movement role)

Speaking Role- Young male, impressionable and insecure.

Movement Role- Older male, self confident.

Ensemble- Non speaking roles, variety of men.

Setting:

This play takes place in a living room, the audience peers into the middle of the room where they find a regular living room arrangement. A stand out piece is a single couch in C facing the audience with a coffee table in front of it. A door lies SR and SL. The play begins with Speaking role in the middle and he describes his feelings in the future as his body lives in the present. Speaking role is wearing all white while Movement role wears black and has fresh black paint on his hands.

SPEAKING ROLE

My name is unimportant, my story is what lives. What defines me is what's always defined me, us, this community...

SPEAKING ROLE sits in the center of the couch and pulls out a cell phone.

SPEAKING ROLE

I'm young, closeted, and trapped. Amongst this prison, this irrational judgment, and this sexuality, I'm human. I seek those like me, to hold, to be held by. I won't even be granted that.

SPEAKING ROLE

(holding up cell phone)

I found you. Or did you find me? I was scared, I've always been scared.

Phone lights up and makes a ding noise.

You messaged me first-

Phone lights up and makes a ding noise.

You'd done this before-

Phone lights up and makes a ding noise.

I made promises-

Phone lights up and makes a ding noise.

I don't want to keep-

Phone lights up and makes a ding noise. SPEAKING ROLE looks at the phone.

SPEAKING ROLE

(looking up from phone)

You were coming over...

SPEAKING ROLE takes a rose in a vase from behind the coach and places it in the coffee table.

My attempt to be romantic, to ease the tension but I was the only one feeling nervous.

A knock is heard at the door. (SR)

SPEAKING ROLE

(approaching SR door and opening it)

And here is when I learn what it truly meant to be part of a "community"-

MOVEMENT ROLE enters
grabbing SPEAKING ROLE,

carrying them to the
couch. The rose vase
falls over.

MOVEMENT ROLE begins
to grope SPEAKING ROLE
everywhere leaving behind
black marks on their
clothing SPEAKING ROLE does
not move nor fight back.
MOVEMENT ROLE begins kissing
SPEAKING ROLE's neck.

SPEAKING ROLE

I won't learn his name, he won't care to ask me for mine. I'll
feel dirty afterwards, used, and I'll end up blaming myself. I
lied about my age and he could tell but he likes them young. I'll
remember seeing a wedding ring later and feel even dirtier.

MOVEMENT ROLE moves
SPEAKING ROLE so he's leaning
over the coffee table and
begins kissing him from behind.

SPEAKING ROLE sees the rose in the
vase on the ground.

SPEAKING ROLE

You give up a lot y'know? In this "community." First dates, first
kisses-

SPEAKING ROLE

(turns head to refer to MOVEMENT ROLE)
-and first names.

MOVEMENT ROLE slides hands
down SPEAKING ROLE's spine
and sits back on the couch, head

leaning back and eyes closed.

SPEAKING ROLE

(getting up)

I won't register what happened for awhile, I'll be more concerned with whether or not he enjoyed himself. I'll fool myself into thinking we're dating now. He must care about me, why else would he touch me like that.

SPEAKING ROLE looks about their body and sees all the black marks on them.

ENSEMBLE men enter through SR and SL door, all in black with black paint on their hands. They proceed to touch SPEAKING ROLE in different places until he is majority in black.

SPEAKING ROLE

(while the previous stage directions are occurring)

I'll meet more like him, and eventually some like me-

One ENSEMBLE member enters in white through SL door crossing to SR.

SPEAKING ROLE

(touching the white member leaving a black mark on him)

-but I won't be like me anymore.

Gate at Gettysburg

Marissa Miksad



Blood Runs Thick

Sean M. Maphia

Darkness. This is all I see. I feel like I'm trapped in someone's dusty, old basement. I smell the mothballs, print of old newspapers, and plastic from old children's toys. It smells like my basement from my childhood home.

Wait a minute...

I am in the basement of my childhood home. I can start to make out the dark outlines of everything that was down here from I was a kid. I was making sure I didn't trip over any of the old toys that Mom kept. This is all strange. Now, if memory serves, there used to be a light switch just down the hall where my father's "office" used to be next to the living room space. I say that with sarcasm, because it was just a small table with an old, green office lamp you would find in a bank.

"Ouch!"

I stub my toe on one of those damn fake lawn mower toys that would rattle. I finally find the light switch and flick it on.

Nothing.

I flick it more than once this time. Still nothing but darkness.

"Why, Alex!? Why weren't you there for me!?"

That voice... It sounds familiar. It's sharp and shrill like a witch's voice and echoes around all over the place. It feels like the basement seems to have no end, because the voice just goes on further and further. It almost sounds like static and keeps coming in and out like FM radio.

"Why didn't you just stay with me?"

It's starting to become more audible, more clear. As clear as the church bells that rang out next to my home when I was a kid. I know who it is...

"You should've been there. You should've kept me safe."

I've never been so scared before.

"Why did you let them hurt me?"

The door upstairs swings open, and the light is so bright, it blinds me.

"Why did you let me die?!"

A ghostly woman appears as soon as my eyes adapt to the light. The first thing that gets my attention is her eyes. They are so full of

rage, and her tears are blood, dripping off her face. Her teeth are sharp as hell, and her tongue resembles a snake's. She reminded me of Medusa. She starts to swoop in for attack. She's going to kill me. I know it.

My own mother is going to kill me.

All of a sudden I jolt up, waking up with cold sweat dripping down my face and panting like a dog. I look all around my room to double check that I'm actually in my apartment and not the basement. I'm hyperventilating.

I fetch for my Xanax sitting on my dresser next to my bed, shakily open up the cap, and pop a pill to calm myself down. It's a bad habit I picked up to calm my anxiety after my mother's death when I was fifteen. I've been having the same nightmare ever since I can remember. I find myself in my childhood basement where I wait for my mother to kill me. But, lately, the nightmare has been escalating. I've had to take time off of work because of it.

I take a sigh of relief and lay back down, my heart slowing to its normal speed again. I look at my alarm clock to check the time and date.

8:20 A.M. March 15th, 2016.

I slowly get out of bed. The apartment really needs a spring cleaning. It's kind of dirty with dust here and there, bills that are past due and last week's pizza on my desk, and clothes all over the floor. I make my way towards my large window and open the blinds. I look out the window and see nothing has changed. I live in New York City, so it is naturally bustling and noisy.

I turn off my music and on the TV then start my shower. I get in and feel the cold water hit my face like a ton of tiny knives. Thankfully, I paid for the hot water back, but the water was only sub-par. As I enjoy my lukewarm shower, I overhear the anchorman say something that catches my attention.

