

The Nemadji Review Volume 5



The Nemadji Review Volume 5

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A Letter from the Editorial Board

Dear Readers,

It is with the utmost pleasure to present the fifth volume of *The Nemadji Review*. We sincerely thank everyone for submitting to *The Nemadji Review* this school year. We received a marvelous amount of submissions with great variety in genre and theme. This allowed us to be able to select the brightest and best submissions for UWS' literary anthology. It is our honor to present this vast body of work, as we believe this showcases the literary excellence found within the core elements of a Liberal Arts education—something UWS strives to accomplish in the heart of every student that attends this institution.

Passion drives the fruit of creativity, and this is something that *The Nemadji Review* celebrates and compliments, for by no means does a creative, literary work come without brainstorming, research, drafting and reflection upon the finalized piece. We are here to praise the level of excellence of each submission that was accepted as well as recognize the amount of time and effort devoted to each and every literary piece.

This passion extends to the literary enthusiasts who make up the editorial board each year with this year being no exception. This year the editorial board worked diligently to ensure that each piece reflects what we believe to be the twinkling gems in the crown of literary standard. That dedication and passion extended even farther when we decided to rework the old format and our talented Design Editor, David Tromblay, was able to construct an entirely new format from the ground up. We take this time to thank and appreciate the time and effort that he has devoted in order to create a newer and better format that we hope will be an asset to future board members and will help to ease the formatting process for everyone involved.

We are proud to officially announce Volume 5 of *The Nemadji Review*. Thank you once again for your readership and or literary contribution to the making of this anthology. Without our readers and contributors, we would be without a means to convey the literary talents of Northern Wisconsin and the surrounding Twin Ports region. For this, we are grateful for your expression of interest in Volume 5 of *The Nemadji Review*.

With warmest regards,

The Nemadji Review Editorial Board

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Poetry



Faith King
“Could Use A Break”

It's not that Life isn't the way I thought it would be,
It's more that I never looked this far ahead.
Lost awirling through my young adult,
Guess I always felt that I had extra time
Since I went to kindergarten early.

So here I am; all woken up and ready to see what there is to see.
But sometimes there's nothing in view.
What could this possibly mean?
Did everyone just stop caring?

Seems like the ones who rise to the top
Are the ones that know how to shut off.
It's not about talent and skills,
It's about who can keep their mouth closed.

Too bad for me, I was raised to speak my mind.
That spunk was cute
That most people you meet are kind.
It hurt to come to find out this isn't always true.

Pain heals by teaching you where to look.
Letting go of the things you only want to be true.
If you create your own reality, is life ever more than a book?
Or sit-com or movie; I guess it doesn't matter
As long as you catch a glimpse of what you came to see.

So Let Go, Let Go, Let Go...
I'm probably not even half way through,
And already I can see there is little that can be predicted to hold true.
Letting go is all that is left, to make things feel a bit calmer.
And I think we could all use a break.

Danika Brown

“Like California only human”

Heavy fault lines form rifts along well worn paths of familiar
unavoidable disappointment
they weigh on my shoulders and as I walk
in a graveyard of hard won truths and lessons
I find myself tripping over old missteps, known ghosts, and mistakes
Until I find myself on hands and knees
clothes covered in muddied memories
struggling to remember that in life’s wash
everything eventually comes clean
The arbitrary moment enough to register on a lone seismograph
the reading like a memoir on the richter scale
The compressional stress making me whole

Josh Terwey

“The Wreck of the Fitzgerald”

my thoughts, I hope, are not indicative
of my life’s acute accomplishments.
yet..

the more I read, the more I fixate upon
your roaringly inspirational Babylon;

my actions, I’m sure, cannot be indicative
of my life’s socially scorched bridges.
yet...

the more I imbibe, the more I feel
a certain kinship with your uneven keel;

my words, I’m convinced, are indicative
of my life’s true trajectory.
yet..

the more I write, the more I work the wheelhouse
of a voyage I’ll inevitably, forever Revisit.

Josh Terwey

“The Veil Between Poetry and Life”

He waits for inspiration to be tapped,
Cognizance to be ordered, mixed and poured.
Too proud to admit he’s trapped,
He hides his liquid crutch like a pirate’s hoard.

Thing is...

He avoids the shitholes, the dirty;
Seeking the clean corners of the city.

He ceaselessly seeks creativity via the bottle,
Despite sober souls selling the merits of sobriety.
Undeniably confident he feathers a fiery throttle,
Burning the fuel of an assumed literary potency.

Thing is...

He loves the mahogany, the crannies;
Writing in the cozy pubs of English histories.

He recognizes the mortal pitfalls of his distilled muse,
Yet pines for the pints of her potent ruminations.
Advancing in age, he can no longer deny his abuse,
As he dares his organs to keep pace with his machinations.

Thing is...

His thoughts are dictated by his memories;
Illuminating his inebriated self prophecies.

Really, though, the thing is...

These lines were written in the nooks and crannies
Of a mind comfortably seated in a clean, well lighted place.

Josh Terwey

“The Haunted Pages Of My Life”

P(age) 13: Poe’s feline fiend;
Not to be the horrific harbinger,
Yet I forever feel Death’s methodical pace.
Was terrestrial life worth the everyday toil?
...Of which I’ve been plenty supplied.

P(age) 18: Shakespeare’s tormented Dutch;
Not to be overly somber,
But I know I’m not alone in my human race.
What is it like to be free of your mortal coil?
...Of which I’m so damn worried.

P(age) 26: Irving’s paranoid Ichabod;
Not to be fixated on Death’s chamber,
Yet I find myself forever measuring the space.
Do you recall the commencement of spoil?
...Of which I’m petrified.

P(age) Unknown: King’s Jaunt;
Not that I’m not a believer,
But I feel we cannot be a cosmically singular case.
Is our launch-pad cemetery soil?
...Under which my p(age)s will be buried.

Wade Schadewald

“It’s True What They Say (about red heads)”

She was ready red with a scar-lit singe
and frayed tips, down dangly low bangs that stray,
baiting the wind; with strands catching in play,
sticking to her lips (the freckly fringe).

Ah, but in her eyes there danced a calm glint,
entrapped amongst the green and Langston hues,
a gas-glow flame burning sap-fiery blue,
perhaps pilot lights, primed hot in the squints.

However, there was no scent to her fume,
no warning placards, no smoking signs,
my words were the fuel, and with fire combined,
she blew up! All the oxygen consumed!

It’s her au-burn temper that ignites fear,
taking a few days for the smoke to clear.

Wade Schadewald
“Summer Scribbles”

(Summer Sprung)

Pitched up under night, so cute from heaven, it compares to the mascara of the moon... and someone new to smear it. Summer came funny, with laughter inside the thieving crooks of her lippery smile. Click lit the cigarettes, steaks on the barbe, and catching cans of beer with our baseball mitts. It was unethical shock value without a price tag... and our winter coats finally melted.

(Summer Soul-stice)

...A one, two, three, knockout punch! Wearing an armored pink TANK-top, low cut Cadillac jeans, and flips that flopped as she stalked. Equipped lips with a fortified technique, hooking and catching on whatever curled her barbs. She had sheen like a young yellow birch, and her head began to bear fruit. But Summer would have me wait until the time is ripe, when September turns her eyes over those shoulders. I can harvest that look by the bushel, and bake pies before the holidays hit.

(The Summer Fall)

The bloody Mary dawns came with Summer's salt on the horizon rim, enough to bristle any hair of the dog. But the season was turning to science fiction—rewinding in those day dreams, waltzing in those R&R whiskey streams, shaking asses to slow moving dances. The non-sense made her less tense. Tangling bets with her head, thinking clarinets and brunettes don't harmonize so well...but she sees the bones in the back brass like to go fishing for first trumpets and small-mouth bass.

(Summer Sundown)

It was a perfect night...

So after he said his goodbye, gave her a genuine kiss and a worthy hug,
She decided to do some digging, where the blackness keeps its secrets
bedded safely under nights blanket of dark. She realized that her blues are
nothing more than another ocean, and paradise is another expulsion. All
things end, she understood, even if it is Minnesota nice. If only for just a
smile longer, she wouldn't be taken for granted. But the shimmer in her
jewel eye was faint, and a gust carried the dates of 'Ber and 'Ary nearly
to a taste. It made her shiver. It was a perfect night to leave.

Signed,

SUMMER

Kenneth Timm
“Weightlessness”

I found myself to be weightless
My bounds released, I was free to drift
And drift I did; I saw the continents, the heavens and the deep blue sea
But without weight, I could not engage, and I longed for the weight of
the world
My senses had dulled leaving nothing but vagueness

Is it possible to feel weight only inside?

I am free, yes it's true
But the weight in my core seems only to grow
Shall I admit it? Was it wrong?
What could possibly be the outcome?
I can hover above it all, but cannot reach great heights
I believe I could once, but the memory has faded; was it only a dream?
I think not

She is weightless as well, oh yes
But the outcome appears different
She glides on the surface, but is free to ascend
How could that be so different? Was it always this?
I cannot stand that thought
Perhaps she is only dying

David Tromblay

“Broken Mind”

After John Ashbury's Soonest Mended

Scarcely accepted, living on the fringe
in our armistice culture, where we're always having to be rescued
from our own obliteration, like parishioners at Heaven's Gate,
before we're called back to the theater for an encore.