"You should've saved me Alex..." It sounds like my mom's voice again, but not as shrill and mean as before. It sounds almost like a whimper, but it can't be. I'm wide awake.

Or at least I think I am.

"Who's there?" I ask as I reach for something to protect

myself with. I only find a brush.

I quickly turn around to see if anybody is behind me, if that woman's horrible face will appear again. Nothing. Just the grimy tiles of my shower and my old shower curtain. I do live with junkies. It's probably one of them pulling some kind of prank or my anxiety. I slap myself really hard to see if I'm in a dream. It hurts, so I know I'm not, but now I have a huge hand mark on my face.

"OUCH!"

I scream out loudly in pain. It feels as if claws dug into my stomach and touched my guts. I fall down from the pain, almost hitting my head on the tub, but my hand breaks my fall. I get back up to the mirror, and I cannot believe what I see. Claw marks on my stomach. I have never been so scared in my life.

"Time to pay, Alex."

The voice echoes in the bathroom. I look for it everywhere and reply back with a scream, "Who's there? You better get out of my damn apartment. I'm armed!"

This is a lie, but it's something to get anyone or anything out of my apartment. I go to open my bathroom door and find it unlocked. I hear a shrill scream. It's my mother. She picks me up with her clawed fingers digging into my sides.

"I'm sorry, Mom! I didn't mean to leave you! I should've went back for you!" I say in agony, hoping for pity. I realize this isn't a dream, but reality.

"Oh, I know, son. I know."

And then darkness.

Take Aim & Reload

Ali Birner

Bang.

Shot again. Another
Grenade thrown,
Left my arm hanging
By a thread of sky-blue-pink peonies
And my heart swirled in cold comfortability.

We both know that no matter
How bloody the next war
May be, I will have a new
Addition to my collection
Of watercolor disarray, scattered
Daises and orchids,
Making it more bearable
To keep fighting the fight;
To keep forcing each other
Into the other's heart.

Bang.

Shot again. Another
Grenade thrown,
Filled with flaming fuchsia lilies
You know I can't say no to.
Poisoned stems from drenched
Roses prick my vein,
Making it easier to
Stand the endless nights

Of screaming lovely words of
Hate to each other and
Leaving the door locked
For good this time.

No more delightful
Daffodils or searing
Lust of lavender.
Only to find that

Bang.

I've been shot for good.

Still

Victoria Jayne



5 Seconds of Courage

Zachary Paquette

One.

The first step is always the hardest, but
Here you are. Quite honestly, you
Aren't even sure how this is happening. Usually that voice
In your head tells you that you shouldn't even
Bother. Today was different. Your breathing is abnormal.
Only the sweet kick of adrenaline
Propels you forward. Everything feels light. You find yourself
Recalling every book you have ever read talking
About butterflies
Or something along those lines.

Two.

Oh god. Is that sweat? You
Start wondering why your hands are sweating so
Much. No that is definitely not a good thing. Maybe you should
Back out. It isn't too late. How you are still able to stand up
Straight if your knees are so weak? Yet somehow, you
Still walk. You know this can still go wrong. But those emotions
Were what planted your feet in the
Ground in the first place. Those emotions
Were left behind when you took that first step.

Three.

You realize that you
Have been holding your breath this
Entire time. You can feel your heartbeat thumping
In your ears. Maybe it is too bright
Outside, but you swear that you are feeling a little
Dizzy. You can't even begin to imagine how someone does this

Without these feelings manifesting
Themselves like some kind of leech you
Can't get rid of.

Four.

What was it that
You wanted to say again? You got
So hyped on taking that first step, you forgot what you had planned to
say?
You had spent so long planning out exactly the words you would use.
Each word cleverly planned so that you could
Accomplish your goal. And in an instant, all of that
Disappeared. Any backup that you had when you
First took that brave step has long
Disappeared now.

Five.

This is it. It has been the longest few
Moments of your life. Everything has led
To this. There is a thick lump in your throat. The sweat has amplified.
You don't even know what is going on
With your stomach. It's flipped, dropped, and has butterflies
Shaking it like an earthquake. Then you arrive, and in a single
Moment, everything boils
Into an explosive bubble
That fills your chest.

Take a breath.
And go.

City

Michael Calobrisi



An Unfortunate Encounter

Sam Gilroy

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A 19th-Century era carriage rides along a scenic country road. It is being pulled by two horses.

INT. CARRIAGE - SAME TIME

LORD WINSTON COTTONMOUTH (Mid 60's) sits in a carriage besides his mistress, LADY ELIZABETH THICKBUSH (Early 30's.)

LADY ELIZABETH

What a lovely day this has been, Lord Cottonmouth. Oh how I do so much enjoy our excursions!

LORD COTTONMOUTH

As do I, my dear Lady Thickbush. Every moment with you is a precious gift that I hold near and dear to my heart.

A THUD indicates that they have just hit something or someone.

LADY ELIZABETH

My word, I do believe we have just hit something.

LORD COTTONMOUTH

Fair maiden, you stay here while I go find the source of such ruckus.

EXT. CARRIAGE - COUNTRY ROAD - SAME TIME

Lord Cottonmouth exits the carriage to see that his DRIVER (Mid 70's) has crashed into a KNIGHT (Mid 30's). The Knight is lying on the ground, having been bucked from his horse. His horse lies dead by the side of the road.

LORD COTTONMOUTH

Good Sir Knight, speak to me! Art
thou scathed in the least?

KNIGHT

(in a less refined tone)

Jesus! What the hell is your
problem?

LORD COTTONMOUTH

My sincerest apologies, Sir Knight.
But perhaps a thank you to our Lord
is in order for keeping you alive in
such a wreck.

KNIGHT

A thank you to our...? Are you
shit-ting me right now? You totaled
my horse!

LORD COTTONMOUTH

And for that I extend my humblest
apologies, Sir Knight.

KNIGHT

I've got to be at a joust in twenty
minutes. I can't believe this.

The Knight walks over to his horse to assess the extent of the
damage.

KNIGHT (CONT'D)

(mockingly)

Praytell, "Sir Nobleman," is your
driver blind or just stupid?

LORD COTTONMOUTH

An even temperament is an honorable thing. Insults won't remedy your struggles, my friend.

KNIGHT

Is this a fucking joke? I just leased this horse two weeks ago. She was brand new!

LORD COTTONMOUTH

And as I have said before, I shall say again. I do sincerely apologize for the circumstances at hand.

KNIGHT

Oh wow, thanks for the apology. That just totally fixed everything. Wait a second - no it didn't! You still wrecked my horse!

Lady Elizabeth pops her head through the carriage window.

LADY ELIZABETH

Is everything all right?

LORD COTTONMOUTH

GET BACK IN THE CARRIAGE,
ELIZABETH! I'M TAKING CARE OF IT!

Lady Elizabeth recedes back into the carriage.

LORD COTTONMOUTH (CONT'D)

Sorry about her. Back to the matters at hand. Doth thou have insurance, Sir Knight?

KNIGHT

Seriously? Are you serious right now? Dude, you can see I'm a knight, right?

LORD COTTONMOUTH

That I can see, yes, but I thought that perhaps you-

KNIGHT

No, I don't have insurance. Premiums are too expensive when you live a "high risk lifestyle." You know, kinda like how a knight does.

The DRIVER (Mid 60's,) clearly intoxicated, sits at the helm of the carriage.

DRIVER

(slurring his words)

My apologies, Sir Knight. I 'spose this is mostly my fault, but I'm gonna blame it on the spot of brandy I had before this afternoon's outings!

KNIGHT

Oh, well that's fucking fantastic. Your driver is drunk. Nice. Real nice.

LORD COTTONMOUTH

Sir Knight, I assure you I will right the wrongs that have transpired today. Whatever it is I can do to compensate you, please don't hesitate to ask.

KNIGHT

Oh, I've got an idea - why don't
you go joust for me today?

LORD COTTONMOUTH

You make a mockery of my offer.

KNIGHT

Me? Make a mockery? Naw, I mean it!
You can go joust for me today. You
can use one of these horses you've
got right here and take my place in
the ring.

LORD COTTONMOUTH

I find no humor in your demeanor,
Sir Knight.

KNIGHT

(mocking Cottonmouth's voice)
Oh look at me, I'm a selfless nobleman.

LORD COTTONMOUTH

It would behoove you to cease your
insubordination.

KNIGHT

(same tone as before)
I say shit like 'cease your
insubordination' because I think
I'm intimidating!

LORD COTTONMOUTH

I insist you stop this tomfoolery
at once!

KNIGHT

(same tone as before)

Boo - Hoo! The big bad knight is
being mean to me!

LORD COTTONMOUTH
ENOUGH!

Again, Lady Elizabeth pops her head through the carriage
window.

LADY ELIZABETH
Winston, what's going on?

LORD COTTONMOUTH
I SAID I'M TAKING CARE OF IT! GO
BACK INSIDE THE CARRIAGE,
ELIZABETH!

LADY ELIZABETH
(under her breath)
God, you're such a dick sometimes.

Again, Lady Elizabeth recedes back into the carriage.

KNIGHT
She's hot.

LORD COTTONMOUTH
She is quite lovely, yes.

KNIGHT
Give me one of your horses and the
girl and we'll call it even.

LORD COTTONMOUTH
A horse I will relinquish to you.
That much is fair. The girl, I

LORD COTTONMOUTH (CON'T)
shall not. She shall stay with me.

The Knight draws his sword from its holster and points it at Lord Cottonmouth's throat.

LORD COTTONMOUTH (CONT'D)
All right, we have a deal.

EXT. CARRIAGE - 5 MINUTES LATER

Lady Elizabeth sits on the back of a horse with The Knight at the reigns.

KNIGHT
Farewell, Sir Cottonswab!

LORD COTTONMOUTH
That's "Cottonmouth!"

KNIGHT
Whatever.

The Knight and Lady Elizabeth begin to ride away.

KNIGHT (CONT'D)
(to ELIZABETH)
So why do they call you "Thickbush?"

FADE OUT.

Oh, Shush

Sarah Pasquarelli

It was the coldest day in October and most of the leaves had already fallen off of the big tree in Grandma Betty's front yard. Your six cousins and your sister were playing tag, a game you despised because you were the smallest and the slowest. Instead you were examining the one exceptionally yellow leaf in the pile your father just raked up for you to jump in. This leaf hadn't even started to get brown like all of the other crunchy, dying leaves. This yellow leaf seemed to glow in that last yard on Heather Lane.

You scanned to your right, down the street, to look for a leaf brighter than yours. But all you found was more brown. You looked up at the sky to compare it to the sun, but the sun never came up that day. The clouds just made everything more dull. You looked left, past the "DEAD END" sign and into the woods. Still, no more yellow. Not even orange. You decided that you had found the only pretty leaf left. You tucked it inside the pocket of your purple, corduroy pants and ran over to the important-looking, metal box that you and your cousins used as home base during tag.

You thought the big metal box was some sort of remote that controlled all of the houses on Heather Lane. You later found out that it was just an electrical box. Once you were older and it was no longer bigger than you, it seemed much less important. When your last cousin got to home base, you all tried to sit on it together. As soon as you got bumped off, you heard your father and aunts calling your names. You stood up and brushed the dirt off your butt before anyone saw. "Kids, come say good-bye to grandma!" shouted Aunt Kathy from the front doorway.

You all ran toward the door while tearing your itchy, fleece jackets from your sweaty bodies. Rosy-cheeked and sniffing, all eight of you lined up, one-by-one, at Grandma Betty's bedroom door. Ever since you could remember, Grandma Betty got really, really sick every winter. You, your sister, and your cousins would take turns going into her room, kissing her cheek and saying "I love you."

Eighth in line, it was finally your turn. You tiptoed into the room and saw Grandma Betty in her bed, propped up on a mountain of pillows. Your dad was sitting at her feet.

"Come here, little bear," she whispered. You ran over and hopped onto the bed next to her.

“Be careful, honey!” yelled your dad. Your flushed cheeks got redder and you backed off.

“Oh, shush,” said Grandma Betty, opening her arms to hug you. You rested your head on her chest, which felt less squishy than usual.

After a minute, Grandma Betty fell asleep. Your dad scooped you up and set you on your feet beside the bed. Remembering the leaf, you pulled it out of your corduroy pocket and placed it on the nightstand. It looked much brighter when it was outside on the brown grass. Grandma Betty’s room was painted purple and her lamp had beads dangling from the shade. Her hair was golden like the leaf, only prettier, with curls. The leaf looked dull there, surrounded by all of Grandma Betty’s beautiful things.

You kissed her cheek, said, “I love you,” and grabbed your dad’s hand to walk out.

**

The next summer you, your sister, and your five cousins were taking turns jumping off of the diving board. They were having a splash contest. You never won because you were the smallest. Your three oldest cousins, big and solid like their father, always won splash contests. They could even do flips off of the board.