There would be thunder in the darkness, a crackling of carbines,
and bugle calls in the stone gardens, and the creasing of
the colors. But small mementos tell this tale, when we won't, as if
forgetting
the whole thing might make the nightmares end, but there's no one
solution.

And then there always comes a time when
happenstances in our mottled minds automatically
create perturbing delusions from daydreams, just when everything felt
O.K.,
only to come to in another land scared and confused,
reeling from this latest piece of information:
War is confrontation without conclusion.

David Tromblay

“This Be the Curse”

After Phillip Larkin’s *This Be the Verse*

I fucked it up, differently than my Dad
 Never once meaning to, yet still I do
I figured I knew better than my father had
 Still I’ve not done right by you

How could I think I deserved a turn?
 My life was white-hats and Pea-coats
‘Spent your life roving bow to stern
 Babylon’s left its dust in our throats

Won’t see you become a man
 But I’ve medals for my shelf
Please, my son, learn what you can
 And don’t repeat this for yourself

Kelci Greenwood
“Panic”

Panic is a loud place.
It’s blinking red on a strobe light,
Never-ending.
I can’t see straight.
The light is blinking,
But the darkness in between flashes is worse.
There is screaming,
Long and drawn-out,
But there are no words.
It’s out of control.
There’s nothing to hold on to.
Blank space in bright, flashing lights.
Blood red,
Pounding in my mind.
I wish I could hold my head,
But I can’t find it.
My hands are like dead weights,
And when I gather the strength to lift them,
They are too numb to feel.

Kourtney Sande
“Innocence of Spring”

Free Flowing tendrils of rain.

Dripping wet and laughter through a thunderstorm

Rose Petals falling from each gentle petal, the delight
the romantic gesture it brings.

With each wet petal that drops, and each spring of laughter that
escapes the lips of innocence lets out
a breath of purity.

Divinity and cool caress of the red rose herself.

The petal that gently graces me and brings out the childlike chuckle as
the storm approaches us.

The essence of spring gathers us into childlike curiosity and we cannot
leave because of this beautiful
new beginning.

Kourtney Sande
“Home”

As the girl
climbed over
the top of
the fence,
first the right
arm,
carefully
then the other arm
stepped down
into the pit of
the empty
home.

Kourtney Sande
“Into a Dream”

The night has fallen like a sensual silk that laces the skin.

My eyes grow heavier, as I make my way up the chilly zig-zag of stairs.

I crawl under the milky sheets that wrap around me, like a friendly zephyr.

Sleep.

Fall into a dream,
Fall into a dream.

I awaken the the siren calls above me.

The milky silk still wrapped around me.

The velvet curtains open to my dream.
Floating above me, such a devouring dream.

The siren still does her musical screaming, as
I dance across the purple clouds.

A delicious dream indeed.

Only a dream, the siren says
Only a dream.

Jacob Smuda
“Electric Guitar”

As I emerge from the shadows I clutch you, my constant companion,
Battered from the wars but still holding strong
That roaring ocean of humanity is my children
I am the pied piper, and you are my pipe
I suddenly strum out that hook that you and they all know too well
And your emanations surge and pump through the bodies
Like the electricity that flows through your wires
My mighty voice matching your metallic thunder

You are a balm for my wounds and a voice for my rage
My words prophecies of doom against the unbelievers
And words of redemption for my righteous children
My chords and solos exorcising the demons of my past
I see my mother and father, my teachers, bullies, policemen
All stare at me from the shadows with judgmental, unforgiving eyes
But I find comfort in you, my slave and master, my weapon and banner
My reason for living, my beauty, my beast, my soul . . . my tears.

Jacob Smuda
“The Bond”

I am it, the thing, the outcast, the unclean
I was born in the wrong family, sent to the wrong school,
Hung out with the wrong crowd
The one who haunts back alleys
My eyes strain under the sunlight, because I am not of it
Pale skin
Pale lips that no one has dared to kiss, and no one ever will
These lips long to utter the tangled, tormented thoughts of a burning mind
A mind that was taught rules that enmeshed and enchained it
That was bound by briars and thorns, and beset with unholy hatred
I am the one you catch glaring into your window,
Staring with black eyes that bespeak sleepless nights, lonely wanderings,
And red torment
And yet. . . I feel something
Most would shun, close the curtain, cringe, look away,
But you are different
I look into your deep blue oceans of eyes,
The eyes of a newborn child,
Innocent to the horror, the pain, the dark-light
But somehow able to see through the eons of time
And pierce straight through the myriads, the generations,
Your very being igniting the atmosphere around us with holy fire
And finally something alights on me with the force of a freight train
But with the grace of angel breath
And all of my demons shriek and shudder
And an image. . . no. . . A memory
A distant memory, hidden among the shadows and echoes of existence
Like a dusty old relic hidden in the back of the attic
A memory of running through the grass,
In the backyard of innocent times, full of innocent people

People who neither punished nor let go
Before poverty enslaved them in a world of lies and hypocrisy

And in my hand is the soft hand of another

Laughter. . .

Exaltation. . .

Sadness. . .

Purpose. . .

BEING

Because you are staring back

And the child whose hand I am holding is yours.

Creative Non-Fiction



Sarah Wargin
“Noise”

My mom and I have joked for a long time that our roles are reversed: she is more like the daughter, and I am more like a mother. She’s the wild child; perpetually 22 inside, and is interested in motorcycles, rock n’ roll, and other similar activities. On the other hand, I’ve always been an old soul, wise beyond my years, diagnosed with back problems at the tender age of 18, and my eyesight is worse than a donkey. Also, from the time I was a small, timid child, I’ve always hated loud noises.

I am what you could call a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP). The general population is likely unfamiliar with this term, so allow me to give a brief definition from Elaine A. Aron, author of *The Highly Sensitive Person*. She states, “Your trait is normal. It is found in 15 to 20% of the population—too many to be a disorder, but not enough to be well understood by the majority of those around you.” Elaine expands briefly on her website to mention that HSPs are more easily overwhelmed by stimuli, the trait is innate, and highly sensitive people tend to be very perceptive of their environment (we pick up on and are more upset by loud noises, bad smells, bright lights, and things of that nature). On the bright side, highly sensitive people can develop a deep appreciation of sounds, scents, foods, and works of art.

Growing up, I was labeled as too shy, too introverted, too sensitive. People told me to “come out of my shell,” to “just speak up!” and asked “why are you so quiet?” (Little did they know HSPs are plotting to rule the world, just you wait). I didn’t speak up in class during high school; even if I had a good thought, an outgoing student would always speak out before me, and I would be silenced in fear. College required that I speak, even when I was initially very hesitant to

this concept. During my freshman year of college, I didn't raise my hand once during the entire semester in one of my classes. When we were required to give a presentation at the end of the semester, one student exclaimed, "holy shit, she talks!" Yes, I do speak, I am not mute. But I prefer to communicate in other ways, such as through my writing.

During elementary school, I was petrified by loud noises. The rambunctious classmates around me, chattering away about this and that grew to be tiresome. I would hide in my room when my mother would vacuum the floor, because it was too loud and it scared me. Even flushing toilets startled me, because their sound echoes like a roar. My mother tells me that when I rode the bus from school to our home, I would regularly be asleep on the bus, and she had to carry me out; she figures school frazzled my nerves, because the school environment was simply too loud and stimulating most days.

I recall that at about the age of six, I asked my parents for a walking doll for Christmas. I had seen it on a TV commercial, and as a little girl, this doll looked like a fun playmate! When visiting my relative's house for our annual Christmas family gathering, my eyes lit up upon receiving the doll that I begged my parents for. I found out that the toy is battery operated so it can crawl around on the floor, similar to a human baby. I started crying, stating, "the doll didn't make any noise on TV!" At that moment, my pink-clad, blonde little baby doll seemed to take on the life of a terrible, clamorous robot, bent on sucking the life out of sensitive children like me. I didn't touch the doll again after that.

I transitioned into young adulthood. After living in college dorms for three years, I've learned to tune out loud noises, such as other students, music blaring from stereos, and so on. I still tend to be very sensitive, but I am less sensitive to noise now, and more bothered by other things, such as uncomfortable fabrics, or unkempt environments. Knowing that I am a highly sensitive person allows me to work with

these traits in a healthy way. I treat myself to soothing bathes and music, and take breaks when I become overwhelmed by responsibilities or by the people around me. I no longer beat myself up about being too sensitive, and know instead that it is an innate part of who I am. Without being a Highly Sensitive Person, I don't think I would appreciate art or literature in the way I do now, and simply put, I just wouldn't be Sarah.

Sources Cited

Aron, Elaine A. "Comfort Zone Blog." *Comfort Zone Blog*. Web. 19 Feb. 2015.