You floated on a Styrofoam noodle over to the shallow end where you found Grandma Betty sitting on the steps in a pretty, flowered bathing suit. She always sat next to the jet near the stairs of the pool where the heated water came out. You never understood why she kept the pool heated to ninety degrees in the middle of summer. She went in the pool about three times each summer. The rest of the time she mostly watched you and the other kids from her shaded patio with your parents, aunts, and uncles.

She was sipping what looked like chocolate milk out of a straw.

“Can I have some?” you asked.

“No little bear, you wouldn’t like this,” she said, “it’s a mudslide.”

“It looks like chocolate milk, can I try it?” you persisted.

She put her straw in your mouth and you sucked up what tasted like chocolate milk mixed with nail polish.

You spit it out into the pool and heard two of your cousins’ yell, “Ew, gross!”

Grandma Betty said, “Oh, shush!” and scooped up the murky pool water with her hand and tossed it into the grass.

**

On Christmas, Grandma Betty gave the girl cousins matching chiffon pajamas. The four of you ran down the hall, shoved into the small purple bathroom, and changed into your new pajamas. You hopped up and down to look at yourself in the mirror and convinced yourself you looked like Princess Jasmine from *Aladdin*.

“I’m Cinderella!” squealed your sister.

“No, I am!” shouted your cousins in unison. The three of them carried on like that for a few minutes until your sister pointed out that she was the only reasonable option because she had blonde hair. After you finished casting, you all zoomed back into the living room to get appraisal from the camera-ready adults.

“Oh look the girls!” yelled Aunt Kathy.

“I know! What adorable sets, where did you get them?” asked your mom.

“Macy’s,” whispered Grandma Betty, “on sale.”

“Come here, girls,” Grandma Betty said while pushing her walker down the hall.

“I want to get some pictures of you on my new comforter.”

The four of you scurried past her, into her room, and hopped on the bed. The pajamas really did look pretty next to her frilly comforter.

“Stand tallest to shortest,” said Grandma Betty while clutching her brand new Kodak. You scooted into your rightful spot at the edge of the photo.

“Do four little monkeys, grandma!” yelled your cousin.

She crossed her arms and shook her head.

“Pleeeeeeeeeeease,” you all whined.

“Okay, girls,” she said, “one time.”

The four of you jumped and shoved when she started chanting, “Four little monkeys jumping on the bed, one fell off and bumped her

head,” she tapped your sister’s arm and she hopped off and pouted. “Gramma called the doctor and the doctor said, ‘no more monkeys jumping on the bed!’” She repeated this until you were the last monkey on the bed.

“You always let her win!” whined your sister. Your cousins shook their heads, agreeing. “Oh, shush,” said Grandma Betty, “the littlest monkeys are they best jumpers.”

**

Going to Grandma Betty’s house was your favorite part of Easter because she always bought those giant, pre-packed Easter baskets from the drugstore that your parents refused to buy. And Easter was very clearly her favorite holiday. She got up early each year to hide hundreds of surprise-filled, plastic eggs around her house and in the yard.

Before the minivan even pulled into the driveway you already spotted four eggs that were in your reach: one on the ground next to home base, one in the planter of flowers, one in the front window, and one under the pine tree, which you knew was going to hurt. The rest of them required height or the ability to climb trees, neither of which you had.

You shoved out of your booster seat, almost elbowing your baby brother, and followed your sister out of the sliding door of the van.

She apparently saw the egg under the tree too, so you raced over before hearing Grandma Betty shout, “Girls! Wait for your cousins to get here!”

The two of you stopped in your tracks and moped back toward the driveway. Grandma Betty handed you each a basket and put her arms around you. You tried to tug away from her grip on your shoulder so you could at least get a head start.

“Be patient,” she said. “There are plenty of eggs that only a little bear can find.”

The egg hunt was intense and you ended up with 40 eggs, six more than last year, but still less than your sister and cousins. The eight of you ran into the living room, dumped your baskets and started shaking the eggs. You were hoping to find at least one that didn’t make any noise. If an egg made noise, it was filled with coins or candy. But, if an egg didn’t make noise, it was filled with cash. Your oldest cousins always found the eggs with the ten-dollar bills because they were always in the

hardest hiding spots.

All of your eggs made noise, so you counted your coins while everyone else counted dollars. You were angry, but at least you had more candy than them. You saw sparkly boots walk past your basket and an egg dropped in. You opened it up to find a twenty-dollar bill.

“Mom, what on Earth is she gonna do with that?” whispered your dad.

“Oh, shush.”

**

The one night, senior year, your parents decided you were going to take a last minute trip to see Grandma Betty. She made some Bundt cakes and she wanted each of her kids to have one. Your little brother had to miss a basketball game, but he wasn’t mad because he loved her Bundt cake. You walked into her house late at night to find some of your aunts, uncles, and cousins sitting in the kitchen. They were quietly eating cake while watching the news on Grandma Betty’s tiny kitchen television.

You followed your parents into her room and your brother walked closely behind you. Grandma Betty was lying down in a small bed that was set up right next to her own bed. Aunt Melissa was sobbing at the foot of the old bed. Your dad went over to comfort his youngest sister. You hung out with your cousins in the living room and they asked how your sister was doing at college. You knew she was drinking too much but you said “good.” After a while of meaningless conversation and three pieces of cake, it was time to go.

“Come say goodbye to grandma!” shouted Aunt Kathy.

With your sister and oldest cousins gone, you were third in line; your brother and little cousins waited patiently behind you. You took turns going into her room, kissing her cheek, and saying, “I love you.” Grandma was asleep the entire time you were there and when you kissed her cheek she said, “mommy.” You backed away, shocked. Your dad put his hand on your shoulder to walk you out and assured you she was just dreaming.

On your way out of the house your mom said, “Let’s stay a little while longer.” After working in a hospital for twenty years she knew what death looked like. Everyone sat in the living room on various pieces of furniture and spots on the floor, waiting. The room was silent as you held your brother’s hand. Aunt Melissa’s scream broke the silence and everyone, but the little kids started crying. Your brother looked at you, con-

fused.

You ran down the hall to find your dad looking into the bedroom. He was a still, silent crier with a straight face and a few measly tears. He put his arm out to hug you and you glanced into her room. She was already gray and her jaw was wide open. Your mom opened the window and later told you she was letting the spirit out - as if anything could trap Grandma Betty's spirit. Her golden wig was glowing on the nightstand, the brightest it ever looked.