Kelci Greenwood
“Spores and Goats”

It was a dreary, overcast day in early January, but inside the crowded Famous Dave’s restaurant, it was warm enough that my coat had been thrown into a pile along with those of my parents on the side of the booth where my father sat alone. On the other side, I was squeezed between the wall and my mother. As per usual, the three of us were engaged in conversation while we waited for our food. That came to a grinding halt, however, the moment when my mom dropped some form of the tired line “When you have kids of your own someday...”

“I’m not having kids,” I told her. “I’m asexual.”

It was the first time I’d ever brought it up in conversation.

“You’re what?” She asked, bewildered yet somehow amused.

“I’m asexual,” I repeated. I was hesitant to explain, but my stubborn nature won out. “It means I’m not sexually attracted to anyone.”

My mother shook her head with a grin.

“Oh,” she cooed. “You just haven’t found the right guy yet.”

I don’t really know what came over me in that moment, but I decided to teach her a life lesson in probably the strangest way possible.

“Mom, have you ever had sex with a goat?” I could have said ‘woman,’ but no, my brain decided to go with ‘goat.’ Before she could get over the shock and even try to respond, I proceeded to pat her hand and say: “Maybe you just haven’t found the right goat.”

My father was mortified. He immediately told me to stop talking, and the rest of our wait was mostly in silence. He doesn’t like to talk about the incident. My mom, on the other hand, thinks it was hilarious and tells everyone at every available opportunity.

I first discovered the term “asexual” in a seventh grade science class. Of course, that asexual – meaning to be without sex or sex organs and usually referring to asexual reproduction in cells, plants, and some species of invertebrates – has absolutely nothing to do with the sexual orientation. At the time, however, it was the closest explanation to what I felt that I had found.

Middle school was about when my classmates began to come into their sexualities. They started dating each other, and some even went so far as to broadcast their sexual exploits to their friends – and anyone within earshot. I just couldn’t understand what the appeal was. There were multiple categories: straight, gay, bisexual – and I didn’t fit into any of them. Because of this, asexual became a joke for me. I would tell my friends that I reproduce by sporing.

By the time I reached high school, the term “asexual” had evolved for me, even while it remained a joke amongst the people I hung out with. I was beginning to understand that it meant something else entirely. Still, I had no idea that it was an actual sexual orientation, and I knew of no one else who identified as asexual. None of the health classes I’d taken in either middle or high school suggested that it was possible to have a romantic relationship without sex. Based on this, I assumed that I was an anomaly, doomed to a lonely and loveless existence. It wasn’t until the summer before my freshman year of college that I discovered any evidence to the contrary.

I was scrolling through the guide on my TV one evening after my parents had gone to bed. That was when I discovered a documentary entitled *(A)sexual*, which was playing on HBO. I was fascinated by the idea that the label I had chosen for myself had been right all along and that there may be others like me. Although I ultimately chose to watch *Star Trek: The Next Generation* that night, I did record the documentary for future viewing. It was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.

When I finally did watch *(A)sexual* a few nights later, I found that, not only were there other asexuals, there was an entire community dedicated to us. The documentary itself was less about the particulars of asexuality and more about the struggle of asexuals within the LGBT community. Fortunately, the documentary did lead me – and many other asexuals, I later learned – to a website called AVEN, the Asexual Visibility and Education Network.

Upon accessing the website, I finally learned the definition of asexual: a person who doesn't experience sexual attraction. It was as simple as that. An asexual person could have a romantic relationship. Romantic attraction and sexual attraction are not mutually exclusive, and there is a distinct difference between them. An asexual person doesn't necessarily have to have an asexual partner. I also discovered that an asexual person can have sex and still identify as asexual. In fact, many asexuals do not discover their sexual orientation until after they've already had sex. Some even engage in sex afterwards because they have a sexual partner or they want to have children.

I joined AVEN that very night and have been an active member ever since. Naturally, I was nervous, but with my first post I was greeted by a warm and welcoming community (along with quite a few compliments on my choice of username). It took me quite a long time to give myself a full label, but eventually I settled on demi-heteroromantic asexual. I was happy in the knowledge that this description can still change as I grow and discover myself and that no one would judge me for it or accuse me of lying.

AVEN gave me the opportunity to vent my frustrations of the outside world's lack of understanding. There are separate spaces for humorous encounters with the ignorant and others for the more serious and/or disturbing. I've always felt lucky that most of my stories have fallen into the former category. Most of them involved ignorance on the part of others, leading to comical or aggravating conversations. There

are, however, plenty of equally comical situations resulting from my own ignorance.

One of my favorite examples happened while sitting at a table with several friends eating lunch on campus. While I was thinking about homework, several of the girls were deep in discussion. Eventually, one of them turned to me and asked:

“What do you like on a guy?”

“A well-tailored suit,” I immediately responded. Apparently, I’d misunderstood. Now, I assume that she was talking about body parts, but at the time, that thought never crossed my mind. This friend was very upset with me – she may have thought that I was making fun of her. I still don’t quite understand why. My incomprehension then led me to elaborate: “It couldn’t be a wool suit, though. I hate the texture of wool.”

That friend and I are no longer on speaking terms. I’m uncertain if this incident had anything to do with it. Even after I told my parents about my asexuality – and my mother’s penchant for telling anyone who will listen – it still took me quite some time to be comfortable enough to mention it in casual conversation. At my parent’s 25th anniversary party, I was walking around trying to figure out what to do with myself when my paternal grandmother approached me. Though I don’t have anything against her, I usually try to avoid conversations with her.

“Do you have a boyfriend yet?” She quizzed me.

“No,” I replied simply, unsure what else to say.

“Your sister has one.”

Even if this could be used as a valid argument – which I don’t feel it can be, because I’m not my sister – it should only apply if said sibling is younger. In this case, she is not. She’s more than a year older than me. My grandmother is really old, and she can’t hear very well, and she just plain doesn’t understand things that didn’t make sense in the

1940s (which is about when she was my age). Homosexuality isn't even on her radar; I can't expect her to understand asexuality at all.

“I'm focusing on my studies,” I finally told her after much mental debate. Later, my mom asked me I'd used the "goat argument" on her, which I absolutely didn't. She doesn't have that particular sense of humor necessary to take that joke in stride. Currently, I am quite comfortable with my sexual orientation, and I often bring it up in relevant conversation. I'm much more willing now to openly discuss and answer questions about asexuality. Of course, I still sometimes face rude comments from those who don't understand and don't wish to understand. More often, though, I receive acknowledgement or thoughtful, and occasionally apologetic, questions.

I think that one of the times when I felt the most accepted was when I was studying abroad in Scotland. A group of friends invited me down to a local pub called Buccleuchs, and asexuality was brought up in the conversation. One of them, Jared, who is a biology major, had the most questions. He didn't understand how approximately 1% of the population did not experience sexual attraction. If not for the fact that he was very respectful in his wording and tone while asking how asexuality was not an evolutionary flaw, I would have been extremely insulted. Ultimately, my own perception of myself is still changing. I've changed my label several times in my life, and I think that there is always room for improvement. While I'm entirely certain of the “asexual” part of my orientation and fairly certain of the “demi” part, I'm unsure if the “heteroromantic” part is accurate. I know that this aspect of myself is important to my future in the same way it has been important to my past. It has always affected my relationships and the ways that I interact with my family and friends. Someday, I hope that it will affect romantic relationships, as well.

Taylor Burn
“Turning Point”

I thought I was invincible. Everybody thinks they're invincible at some point in their life. They take risks like jumping out of an airplane for fun or getting into a vehicle with a driver who has been drinking. They think “Oh, I'll be fine. Nothing bad will come of this. What are the odds?” Well, I thought the same thing. I thought God could not touch me; I was invincible.

I drove this same route plenty of times. Ever since my brother moved to Fargo, North Dakota with his girlfriend and my nephew, I would take a semi-monthly cruise to the flatlands. I would stop for snacks and gasoline, getting my usual Red bull and Combos crackers. I put the Red bull in my center console, glimpsing momentarily at the ornament tucked inside that my grandmother had given me.

Once I got to Fargo, I would spend as much time playing with my nephew as possible. It's hard not seeing him grow up, not watching his first steps, not hearing his first real words, or not seeing the difference in his size. It is true that I can see physical differences every single time I take a trip out there, but it is not the same. My counselor asked me if I could do whatever I wanted right now, what would I do? I told him I would move to Fargo to be closer to my brother and nephew. That would make life complete for me. That would make life worth living.

Unfortunately, I fall back into the deep end. Every day is a battle getting out of bed. It is a struggle to look at myself in the mirror. My gaze lands on my sad eyes and the gentle curve of a frown set in stone. “Why are you so damn sad? Why can't you just be happy that you're alive? Why aren't you happy to be alive?!” I ask myself. Where is my passion for life? The wrinkles between my eyebrows show fury. I look

into the blue eyes and wonder why they could not see this coming. They can see through people, through their lies and their shortcomings. They can see shades of my mother, able to distinguish between every single one. They can even shut everything out by closing... eyelashes locked... sleeping reality away, until I wake up, look in the mirror again wishing that it would have been the end. This time I see shoulders hunched over, scars on my abdomen, the physical consequences of the accident. I straighten the vertebrae in my back and push my chest forward, trying to stretch the slipped disc, trying to stop the pain. I slouch again.