She was buried in the fall, before all of the leaves died. The last time you saw the wig, a pink, sequined shirt that Grandma Betty wore in her casket dimmed it. The funeral home was filled with Sinatra music and thousands of beautiful, expensive flowers. Being sad seemed wrong. Looking around at all of your sobbing relatives, you could almost hear her.

“Oh, shush.”

Feelin' Some Typha Way

Sarita Charap

Chest waders leak black mud, silty water, tiny microbes
Tardigrade dreams held by cosmic bear hands
Don't get eaten up
Pitcher plants: carnivorous, red spotted devourers of ephemeral worlds
Sundew sticky spindle arms ready to hold those
Six legged wanderers who wander no more
Menyanthes trifoliata, three leaved sanctuary to larval bog buck moth
Rarest beauty only few have seen
Head, thorax, abdomen boot filled with disappearing genetic squish
Little turtle hides among the poison sumac
Don't touch!
Red itchy hands that cut invasive cattail in the summer heat
Typha agustifolia, latifolia, glauca
Thick stemmed, rhizome bountiful pain in my ass
Heavy lopers mow them down
I am catcher of turtle
Handler of snake
Guardian of the bog
God among cattail

Trickled Reflection

Marissa Miksad



Goodnight

Megan Debolt

I cannot imagine anything more perfect
Then snow falling in packs of fluffy white sheep
From the dark velveteen ears of my old rabbit
As I rub my cheek not yet angry and red
But rather smooth as the condensation resting on my window pane.

In that kind of dark where the wet cold cotton is falling
Up or down I do not know, just floating back from space
Until it blankets the Earth, whether green, grey, or brown
It shivers it's glittery arms into an embrace so biting cold
That it's filled with the warmth of my mother's lips as they kissed my
Pale snow fallen cheeks goodnight.

Purple Rose

Dori Gronich



Firm on Two Feet

Zachary Paquette

“Cole! Step up!” my buddy, Max, called. He stood on the mound, ready to pitch.

I grabbed my bat. Two taps on my right foot, two on my left. Same as always.

“And now!” Ryan, the catcher, said. “Stepping up to the plate is the superstar of North Mary High School, Cole Sky!”

As soon as I arrived at home plate, all of my friends took a few steps back. I grinned. After all, I really was the superstar of North Mary High School.

Picture a really good looking baseball player. Okay, now make him shorter. Alright, not THAT short. Average height. I was a senior in high school, but I was strong. Years of playing the game had given me some great muscles. Got the picture in your head? That was me... probably. I will let that be your image for now.

There was no question I swung right on the first pitch. It was low on the inside, Max’s favorite spot. There was a low crack, and away the ball went. I didn’t bother running the bases, and my friends didn’t bother to chase after it. They all knew what was about to happen. However, this time, the ball felt different. It didn’t travel as high as I wanted it to, and it crashed right through someone’s fence, breaking off into their backyard.

Max cursed. “That isn’t good.”

I placed the bat on the ground. “Maybe it isn’t as bad as we think.” I tried to sound confident, but from what I could see, the folks who lived in this house just lost a lot of privacy in their backyard. A closer inspection confirmed my fears. It was pretty bad.

“At least it isn’t a window,” Max said, trying to be positive.

I cleared my throat. “I’m going over there.”

“What? Why? This isn’t the time for you to be all goody goody. They might be really pissed!”

“You know I can’t just leave. My parents raised me this way.”

Max put his hand on my shoulder. “Good luck.”

I could feel a hard lump in my throat. On my way around the block to get to the front of the house, I was mentally preparing myself to handle whatever I might find when I knocked on that door. I imagined some scary, bald guy who would come out pumping a shotgun and aiming

it at me for breaking his fence. I tried going over lines that I would say if the person got mad.

The house was certainly not the nicest on the block. The car out front was old and dented, and the grass, if you could call it that, was not mowed properly.

Without realizing it, I had gone up to the door and rang the doorbell. Before I knew it, a beautiful woman, probably in her late thirties, stood before me. She greeted me with a bright smile that actually made me forget why I was even there in the first place.

“Hello. How can I help you?” she said kindly.

I quickly snapped out of my brief trance. I remembered what my father had drilled into my head about greeting new people. Big smiles, even if you don’t mean it. Treat everyone with respect.

“Good afternoon. My name is Cole Sky. My friends and I were playing ball out in the field behind your house, and I accidentally hit a ball that went through your fence out back. I am terribly sorry about all of this. I can help pay for the damages.”

The woman looked taken aback by what I had just said. “Is that what that noise was? I thought the squirrels were making a racket again.” She paused. “It is bad?”

I nodded. Just then, I heard a noise coming from inside.

A man walked up to the front door and looked at me.

“Cole? What are you doing here?”

“Mr. Mathews? You live here?”

Mr. Mathews was my biology teacher. I would never tell anyone this, but biology was my favorite class. He made the class really interesting when he talked about human anatomy and how it worked. I would often talk with Mr. Mathews after class about medical things. He was my favorite teacher. Of course I could never admit that to my baseball-obsessed friends who believed I was also just as obsessed.

“Please, come in, Cole.” Mr. Mathews turned to the woman. “Darlene, this is Cole. I think I have talked about him before.”

The woman, Darlene, gasped. “This is the boy who you said was really into your class? The one who plays baseball?”

I blushed. "That's me."

"So, what brings you here, Cole?"

I gulped. "I am sorry, sir, but I accidentally broke your fence out back."

Mr. Mathews turned around to look at the damage through a window.

"It isn't so bad."

I looked at him confused. "I can pay you for damages. I'll give you my parents' informa "

"Cole, I don't want your money."

This felt weird. I felt guilty. Maybe someone else would have high-tailed it out of that house by now, but I couldn't, especially since it was someone I knew.

"There must be something I can do."

Mr. Mathews smiled. "Forget it, Cole. You don't need to do anything."

"Actually," Darlene said, "I think you might be able to do something for us."

Both Mr. Mathews and I looked at her in confusion.

"Our daughter she doesn't get out much. She's homeschooled and doesn't exactly get to interact with a lot of people besides us."

"That's right!" Mr. Mathews said. "Maya loves baseball! Oh, I bet you two would get along just fine."

"Uh, I guess I could." I will admit: I was a bit weirded out by this. Were these people really so kind as to just let this go? How was that possible? I damaged her property! Shouldn't they be furious at me and all I had to do was talk to their daughter for a little while? I never once had a problem with meeting new people, so this wasn't a punishment at all. I guessed that I could be done with this whole mess in two hours. Easy.