I see a 20-year-old girl who made a mistake. I see the headlights again. Again. Again. They appear to be coming straight towards me. Wait. No, the car is parked. Am I screaming? I am screaming louder than ever before. Oh God, I am upside down, hanging from my seatbelt, conscious again. Oh my God, I cannot breathe. I see two people running towards me. I see the girl is crying. Can she hear me? Can anybody hear me? I see the windshield shattered, inches from my face. I can feel the glass in my hair, still wet from the shower that I took two hours prior. I feel the steering wheel pinning my legs to the seat. Am I alive? This cannot be real. I am dead. Is this what death feels like? Why can't anybody hear me? I can see them. Can they see me? I try to stop screaming. I can't stop. I see the light.

I try to recall what happened. I remember looking up and seeing darkness. I remember hitting the bushes on the left hand side, going 72 mph with my cruise set. It was not just my front left tire that hit the bushes though, it was the entire car. I turned the steering wheel to the right, trying to get out of the bushes. I turned too sharp. I tried to turn back to the left, and darted towards the median again. I turned to the right one more time, knowing that I was going to roll. From the time that it took for me to realize I was in the bushes until the time I realized

I was going to roll, a calm came over me. I did not tense up. I relaxed and said to myself, “this is the end. This is it. This is the end.”

In that moment, I embraced death. I was ready for it. If I was standing in front of a loaded gun and the person asked me what my last wish was, I would have told them my last wish was for them to pull the trigger. I was ready to die. Did I know that my sand had run out? Did I drive into the bushes to end the misery that I existed in? What made me crash into the bushes? Had I fallen asleep? Did I pass out? Did I hit something? Was I distracted?

“What happened?” the sheriff asked me in the Emergency Room.

“Did you fall asleep?” my mother accused when she showed up in Detroit Lakes.

“Did you hit a deer?” was another scenario that people painted in their heads to justify how I rolled my vehicle.

The questions always came first. I would say I was in a car accident and they would ask those questions. At first, I lied. I said that I hit a chunk of plywood, tried to swerve, overcorrected, and rolled. At first, I started to believe it, especially since there was a piece of plywood on the highway about 15 yards from where the car rolled. I started to believe the lie I was telling people. I knew what had happened. I was ashamed. I was guilty. I was guilty of feeling invincible.

“So beautiful, Julia!” I commented on a Facebook picture at 7:28 p.m. At 7:29 p.m., I dialed 9-1-1. The phone was still in my hand, clutching the steering wheel. Upside down, hanging from my seatbelt, I dialed 9-1-1. The only reason I was able to dial was because the phone was still in my hand. Aside from Facebook, I had Pandora streaming music to my radio. I had been texting my brother’s girlfriend among other people. I was driving 72 mph with my cruise set, distracted by an electronic device that controlled my life.

I remember watching the “Don’t text and drive” commercials, while sitting on the couch, phone glued to my palm. I thought I was

invincible. I thought I was so good at it that it would never happen to me. I would never be mid-text and smash into a tree or into another vehicle. I was so good at using my phone while I was driving that I did not bother to try and stop doing it. It was habit and second nature to buckle my seatbelt and put my phone in my hand as I shifted the car into Drive.

I wince as I flashback to the moments that followed the accident. I was on the ground, body convulsing, sobbing. I could feel glass in my shirt from the windshield and a strange man was kneeling next to me. His fingers were intertwined with mine as he tried to soothe me and tell me everything was okay. I recall the conversation.

“Were you alone? Was there anybody else in the car?”

“I was alone. There was nobody else with me.”

“Can you tell me your name?”

“Taylor... Burm.”

“How old are you, Taylor?”

“I’m 20. I’m almost 21. Oh God, I could have died before I turned 21.”

“You are okay. You are alive.”

“I should be dead! Look at my car! It’s upside down! I shouldn’t be alive. I should be dead,” I laughed through a sob.

“Listen to me, you are alive. There’s a reason you are alive. There’s a bigger plan for you. You have too much left to do. Breathe...” I let out another sob.

“I’m cold. Oh no. I’m cold. I’m dying. I’m going towards the light.”

“Taylor. Squeeze my hand. You’re here. Breathe. You’re alive. Slow breaths.” I started to scream again, tears fell in a steady stream.

I think back to those raw moments of desire and fear. I wanted to be dead. I was scared to live. I wish I would have died. I struggle every day with the consequences of my actions. My airbag could have

gone off, pushing my head into the caved-in-roof. I could have been paralyzed from the neck or waist down. I could have had passengers in the vehicle that would not have survived; the roof was caved all the way into the passenger seat and the backseat was not physically in the car after it had rolled. I could have crossed the median and smashed head-first into another vehicle, murdering innocent travelers.

I could be spending my days in jail on charges of vehicular homicide. Instead, I rot in a different kind of prison cell. My mind feels as though it is rotting away, taking my heart, soul, and passion with it. I replay the sound of the tires squealing on the asphalt, the screams coming from my own lungs. I feel the guilt of survival. Why me? Why did I survive?

When I was loaded into the ambulance, somehow my purse ended up with me. I'm not sure how it got from inside the totaled car to inside the ambulance, but there it was. There were three items inside of it: my wallet, my makeup bag, and the silver guardian angel ornament that was secured in my center console. Engraved in the angel were the words: "Granddaughter, I love you with all my heart." My grandmother had given me this on my 16th Christmas, knowing that I had started driving, and wanting to keep me safe. How did this angel go from my center console to my purse? It was a miracle that it went to the hospital. It was in the moment that I pulled the angel from my purse that I realized why I was alive: a guardian angel.

Someday, I may jump out of a plane for fun. I may get into a vehicle with someone who is under the influence. Someday, I may get distracted while I am driving, but I will never text and drive again. I will never feel invincible towards death again. It could have happened to me and it still could. I am not invincible. I am a miracle.

Taylor Burn
“Silence”

His watch ticks against my skin. I anticipate every second, trying to guess when the next tick will be. My index finger bounces on his abdomen to the beat of the drum. His breath inflates my own lungs as I try to match my inhales with his, match my exhales with his. His breathing gets deeper and I know he has fallen deep into sleep.

How can he dream when there's so much to talk about? “I can't love you as much as you love me. My gas tank is only half as big as yours.” Now he sleeps, peacefully, ignoring the elephant roaring in the corner of the room. “You don't give me as much as I need. You never write me letters. You don't care,” he says. I realize that I am holding my breath, awaiting his response. I let it out with a sob. Can he hear the tears streaming down my cheeks? He reacts and wipes them away with his thumb.

There's so much that I want to say. His sighs are loud, but his snores are louder. His words scream guilt into my head, but his silence screams expiration into my heart.

The heater ticks against the comforter. It ticks at a different beat than the watch. The contrast drives me crazy. Why can't they be synchronized? I turn towards him, lying on my left side. The pillow crunches under my neck, the foam attempting to form to my spine. My leg slides under the sheet.

I wonder if I will be able to sleep with this monster lying next to me. Then it is silent. We wake at the same time. Then it is silent.

The silence is exactly what I want. I don't want to fight anymore. I don't want to talk about the future or the past. I want to sleep alone, falling asleep to the ticking of my own drum. I want to exist alone, separate from a man who depends on my words to wrap his arms around.

Sometimes the silence eats at me and I wish I had his comforting “I love you.” Other times, I lie in bed thinking about the noise that used to come from the living room. My parents spewed venom at each other as they speared words below the belt. My mother played the you-never-back-me-up card. My father played the what-do-you-want-me-to-do card. I sat in my room, ear against the wooden door, listening to the muffled argument. One of them charged down the hallway towards my bedroom and I scurried into bed. I did not want them to know I was listening. I turned off the light, pulled the covers over my head, and waited for the footsteps to end at the foot of my bed.

The door creaked open. “Are you awake?” my father asked. I pretended to be asleep as he tiptoed toward the edge of the bed. He leaned down, kissed me on the forehead, and said “goodnight, baby girl, love you” tucking the covers in at my sides. He closed the door behind him as he left. I let out a sigh, realizing that I had been holding my breath.

I am holding my breath now, thinking back to my parent’s arguments. It is almost like I do not want to relive it, so I hold back on the only thing giving me life: breath. I let out a sob. He stares at the ceiling, not attempting to break my tears this time. He knows that they are uncontrollable. He knows that he mustn’t touch me or comfort me.

After I self-soothe, I lie on my back and think about what to say next. Do I tell him that it’s not him, but it’s me? Do I spew venom like my mother used to, blaming him for his insensitivity and carelessness? Do I stay silent?