If only I had known about Maya Mathews, maybe I wouldn't have had my jaw hit the floor when I first saw her. There were signs. The chair elevator that went up the stairs. The smell of a hospital room. The medical magazines scattered throughout the house. I could have figured it out. Instead, I walked into Maya's room and gapped the moment I saw her.

A little girl, no older than twelve, was lying on the floor in a very awkward position with her legs up in the air, sort of

upside-down.

To this day, I still didn't know why I felt the need to say something funny to her. Maybe in my stunned mind, a joke was the only thing that could escape my shock. I didn't plan on joking around immediately, but for some reason, I did. Something in my mind kicked in, and I felt an overwhelming urge to make her smile.

"Is your rug that comfy?"

Maya slowly shifted herself to look at me. She grins widely. "It's soft."

I walked over to her and dropped down to the floor. "Hi," I said.

Maya smiled. "Hi."

"What is your name?"

"Maya. Who are you?"

"Cole. Why are you upside-down?"

"I dropped my notebook."

I grinned. "Are you stuck?"

Maya flailed her arms around before they collapsed back at her side. "Yeah."

I scooped her up and placed her back on her bed. That was when I began to notice some things about the room. First, her bed was one of those hospital beds that could be raised up to be a backrest. There were posters of just about every sport hung up on the wall. And then on a dresser on the other side of the room there were medical supplies, pills and bottles, on a tray. I also noticed that Maya made no effort to make herself more comfortable in the bed. In fact, she didn't move an inch from where I put her down. Her head only moved to face me.

"Isn't that uncomfortable?"

Darlene walked into the room.

"Cole, Maya is paralyzed from the waist down. She can't walk."

Maya's face turned bright red. "Mom!"

"It's fine, sweetie. Cole is a friend of your father's."

"Why are you here?"

"I hit a baseball into your yard. Your mom let me into the house so I could get it," I said. I swear to you right now, the

second I mentioned baseball, I saw Maya's eyes get twice as big. It was like I had just told her Santa was coming. She was so excited.

"Oh, my gosh! You are Baseball Guy!"

"Baseball Guy?"

Mr. Mathews walked into the room. "Maya watches the people who play out in the park from her window."

I looked out her window. He was right, there was a perfect view of the field I was just playing at.

"You are Baseball Guy! You always hit home runs!"

I smiled. "Baseball Guy, huh? Well, now you know my real name, so you have to call me Cole now alright?"

"Okay!"

I spent the next hour talking to Maya. I learned all about her and how amazing she really was. Maya had been born paralyzed. It seemed like it was hard for her. She kept talking about her dreams to be an Olympic athlete where she would be a superstar. She wanted to do so many things, but she couldn't.

Later on, Mr. Mathews brought over the medicine Maya needed to take every day. He showed me some things about each one. I learned how to prepare the needle and what pills needed to be taken when. It was fascinating and felt really good to be helping her out like that.

Even as the needle went into her arm, Maya still had the biggest smile I had ever seen in my life. She couldn't even turn her body, but it seemed like she had won the World Series. She wanted to be a superhero. She wanted to fly. She wanted to do everything those other kids outside her window were doing that she couldn't.

I left the Mathews household with the strangest feelings. I really enjoyed going there, but I couldn't help but pity poor Maya. I couldn't stop thinking about her and everything I learned about. I wondered what I could do to help her.

Even the next day at school, I was in a complete daze and hardly paid any attention in class.

"Dude, you are so out of it today," Max said as we walked down the hallway between classes. "Baseball on the brain?"

"No," I said. "I don't always think about baseball you know."

Max laughed. "Oh, yeah? What else does the superstar, Cole Sky, think about besides baseball?"

"The future, and what happens after all of this is over."

Max lightly punched me. "So, baseball?"

"What do you mean?"

"The answer is baseball, dude. We are going to a school with the best baseball team. My future is set in stone. What else would it be?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I don't think that I want to play baseball for the rest of my life. I want to do something that will make a difference. You know what I mean?"

"You're Cole Sky. Baseball is in your blood. You live and breathe baseball. And you're going to tell me that you would just throw all of that away? That sounds crazy."

"Yeah, but "

"We have played baseball our entire lives. It's what we are best at. Why bother doing something that we aren't good at?"

"What if I want to try something else?"

Max glared at me. "Dude, what is wrong with you? You are talking nonsense." He then grabbed the textbook I was carrying. "See this? This is for them. The guys who aren't superstars. We don't need stupid stuff like biology." He flipped open the page and pointed to a picture. "See? I have no idea what this is, and I won't ever need to know."

"It's the femoral artery."

Max froze. "The what?"

"It's the femoral artery. It is located "

"I heard you. Why the hell do you know what that is?"

I shrugged. "I kind of like biology. I was thinking about maybe becoming a nurse in the future."

Max burst out laughing. "No way! A nurse? Oh, god! That is too funny. I can't breathe. Dude, you want to be a nurse? You mean a doctor?"

"Guys can be nurses you know," I said. I was starting to get a little angry with him.

"Whatever, dude. Nice joke. You know just as much as I that you are going to be stuck in baseball for the rest of your life. It is your destiny. Don't talk like a crazy person."

“I am not...”

“I don’t want to hear any of this crazy talk any more. You are Cole Sky, Baseball Superstar. Why don’t you cool off for a bit? Hopefully, you will come to your sense soon enough.”

I wanted to resist him, but he had a point. I have been “Baseball Guy” all my life. Why should I bother even thinking about doing anything else? I probably wouldn’t even be good at being a nurse.

After school, I somehow wound up on the footsteps of Maya’s house. I didn’t really plan on going back, even though I secretly wanted to, but there I was knocking on their front door.

Darlene opened the door, very surprised to see me again. “Did you forget something?”

I fiddled with my hands. I had no idea what to say. Was this weird? It was definitely weird. I felt awkward until I remembered that I never retrieved the ball from the backyard. “I left the ball in your backyard,” I said quickly.

Darlene smiled. “Oh, that’s right. The ball.” She totally saw through my lie. I knew she did. She knew that I knew. Without even bothering to send me out back, Darlene directed me upstairs. “She just finished her lessons for today. She should be drawing right now.”

I blushed. It was embarrassing to have her see right through me like that. I shrugged it off, however, and walked upstairs.

Maya was sitting down on her bed, sketching in a notebook. Her jaw dropped when she saw me enter the room.

“Cole! You came back!”

“Of course!”

“Awesome!” Maya said. She smiled brightly.

“What are you smiling about?”

Maya looked at me confused. “Why not? I like being happy. Being happy is the best!”

I sucked in a breath. Suddenly that felt like a really stupid question.