I decide on making noise because that is the only thing that will end this uncertainty and pain. The three syllables slip off the tongue, familiar yet foreign. I have said them before, but I have never said them as goodbye. This is closure. This is what we both need.

“I love you.” Then it is silent.

Dramatic Writing



Jillian Knutson
“GAY STUFF”

CHARACTERS

CHUCK, mid 20’s. Gives off a Fred Durst-y kind of vibe.

ISAAC, late teens/early 20’s. Nervous and lurchy.

JIM, late 30’s. A timid dad type.

BURGER KING MANAGER, late 30’s. Working a double shift.

SETTING

A Burger King bathroom, designed for single use. One sink, one toilet, one urinal. Everything is a variant of white or gray. It’s very basic looking, but still manages to feel outdated. The bathroom gives off a feeling of desertion and neglect; clearly, not many people come to eat here. The place is by no means immaculate, but it’s not too bad either.

(Lights up. CHUCK is leaning up against the wall farthest away from the bathroom door, looking bored, half-heartedly messing around with his flip phone.

ISAAC hesitantly opens the door and joins CHUCK in the bathroom, making sure to lock the door behind him. He looks flustered. CHUCK puts his phone away, puts his arms out in a type of phantom hug.)

CHUCK

Hey, there he is! Ten minutes late, but hey. I’m not complaining.

ISAAC

(quietly, almost panicky) What the fuck, man?

CHUCK

That’s no way to greet your drug dealer!

(ISSAC visibly winces at ‘drug dealer’, looks back at the door.)

Now come on, let me get a look at you. It’s been what, two weeks now? You’ve changed so much since then.

ISAAC

Shut up.

CHUCK

(CHUCK puts a hand on ISAAC's shoulder.)

Isaac. Isaac, listen to me. You look sick. You look like you have jaundice. You look like you've been living on Mountain Dew and that's it. You look like you've been drinking so much of it that it's seeping out of your pores. You got that guy-living-in-his-mom's-basement thing going on, and that's coming from a guy who actually does. Is that Cheetos dust under your nails? You gotta start getting some sun, man, Jesus. And drink some fucking water. Hydration is important.

(ISAAC shakes CHUCK off.)

ISAAC

Hey, you mind keeping your fucking voice down? What are we doing here, man? Why aren't we in *your* mom's basement?

CHUCK

Now calm down, kid. It's all good. You see, Mom was getting a little suspicious, all these sketchy looking dudes coming around all the time, never wanting to stay for dinner. That always hurt her, man. You guys always had an excuse. So I figured I'd change my location.

ISAAC

I'm not gonna eat dinner with my dealer's mom, bro. That's weird. Aren't you like 40 now? And also, why the fuck did you choose the fucking Burger King bathroom of all places?

CHUCK

Are you kidding me? It's perfect. No cameras, no cops, no innocent bystanders; I mean, have you seen this fucking place? No one's here. 8 o'clock on a Tuesday night and it's as dead as a graveyard.

ISAAC

Let's just hurry this up. (ISAAC digs out his wallet from his back pocket.) I don't feel comfortable being here. I gotta say it, man. I think it's a shitty idea. What if someone notices? This is weird, you gotta admit it.

CHUCK

Don't worry. I've thought about it; it's not like I haven't thought about it. If someone knocks or tries to come in we just have to pretend we're doing gay stuff, that's all.

ISAAC

(disbelieving) Gay stuff.

CHUCK

Yeah, gay stuff. What are you, a homophobe or something? Come on, I thought you wanted to hurry this up. What do you want, an ounce?

ISAAC

Just a half.

CHUCK

(snorts) Faggot.

(CHUCK pulls out a plastic bag from one of his jacket pockets as ISAAC takes out his money.)

This is good shit, man, I'm telling you. Don't smoke it all at once.

(There is a knock at the door. ISAAC jumps; CHUCK doesn't seem to notice.)

Or I guess you can, what do I care? Actually yeah, do it. I changed my mind.

JIM

(from off stage) Hello?

ISAAC

(whisper-yelling) Oh fuck, man!

(ISAAC jams the money back in his wallet, suddenly a flurry of activity. He motions for CHUCK to put the weed away, paces, puts his hands up to his face, paces some more. CHUCK seems started for a moment but remains calm, slowly putting the weed away.)

What the fuck are we gonna do?

CHUCK

Shut up for a second, will you? (shouting to Jim) Sorry buddy, it's gonna be a while still.

JIM

Oh! Oh. Um, okay.

ISAAC

(panicking) I told you! I told you. I fucking. Told you.

CHUCK

Okay. Okay. Shut up.

ISAAC

What the fuck kind of half-assed piece of shit plan—

CHUCK

I know I've been saying it for a while now and maybe the meaning's been lost or something but for the love of god, you have to shut up. Alright? There's a man right outside of that door and there's no way he can't hear that there's two people in here.

(JIM knocks again.)

(yelling) I told you man, I'm gonna be a while!

JIM

Sure, sure. But uh, hey. The, uh, manager says that they're closing up soon.

BURGER KING MANAGER

(yelling, farther away) I got to go home too, you know!

ISAAC

I'm getting out of here, man.

(ISAAC turns to leave; CHUCK grabs his arm, pulling him back.

CHUCK

We gotta do the gay stuff, man.

ISAAC

What?! No!

BURGER KING MANAGER

(to JIM) Tell 'em I gotta clean the bathrooms still!

JIM

He says that he has to, uh, clean the bathrooms still.

ISAAC

No. This is bullshit. You're a shitty dealer and I hate you.

(ISAAC turns to leave again.)

CHUCK

You can't just walk out!

ISAAC

Better than getting arrested for public indecency! Gay stuff. (scoffs) I can't believe that was your back up plan.

CHUCK

Well just—pretend to be my disabled brother or something! Come on, we need a plan!

JIM

Are there...two of you in there? Hello?

BURGER KING MANAGER

(closer this time, like he's right outside of the door) What? They better not be doing gay stuff in there. (knocks loudly) This is the manager. I'm giving you five seconds to get your asses out of there before I call the cops.

ISAAC

(whining) Chuck, we can't have the fucking cops here, man.

CHUCK

(to JIM and BURGER KING MANAGER) Okay, okay, we're coming.

(CHUCK unlocks the door, opens it; ISAAC runs out. JIM and BURGER KING MANAGER enter just enough that they're on stage. BURGER KING MANAGER looks slightly angry but more exhausted than anything; JIM looks like he has to pee.)

My brother's disabled, you know.

(CHUCK walks out. BURGER KING MANAGER AND JIM look at each other for a moment, then...)

BURGER KING MANAGER

Was that guy doing gay stuff with his retarded brother?

(Lights out.)

Emily Treptow
“Tea Time”

Cast of Characters

Beatrice: An older women between the ages of 60-70. Wearing a light blue dress with a large hat.

Marcie: An older women between the ages of 60-70. Wearing a magenta colored dress with a large hat.

Clara: An older women between the ages of 60-70. Wearing a champagne colored dress with a large hat.

Lucille: An older women between the ages of 60-70. Wearing a lavender colored dress with a large hat.

Waiter 1: Blond hair. In waiter’s attire from a fancier restaurant.

Waiter 2 / Harry: Red hair. In waiter’s attire from a fancier restaurant.

ACT I

Scene 1

The stage is set with a four person sized round table with a white linen on top. There are neatly folded napkins set next to small white plates across from Chippendale Style chairs. The chairs are set with three facing the audience and one facing towards the stage. Atop the napkins sets of gold silverware. There is a center piece of pastel colored flowers. Across the table on the other side of the stage is a marble statue of a David by Michel Angelo. The backdrop to the set is white with a water colored painted garden.

Note: Keep in mind this is based off of British Comedy. Basing humor from of the BBC show Vicious.

Big Ben chimes four times.

CURTAIN OPENS

Waiters bustle around the table to add final touches to the table set.

Three ladies walk onto the stage from opposite the table with Lucille in tow. The first three ladies make it to their seats and sit down.

Lucille pulls out the one remaining chair at the table facing away from the audience.

MARCIE

(To Lucille)

No, No! Don't sit there!

Lucille jumps, startled by Marcie's loud statement.

LUCILLE

Why not?!

Marcie waves Lucille away.

MARCIE

Because I wish to see the Waiter when he comes over.

BEATRICE

Oh yes, yes please!

Beatrice glances over searching for the Waiter.

LUCILLE

We see the Waiters every day!

CLARA

Oh Lucille, we can move over.

LUCILLE

Oh no, no.

Lucille leaves her chair.

I'll just go over here.

Lucille walks over to the statue.

CLARA

Lucille get back here!

LUCILLE

(Dramatically)

"I've been shunned...only to have the best view.

After she says that, Waiter 1 walks out onto the stage with a tea pot and a tray of pastries. The women quiet down and stare. Lucille stares as Waiter 1 walks past her.

MARCIE

Marcie waves her hand next to face to cool her down.

Is it hot in here? I think I'm going through menopause...again!

BEATRICE

Oh, it not just you, dear.

Waiter 1 bends slightly to set down the tea pot and tray of pastries. In front of him, Beatrice leans around the waiter and looks at his behind. Waiter 1 stands upright and looks at Lucille then address Clara.

WAITER 1

(To Clara)

CLARA

Will she be joining you?

Yes she is. Lucille, get over here!

LUCILLE

No! no- I'm busy!

CLARA

Good heavens. With what?!

LUCILLE

Appreciating art.

Lucille runs her hand up and down the statue. While her eyes are tracking up and down Waiter 1.

WAITER 1

Waiter 1, confused, looks back at the rest of the group.

Alright, I will some sugar for your tea.

MARCIE

Waiter 1 turns to leave.

(Swooning over Waiter)

No need for sugar. We have plenty.

BEATRICE

Waiter 1 stops suddenly and turns back towards the ladies.

No, we don't need any more sugar.

MARCIE

Hand motion to Waiter.

Yes, plenty.

CLARA

The Waiter exits the stage.

My, my. He looks like a blond Prince Harry.

MARCIE

How nice is that? It's like we're royalty!

BEATRICE

Like Downton Abbey?!

CLARA

No, that's a television show, dear.

LUCILLE

However, a brilliant show! That I wish to be home in time for!

CLARA

Lucille, will you please come sit down?

LUCILLE

No, I'm waiting for more art to appear.

Lucille crosses her arms and refuses to sit down. Waiter 1 returns and kindly hands Lucille a cup of tea and exits the stage.

Lucille swoons and takes a sip of her tea.

BEATRICE

(Takes a bite of a pastry)

These scones are too delicious!

MARCIE

I know what else might be delicious.

CLARA

Eat your food and drink your tea, dear. We're too old for the poor boy.

ACT 2

Scene 1

MARCIE

Waiter 1 starts to collect and pile plates. The Ladies look concerned.

(Touching Waiter 1's arm)

Are you sure you can handle all of those heavy plates, dear?

BEATRICE

We don't want you to strain yourself.

WAITER 1

Nonsense. I can get someone to help me. I'll go get him.

Waiter 1 leaves, and ladies look excited.

MARCIE

(Addressing the ladies.)

There's another one?!

The Waiter 1 walks back out onto the stage with Waiter 2 in tow.

MARCIE

The ladies swoon and Lucille dramatically turns to watch both Waiters walk to the table.

The ladies look pleased as the Waiters clear off the table.

(To Waiter 2)

I haven't seen you before. How long have you been here?

WAITER 1

He's new. Actually, he started the job yesterday. Oh sorry, where are my manners. This is my boyfriend, Harry.

Waiter 1 puts his hand on Waiter 2's shoulder.

CLARA

Marcie and Beatrice look stunned and Clara giggles.

What a lovely twist.

Lucille looks surprised and puts a hand on the statue to keep herself from fainting.

WAITER 1

Will that be all for today, ladies?

Beatrice and Marcie are speechless.

CLARA

Yes, yes it will. Thank you!

The Waiters leave and Lucille walks over and sets her tea cup down.

LUCILLE

(With feminine determination.)

I could turn them.

CURTAIN

Short Fiction



Felicia Schneiderhan

“Pop. 1276”

In the deep summer when the Mississippi River Valley is filled with life, everything is misty, wet and soft. On a road, surrounded by corn at its peak, cicadas buzz in anticipation of the hot, hot day. Everything moves slinky, silky, slow, from the caterpillars to the tassels atop the corn. The world is so full you think it might burst. This is the hardest part of the summer for Linda, who feels the fullness in her muscles and thinks she, too, might burst if she doesn't find some place to go.

On Friday morning, Linda rises just before dawn, puts on her t-shirt and jeans from the day before, steps quietly down to the kitchen. She grabs her sack lunch, slips into work boots, heads out to the truck. She lights a cigarette before turning the key, backs out of her dad's driveway and turns toward the highway, just like she's done every summer morning for the past two years, since she and her best friend Peggy graduated with the class of '93 and started working construction.

This summer they're working Highway 18. Every day, Linda and Peggy take their stands five miles apart, each holding a sign and a walkie-talkie. They watch the traffic crawl, they wave to truck-drivers and kids in station wagons, they hand off the baton. And they talk. From 6 a.m. until 4 p.m., they talk through the walkie-talkie. They talk about their friends, their families, the cars, the weather, the carnival, the fishing, the party tomorrow night or last night. They stop talking only for the phone call Peggy expects from her son's father everyday at two o'clock. For the past three days, they've talked of only one thing.

On Friday morning, just after six a.m., when Linda has only just taken her post and lit another cigarette, Peggy's voice comes over as if are mid-conversation. “I still can't believe he did it on his birthday.”

Linda holds the walkie-talkie away from her cheek, careful not to let it touch her skin, wary of pimples in the hot, sweaty sun. She's thinking about the sweat dripping down her back, the sun already beating, flies swarming, dragonflies swooping low. The air is sweet with upturned earth and corn pollen. There aren't many cars out so early, just a few intermittent trucks. She counts slowly. At 25, she'll stop the next car and hand them the baton.

"Hello?" Peggy says. "Are you there?"

"I'm here. I'm counting."

Another truck rolls by. Peggy asks, "What's up with you today?"

"Nothing. I'm just...I'm just tired of talking about it."

"What? How can you be tired of talking about it? This isn't something we get tired of talking about. Fishing is something I get tired of talking about. Drinking. The fucking Twin-O-Rama. Five suicides in two years is not something we get tired of talking about."

"I don't mean I'm tired of it. I just...I just can't keep going over it."

But it's too late: Peggy launches her litany. "We need to talk about what's going on here, my friend. We need to remember this started two years ago when Shane's dad 'accidentally' drowned setting lines. Then Mark Kaplan's bike 'stalled' on the tracks. Don Olson 'forgot' to raise the garage door. Cort Peterson hanged himself. And now Pat Hutchins shoots himself in his truck with his family's heirloom rifle. On his birthday."

It all seems so unrealistic, as Peggy spews out her litany. That anything this crazy, this tragic, could happen in such a small town.

"I mean, who's next?" Peggy asks. "Who's gonna make it a half dozen?"

For the last two years, it seems suicide is the only way out of Cassville, Wisconsin, population 1276.

Unless you are a woman.

Alexander Pratt is the only man Linda knows who isn't likely to kill himself anytime soon.

Alex is a computer specialist from Madison, brought in to overhaul the machinist plant. Every Monday morning Linda waits for his blue Honda to drive over the hill toward Cassville. Every Friday afternoon she waits for his car to go back over the hill toward Madison. Linda always turns the sign to stop as soon as Alex's car comes up.

"Why is it I always seem to be first in line?" he asked her, last Friday, on his way out of town.

"Just bad luck, I guess."

"Or good luck, depending how you look at it."

Linda bit her lip. How do you look at it? she wanted to ask.

"Do you like jazz?" she asked.

His eyebrows raised behind wire-rimmed glasses. "Do you?"

She lowered her eyes and shook her head. She didn't know anything about jazz. There was an awkward silence and she prayed the last car would come soon from the other direction, prayed the blue baton would appear so she could hand it off to Alex and send him on his way. Linda imagined his house – hardwood floors and big windows and books—books books books all over the house. She imagined his bedroom upstairs, that his bed had flannel checked sheets, the kind all smart, sturdy men like to sleep on, even in summer. She imagined he shopped for his own food and made himself dinner on Saturday nights and read and ate and listened to jazz music, with lots of piano. She imagined all kinds of things about Alexander Pratt's life.

By 2:15, the daily call from Peggy's son's father hasn't come. "He crashed last night at my mom's place," Peggy says. "I set the alarm for him. Where the hell is he?"

"He'll call," Linda says. "He's been up drinking with Pat's friends. They do this every time."

“I don’t care. I set that alarm for a reason. Least he can do his haul is butt out of bed to call me. I’m the one working.”

“Give him a few minutes. He’ll call.”

But he doesn’t call. The minutes tick by. Cars and semis swish and sashay past, truckers honking, kids waving at the two girls. Linda doesn’t even care about the baton. She wants Ron to call so Peggy will feel better and they can get on with things. 2:30, 3:00. No call. Peggy’s swearing a blue streak. It’s not anger, Linda knows; it’s fear.

Then, at 3:25, the blue Honda emerges over the hill.

“You’re early,” she says to Alex when he stops for her turned sign.

“Family picnic tonight in Madison.”

“I’d like to go to Madison,” Linda says.

“You should come sometime.”

“I should come now.”

There it is – hanging in the air between them, what she’s been thinking all summer. She isn’t even sure where she got the courage to say it, except maybe it’s been simmering so long it finally just broke through. There’s a pause, a pause filled with incessant cicadas and idling engines, a pause bursting with possibility. Linda waits, dusty work boots and jeans, brown hair pulled back in a trucker’s cap, muscles lean and flexed, ready to jump into the blue Honda and disappear.