Just then Mr. Mathews walked into the room. “Welcome back, Cole.”

“Hello, Mr. Mathews. I came to visit again. I hope it isn’t a bother.”

“No way! You should always come!” Maya said.

Mr. Mathews nodded. “You’re always welcome here Cole. Stay as long as you would like.” He paused. “Maya, time for your shots and your pills again.”

I immediately walked over to him. I watched as he carefully prepared the first needle. He looked over at me and smiled, asking, “You want to help?”

I nodded quickly. I opened the first bottle of pills and started getting them ready.

“You seem to like this kind of stuff Cole. Are you thinking about doing this in college?”

I froze. “Me? No, I couldn’t do that. I gotta play baseball in college. I’m just Baseball Guy.”

“Are you sure? I know of some great medical schools that I could recommend for you.”

I sighed. “Nope. I am going to be a baseball player. It’s in my blood.”

“I think you would be a great nurse!” Maya said from her bed.

I turned to her. “But you said I was Baseball Guy.”

Maya laughed. “Cole is Cole. You don’t have to be Baseball Guy if you don’t want to.”

I walked over to her. “You really think that?”

“I think you’d do a great job!”

“Oh, yeah?”

Maya smiled. “You could be a superhero!”

I pulled up a chair and paused for a moment. I was totally letting a twelve year old girl lecture me on my future. And, somehow, I was believing her. I really wanted to believe her. Even though Max had told me no, I knew I was waiting for someone to tell me to do it. I really liked helping Maya. I wanted to do something like that for the rest of my life.

I caught a glimpse of her drawing in her notebook. I couldn’t see the whole thing, but what I was able to see looked pretty good.

“What do you have there?”

Maya quickly ripped the page out of her notebook and crumpled it into a little ball. Then I watched as she tossed the ball into the waste basket on the other side of the room.

My jaw dropped. “Nice shot!” I walked over to the basket and retrieved the paper ball. I returned it back to her. “Do it again.”

To my amazement, Maya shot the ball, and it sunk in just the same. I couldn’t help, but clap.

“Maya! That was amazing! You could be in the paper ball Olympics!”

Maya’s eyes widened. “They have that? Really?”

“Oh, sorry. They don’t really. Sorry, Maya.”

Maya frowned for a moment. That brief moment felt heart-wrenching. There must be something I could do for her!

Darlene entered the room. “Cole, would you like to join us for a walk?”

“A walk?” I looked over at Maya. “How?”

Maya laughed. “I have a wheelchair stupid.”

Suddenly, the gears in my brain started shifting into gear. A wheelchair. Wait! An idea came into my head.

“That’s it!” I grabbed Maya’s hand. “Maya, I know how to make you an athlete!”

I sat down. My heart was racing. It was alright to be this excited, right? Butterflies were okay right now, right?

Darlene and Mr. Mathews found and sat down next to me. “There is the college student!” Mr. Mathews said. “How is nursing school?”

I smiled. “It’s great. Really hard, but I really like it.”

“It looks like she is almost ready now,” Darlene said.

“Thank you for this, Cole. We had given up on her dream, but you showed us the way. Thank you again.”

I smiled. “Thank you for always believing in my dream, even when I didn’t myself.”

A buzzer sounded. I sat back.

“It was so simple. Wheelchair Basketball. Now it’s Maya’s turn to be a superstar.”

Tree of Cycle

Marissa Miksad



Ice Prick

Max Hlat

There is a large ice mountain, frozen completely, surrounded by many others. On the visible section of the mountain there are two men, STEVE and RICK, hanging from long climbing wires. Rick is above Steve slightly. They are covered, head to toe, in both climbing and winter apparel. There is both blizzard-like snow falling and loud wind howling. There is a third wire, parallel to theirs, absent of anyone.

NOTE: Whenever they speak they must yell over the wind.

STEVE

Rick?

RICK

What?

STEVE

We're best buddies right?

RICK

The best of friends, mate, you and me, buddy.

STEVE

Well, ok then, in that case: Can I ask you a question and can you promise to be honest with me?

RICK

Hell yeah, bro, I got you.

STEVE

But, like, you say that. *(beat)* You promise right?

RICK

You know it.

STEVE

Okay. *(pause)* Are you sleeping with Jessica?

There is a long pause.

RICK

What? Like your wife?

STEVE

No my dog. Yes, my wife Jessica the person to whom I am married.

RICK

What? No man, why the hell would you say that?

After Rick speaks
the two of them are
nearly obliterated by
a falling ice chunk.
They scream, then casually
return to their
conversation.

STEVE

Well you see, I was noticing her closet including some articles of clothing that I know for a fact aren't mine.

RICK

Guy stuff?

STEVE

Wh - yeah! Yes, guy stuff!

RICK

Oh!

STEVE

Why would I be asking you if it wasn't?

RICK

Don't ask me, you're the one accusing me of sleeping with your -

Rick is cut off by the wind nearly tearing them from the mountain to their shared doom. They scream, and again, casually return to their conversation.

STEVE

I mean I wouldn't call you out unless I saw your Barcelona jersey in the closet.

RICK

Maybe she's just getting into that team?

STEVE

You know I wouldn't marry her if that was a possibility.

RICK

Right. Well hey man I'm not sleeping with her, but I can tell you

she needs more. I, um, Becky told me. You know, girl gossip.

STEVE

What? More? What do you mean?

RICK

Sometimes you don't listen to her, like really listen to her and -

Rick tries to ice-pick up slightly, but he loses handling and almost falls but Steve steadies him.

Thanks, man.

STEVE

No problem.

RICK

But, yeah like she's a complicated person and won't stick around long if you don't -

Rick is cut off as they hear the third person, JERRY, climbing up his rope. Jerry is struggling, and making loud grunting noises. As he climbs, Rick and Steve stop their climbing and

watch until he is almost even with them.
Jerry stops and takes a few breaths after the tough climb.

JERRY

(heavy breathing) You know I'm going to have to agree with Rick on this one, Jessica is a woman of many layers and you seem to only see a few of those layers.

STEVE

Jerry, why did I find your weird pink and blue gloves under the sheets the other night?

There is a long pause.

JERRY

Listen we can spend all day here asking if there was a foursome in your bed but it won't get us anywhere.

STEVE

Four? Whoa, wait, what? Foursome? Rick?

RICK

I - Listen I don't - It's not like...

He is interrupted by a

large ice chunk almost swiping all three of them off the mountain. They scream in horror then return to climbing.

STEVE

You guys are horrible people! You're both married!

JERRY

Diane was cool with it.

STEVE

Tell me she was the fourth.