Keegan Still

“Found, Oval and Final”

Music can be heard. A low A chord without the third is softly resonating like a resting heartbeat, an ascendant melody of E, F# and G an octave above is its consoling inamorata. The hands that orchestrated this grave masterwork move with the lethargic deliberation of a maestro weary of his craft. In the dark room where this somber threnody resounds the half-light of dawn begins to make its way through the window, stretching its feeble gleam onto the grand piano where he plays. An austere man whose wide frame and grave appearance belies his subtle grace. His eyes are closed, for he does not need to see the keys to inspire his theme. Simple and melancholic though it may be, it is familiar and comforting.

His head nods to the pulse of the interval, sustaining his trance-like focus. His hand moves to expand the melody; descending from E, then to C, and quickly to B, but a dissonance is struck as Bb key is pressed in error. He stops, disrupting the rhythm—the heartbeat—furrows his brow and his lips contort into a slight frown. He begins again, but plays the interval from B instead of A. His brow furrows deeper—arrhythmia sustained—and his lips contort further. He begins again. Another sour note. His contorted lips part and expels a harsh sigh between clenched teeth. He begins again. Another sour note. And another. As he begins again and strikes the wrong interval altogether, he snaps.

“FUCK!” He shouts, and slams his hands on the keys, hastily turning away from the piano and hanging his head as the ear-splitting cacophony resounds like an aural, choral wall of thorns. Eventually, it fades and silence fills the room.

He sits there, still and silent, his head in his hands. His long, straight hair hangs over his face and between his calloused fingertips. If

not for the slight rise and fall of his chest and the faintest sound of breath, he very well could be mistaken for a statue. A caricature of sculpture, not a marble paragon of beauty and strength like that of Michelangelo's David but one of uncertainty and weakness, made of flesh and blood, as vulnerable to the woes of disease as any imperfect being.

With a weary ache in his movement he raises his head from his hands, his hair still hanging in his face. Any anger it had shown had left, the shadows hanging under his eyes speak only of fatigue. He looks around the room draped in amorphous shadow. To his right, a large black leather lounging chair in the corner, an end table to its left, a turntable to its right and the walls next to it lined with bookcases that are filled with music. To his left; several paintings of varying sizes hung on the wall. With a sullen effort he rises from the piano bench, running his hands through his hair to the back of his head, and walks towards the bookcases, the veritable library of music that is displayed on their bent, tired shelves. CD's, DVD's, vinyl records and even cassette tapes, all beyond practical measure, yet counted innumerable times before. He stands there with his hands behind his back, staring at the massive collection that's taken the majority of his life to amass. Eventually, he retrieves a record and settles himself in the chair.

As the chair swallows him in familiar comfort, he looks at the cover of the record. Even in the relative dark, the artwork can be clearly made out. It's a photograph, depicting the profile of a female dancer on her knees, bending backwards until her head is touching her toes. For several minutes, he stares at the image. Such a contortion of the body demonstrates the flexibility and resilience of the human condition in trials of both physical and emotional adversity. Bending yet not breaking, even as the pressure builds upon the spine and threatens to break under whatever weight burdens the dancer of tribulation's silent ballet. Eventually, he reaches into the cover to pull out the record but stops and sets it on the end table, next to his cell phone and the business card under

it. He stares at the paintings on the opposite side of the room, but the relative dark of the room makes it impossible to make out what they portray. All that can be seen are black, cancerous masses of varying shapes. He sits there for a time, shifting in the chair, tapping his foot, occasionally glancing at his phone. Time fades from lucid comprehension, seconds stretching themselves into thin, transparent minutes. Eventually he reaches for it, hesitating slightly, and turns it on. 6:11 AM, no missed calls. The numbers glare at him as he stares, their artificial luminescence being the brightest light in the room. With a shallow sigh, he sets it back on the table. His attention then turns to the card next to it. He picks it up and stares at it; flipping it to its other side and eventually sets it back next to his cell phone, half-tossing it. He turns his gaze towards the piano in the center of the room, and then to the window. The morning sun lurks on the horizon with its virulent shades of pink and yellow, blending together to contaminate the dark of the night and spread its infectious hues to the entirety of the sky like some loathsome disease.

“Hopefully they’ll get back to me soon,” he mutters. A faint tremor can be heard as the breath leaves his lips.

With a final sigh, he rises from his chair and walks back to the piano with a slight drag in his feet. He sits back down and begins to play again—the interval trembling under an uneasy hand, the melody uneven and erratic.

Samantha Wolf

“Beauty and the Beast”

Before your great-grandfather’s time, and his great-grandfather before him, there lived a girl. She lived off of her father’s wealthy table, and never wanted for anything. Extremely beautiful, she never wanted for company. She was beloved by all that met her. While walking in the forest one day, she swore she heard a voice beckon to her from deep within the woods. Unable to resist such a call, she raced into the forest, marveling at the way her feet landed perfectly away from sharp sticks, the way her golden hair never tangled in the passing branches. On and on she ran, not tiring, until she finally noticed that she was in an altogether unfamiliar place. The sun had started to set, and the forest, once so welcoming, now closed in around her. She wandered more cautiously, jumping at little sounds. A dark shape loomed before her. It morphed into a grand manor house as she walked closer. It was crumbling from the ground up. Nonetheless, it had once been beautiful in its day, and she welcomed the idea of civilization over the dark forest. When her father and the townspeople came looking for her, they would not be able to miss the great manse. She would rest here until she had been found. She struggled to open the great oaken door, and once she slipped inside, it shut behind her. The entrance hall was dirty with decades of dust. She left small footprints where she walked, and the hem of her dress was soon black with the grime of ages. She walked cautiously into the hall, trying to get a sense of where she was. She took a candle from a wall sconce and lit it, the sudden glow of light making her feel suddenly alone. She crept through the hall into the dining hall. The table was set as though for a party, but there was no sign of life anywhere. Just dirt and ash. Feeling more bold, she strode toward the west end of the house. As she got closer, a low rumble began emanating through the house. By the time she reached the ornate doors to the west wing’s private chambers, it had grown to a

deafening roar. She almost stopped walking, an oppressive weight settling on her shoulders and preventing her from moving. She could see shadows move from the corner of her eyes. And yet she went on. She touched the doorknob, and the roar formed into words.

“YOU SHALL NOT CROSS THIS THRESHOLD.” The roar screeched.

The girl jumped back, terrified at the thought of someone living in such a place, and the fact that this someone seemed to be watching her. She turned and ran, trying to find her way out of the house. She slipped on her hem as she came to the stairs, and rolled all the way down. After lying there, stunned, she sat up. The roar had gone away. Upon standing, she realized that she was quite covered in dirt. She walked slowly, bruised body protesting every step. There must be a bath somewhere in here, there must be! She eventually found what she was looking for – a small bath chamber, the bath itself fed by an outside stream. She dipped a slender foot in the water, and immediately jerked it back out again. It was deathly cold, too cold for washing. She sighed in despair and slumped to the floor.

“WHO ARE YOU?” The roar howled, out of the blue. She jumped so badly she almost fell in the bath. She scrambled to put her back against the wall, and faced the door. “WHO ARE YOU?”

“I... I’m the daughter of the wealthiest man in town!” She said.

I am the most beautiful girl of the countryside! I am the most beloved woman in the land!” The room suddenly grew cold, almost as cold as the water. She shivered, drawing her knees to her chest and wrapping her arms around them. The weight once again settled on her, compelling her to action. She suddenly felt dirty, disgusting. Who was she? Sobbing, she stood up and went over to a cupboard. Inside, she found a straight blade razor and a towel. “WHO ARE YOU?” The roar continued to demand. She turned toward the mirror, and hacked her hair until it was boyishly short, then shaved even that from her head. As she sheared her locks, the weight began to lift from her shoulders. The shadows in the

corner of her eye receded. Her head bleeding in many places, she sank into the bath, finally cleansing herself of the dirt. The water no longer seemed cold.

“WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU?” the voice hissed.

“I don’t know,” she wept. “I don’t know...”

After a time, she raised herself from the bath and dried herself off. Her head felt light, and she dared not look at the pile where her hair lay. She tiptoed out of the bath chamber, suddenly ravenous. Instinct led her to where the kitchen was located. Though the place had been abandoned for many years, she still found some preserved food. It was strung up too high for her to reach, however. The only way to get to it was to climb a rickety ladder, rotten through in some places. She sighed in despair.

“WHY ARE YOU HERE?” The voice was relentless. She was not scared by it anymore, only saddened. “WHY ARE YOU HERE?”

“I was lost in the woods,” she said plaintively. “I thought this place would be safe to stay in until someone found me.” The room grew hot, stifling. Once again, the weight landed on her, compelling her to action. She went into the pantry and grabbed firewood. She stacked it in the kitchen fireplace, and lit it from her candle. She dragged a large kettle over to the fireplace and set it on the hook. “WHY ARE YOU HERE?” She made trips back and forth from the bath chamber until the pot was filled with water. It was soon boiling. “I’ll show you I’m good for something!” she screeched. “I’ll show you!” She grabbed some herbs from the pantry and began to throw them into the kettle. The herbs boiled into a fragrant tea. She filled a cracked cup and took a sip. Immediately she doubled over and began retching. She had poisoned herself. It was a long time before she was able to sit up again, and longer still until she was able to stand. The effects seemed to have worn off. She climbed the rickety ladder to reach the cured meat hanging from the ceiling. It didn’t seem so unstable now.