Jerry and Rick speak at the same time:

JERRY

What, no!

RICK

Hell yeah!

They stop. There is a very long pause. They

continue to climb in
silence.

RICK

I heard there's like a sweet waffle place at the top of this mountain,
with like free toppings and stuff.

STEVE

I highly doubt th - oh wait I can smell it!

JERRY

Damn I forgot my wallet.

STEVE

I'll cover you.

JERRY

Thanks, man.

STEVE

(quickly) Fuck you.

RICK

Man, Vermont is awesome.

LIGHTS. END.

A Time to Remember

Scott Kesselring



Driving

Megan Debolt

Driving.

The windows are down
and the hot, dry air moves fast
across your cheek. You finally get to the apartment
complex, the old white and brown building marked with an M.
And you see her little blue hat Peeking between the curtains
and you already know the door is unlocked
even though you've warned Mima a thousand times about the danger.

Driving.

To doctors appointments, to
get this test, and that test to
check her pacemaker, to
draw blood, to
get results back.
Listening to her tell you about Warfarin for the thousandth time
but you don't care,
you would listen to her forever if you could—
the yodeling in
the front seat of the car, the goofy chair dance you
and your sister always laughed at
the way she would reach her bony hands back
and tickle you.
the ice cream trips that really
“Hit the spot.”

Driving...

It's when you're
Driving that you get

the call.

And you have to turn around and keep driving even though you no longer can see out the windshield and wipers wouldn't do you any good and you've got to get your sister as fast as you can

and you can't breathe and
you're frozen and praying
to someone you're not ever sure
exists in the first place

just hoping that you are going as fast as you can.

Driving.

Your sister gets in, cheeks

also wet with

thousands of hugs

thousands of weekends spent watching Disney movies

thousands of nursery rhymes read in the back yard

thousands upon thousands just running down cheeks as if they too are trying to escape what you know.

You feel as if you're going to get sick,

but you keep

Driving

and your mom is trying to keep calm
in the front set of the car, but
she keeps asking you to text your aunt, but
your dad tells you not to, but
you do it anyway because even though you don't want to know

you want to know

you need to know.

So when she texts you
and tells you that you and your sister need to stay in the waiting
room
even though you
 don't know
you know. And you hate yourself
because no matter how fast you drove
you just didn't drive fast enough.

Driving.

The windows are down
and the hot, dry air moves fast across your cheek.
You pass the apartment complex
the old white and brown building, marked with an M. And
you look at the little blue hat on the dashboard, and
you notice the curtains have changed, and
you know the door is locked, and
you know that you can't stop.
You just have to keep on driving.

Cracked

Victoria Jayne

EXT. SUBURBS - DAY

Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds" plays.

EXT. ROBERT'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

ROBERT (35) an uptight business man, folders and coffee in hand, gets into his TOYOTA PRIUS. He is on the phone.

ROBERT
(to phone)
No no no, I'm headed there now.

INT. TOYOTA PRIUS - DAY

Robert puts the coffee down, opens a folder and flips through its contents confused.

ROBERT
(to phone)
I don't care if this ruins your
plans Janice.

INT. POWER WHEELS CAR - DAY

BILLY (9) drinks a JUICE BOX. He wears a Hawaiian shirt, tan shorts, and aviator sunglasses. He drives a POWER WHEELS CAR.

EXT. SUBURBS - DAY

Billy drives down the side walk.

INT. TOYOTA PRIUS - DAY

Robert is writing on the paper, he sorts the papers back into the folder.

ROBERT
(to phone)
Well I'm sorry Janice I didn't
realize George was a doctor.

EXT. ROBERT'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

Billy drives onto Robert's driveway. He approaches the PRIUS.

CUT TO:

INT. TOYOTA PRIUS - DAY

The music stops with a BANG. Robert looks up.

ROBERT
(to phone)
I have to call you back.

Robert hangs up the phone. He looks back; sees nothing.

EXT. ROBERT'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

He gets out of his car and walks to where the sound occurred.
He discovers Billy, and a giant crack on the fender of the
prius. Billy's power wheels car is in perfect condition.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
(frantic)
What have you done!?

Robert crouches to look at the crack. He goes to touch it and
he sharply inhales.

BILLY
Relax. Nothing a little Play-Doh
can't fix.

ROBERT

What is wrong with you?

BILLY

Listen sir... You have nothing to worry about.

Billy gets out of his car. He approaches Robert.

BILLY (CONT'D)

This is just a minor inconvenience.
I know a guy that can help.

ROBERT

I don't have time for this. I...

Robert looks at the power wheels car and sees the juice box.

ROBERT (CONT'D)

... Have you been drinking?

BILLY

... No.

ROBERT

Yes you have. I can see the juice box. You reek of apples.

BILLY

How dare you accuse me of such a thing. I am a responsible driver.

Robert stands up, walks over to the power wheels and grabs the juice box. He examines it.

ROBERT

Apple juice. I should have known from that foul smell.

BILLY

So what I drank some apple juice. I
am allowed to consume what I choose.

Billy snatches the juice box for Robert.

ROBERT

Not if you are going to be
operating heavy machinery.

BILLY

Listen. You are overreacting. I
have been in far worse. This is an
easy fix.

ROBERT

There is a giant crack in my car!

BILLY

Like I told you before, I know a
guy. He can do anything with PlayDoh.
One time he was able to put a
sled back together with just half a
jar. He. Works. Miracles.

ROBERT

I don't need your guy. I need a
real mechanic.

BILLY

I have dealt with your criticisms
of me, but when you criticize my
friends? That is another story. I
am leaving.

Billy gets into his car, and begins to drive away.

INT. COP CAR - DAY

COP (4os) P.O.V. Robert is yelling at Billy as he drives away. The cop pulls over and gets out.

EXT. ROBERT'S DRIVEWAY - DAY

COP

Is there a problem here?

ROBERT

Yes, he smashed into my car and he has been drinking.

COP

(to Billy)

SIR!

Billy stops his car and turns to the cop.

BILLY

What?

COP

I am going to have to see your license.

BILLY

Fine.

COP

I am also going to have to check your B.J.C.

BILLY

My what?

COP

You're blood juice content.

Billy freezes and looks at the cop. Billy floors it.

COP (CONT'D)

Damn it we got a runner.

(to radio)

Dispatch we have a 9 year old on
the run. He is not compliant. I
repeat he is not compliant.

Cop gets into his car and chases after Billy, leaving Robert
alone with the damaged Prius.

FADE TO BLACK.

Reflect

Marissa Specioso





WE'RE NICE PEOPLE