“WHY ARE YOU HERE? WHY ARE YOU HERE?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “I don’t know...”

She wandered the estate in a daze. She found her way to a tower. Part of the wall had fallen away. It was a long drop to the cobblestone courtyard below. She looked out to the sky, not seeing the glare of the sun or the shine of the moon. It was a dark night, a lonely night. She sighed.

“WHY DO YOU STAY?” The voice hissed. “WHY DO YOU STAY?”

The weight once more settled on her shoulders, heavier and more insistent this time. She closed her eyes and felt the wind whip around her. It would be quick. Just a step off the ledge. “WHY DO YOU STAY?” Who was she? Why was she here on this plane? What good was she? Take away all that she was physically, all that she could do, and what was left? What was left...

Her eyes snapped open. She marched down from the tower, the voice continuing to question her. “WHY DO YOU STAY? WHY DO YOU STAY?”

She climbed the stairs and headed for the west wing. The voice, suddenly aware of her intention, became unbearable to listen to. It was a hurricane of anger, a whirlwind of hate. It was harder and harder for her to go on. The weight tried to strangle her. The shadows from the corner of her eyes leaped and threatened to take her. And yet, she finally reached the door. She grabbed the knob, twisted it, and threw the door open. Immediately, the voice was silenced. She was left in a vacuum of sound. The weight was gone, and she could stand up straight. Nothing moved. The door opened onto a forest path, heading back toward town.

There had been no one in the mansion but her.

Jamie Taft

“Taking Back my Life”

The rain pelted my head as I ran down the sidewalk. I just had to get away, I couldn't take it anymore. The fighting, the yelling, any of it. Lucas was just a hateful man and I couldn't be there anymore. I stopped in front of a familiar blue, one story house. There was a light on inside, were they home? Or did they just leave a light on like other people to make it look like someone is home? Lightening cackled in the sky, I shivered. I slowly walked up the walkway to the door and knocked as loud as my weak fist could muster. The outdoor light turned on, blinding me for a second. The door opened, revealing Danielle on the other side of the screen door.

“Cammie?” She looked surprised to see me. “What are you doing here?”

“Can I come in?” I asked, hugging myself. Danielle nodded and opened the screen door for me.

“Jeez, Cammie, you're soaked to the bone,” she pointed out the obvious. “Why were you out running in the rain?”

“I couldn't stay there anymore,” I shivered, “had to get away.”

“Well c'mon, let's get you in a hot shower before you get hypothermia. We can talk after.” Danielle led me down the hallway to the bathroom, “I'll bring you some towels and fresh clothes.” I nodded as she shut the door behind her. I moved to the shower and turned the water on to just blistering hot before striping and getting in. The water stung me but it felt nice to finally feel something, my body had become numb due to the rain.

“You stupid bitch!” Lucas threw a plate against the wall. I flinched as it shattered. “I told you I wanted my steak medium rare! This is well done, practically fucking leather!”

“I-I’m sorry.” I whimpered. Lucas stood and strode towards me. He grabbed me by my thick black hair and pulled me up to eye level with him.

“You’re sorry?” He spat in my face, “sorry isn’t going to fix this sweet heart. If you hadn’t royally fucked my dinner, I wouldn’t have ruined my Mother’s fine China, and you wouldn’t be a crying mess right here.” He threw me to the ground, my hands went to protect my stomach. “Clean all this up, I’m going out. If it’s not done by the time I’m back, there’ll be hell to pay. Understand?”

I nodded.

“I said, do you understand?!” He crouched down low in front of me.

“I understand.” I said as clear as I could.

“Good.” He grabbed my chin between his fingers and forced a kiss on me. I wanted to vomit. “I’ll be back later.” He got up and slammed the door behind him.

Too bad for you I won’t be.

“Cammie?” A knock at the door interrupted my thoughts, “are you okay? You’ve been in there a long time.”

“Yeah, don’t worry. I’ll be out in a minute.” I called out. I finished up my hair and turned off the water. In the mirror I could see everything, every single bruise he ever left on me. Each one was carefully left in a location that could be covered up by clothing. He never hit my face, he never hit my neck, and he never roughly grabbed my forearms. Those couldn’t be covered without a goop of make up or an unusually long sleeve shirt for this kind of weather. It never mattered though, I knew

they were there. I dried myself off and dressed in the sweats and t shirt Danielle had left for me.

“There you are.” Danielle smiled at me as I walked out. I mustered up a small one for her.

“Where’s Jake?”

“He’s not here tonight, his sister needed some help back home so he caught a flight and headed back. It’s just us tonight.”

I paled, Jake wasn’t here? It wasn’t any offence to my sister but Lucas had no morals, he’d hit a woman. That much was obvious.

“Cameron, tell me what’s up.” Her voice was firm, she could tell something was wrong with me. “Please, I’m your sister.”

“It’s better to show you than tell you.” I said in a quiet tone, turning around and slowly taking off the shirt she gave me. Her gasp of horror said it all. I felt nothing, I was trained to feel nothing anymore.

That’s how I’ve survived the past three years.

“Oh my gosh, Cameron.” Her voice sounded choked back, like holding back tears. I had learned a long time ago not to cry. “How long has this been happening?”

“About two months into our relationship, so almost three years.” I said stoically. “In the beginning he’d promise it’d never happen again but that was a lie, every single time.”

“Why’d you stay for so long?”

“I really thought he’d change,” I answered. “I thought I could help him but I was wrong.”

“What made you leave now?” Danielle asked. “Trust me I am so beyond happy you left but why now?”

I took a deep breath and pulled the shirt back down, covering my breasts. I turned around and faced her, revealing my slightly swollen stomach.

“Because I refuse to let my child grow up around that bastard, I won’t let him or her feel what I’ve felt by him.” I let my shirt fall, fully

covering myself. Danielle stood and hugged me tight. I didn't even wince when she touched my bruises.

"Whatever you need Cammie, I'm here for you." She cried. "I won't let him hurt either of you. Neither will Jake." I wrapped my arms around her and stood there, for once feeling safe and comforted.

"Thank you Dani." I said as I pulled away from her. Danielle nodded and dropped her arms from me.

"I'm going to go throw your wet clothes in the wash, just sit and relax." She turned and walked away. I slowly sat down on the couch and tucked my feet underneath myself in an attempt to get comfy. My head hit the softness of the couch and I was out.

A loud clap of thunder woke me from my sleep, I looked down at the blanket on myself. Danielle must have thrown a blanket over me before going to bed herself. I stretched myself out on the couch.

KNOCK, KNOCK

I jumped at the sudden pounding on the front door. Was Jake home and forgot his key or something? The pounding continued. I inched slowly towards the front door and peaked through the curtain.

"I know you're in there you little bitch!"

My body felt like ice, bile rose up in my throat, Lucas was here, standing outside my sister's house! I tumbled backwards into the house, trying to create some space.

"C'mon Cammie, there's no running away from me!" He yelled through the door, I flinched.

"What's going on?"

I hadn't even noticed Danielle walk out behind me.

"Cammie, who's out there?" She asked groggily.

"Shh!" I hushed her. "He's here looking for me."

"I know you're in there Cameron!" I heard him shout.

“We have to call the cops, Cammie.” Danielle urged. The door shook as Lucas tried to get in. “Cameron!”

“I’m scared!” I cried, sliding to the ground. Danielle crouched in front of me.

“Cameron, listen to me,” she grabbed my hands and forced my attention. “He’s never going to stop unless you do something here and now.”

“Please don’t leave me alone.” I begged her.

“I’ll stay with you but here and now it’s time to make this bastard pay.”

“What can you tell us about your relationship with Mr. Michaels?” The DA asked. I took a breath before speaking.

“We began a relationship three years ago. Things were fine for the first few months and then he started to become abusive.” I said as clear as I could. “He was careful not to leave bruises on places that would need obnoxious amounts of make up or awkward clothing.”

“What finally made you leave?”

“I became pregnant, at first he seemed happy. He stopped hitting me for about a month but then started up again. I wasn’t going to be somewhere where my baby was going to be in danger, so I left to my sister’s.” I answered, my hands resting on my now very swollen stomach.

“Thank you Ms. Hudson,” the DA asked.

“You may step down Ms.” The judge announced. I did as she said. “It has come to my understanding that the two parties have reached a plea?”

“We have your Honor,” the DA announced. “It was agreed that the defendant will serve one year in jail, complete a batter’s program, and there will be a restraining order between the defendant and Ms. Hudson and her family. And Mr. Michaels has agreed to give up his parental rights for the unborn child.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Danielle asked. We sat in her car outside the county jail.

“Yeah, I need too.” I said softly. “I’ll be right back.” I opened the door and walked over to the gate.

The guard looked at me. “Name?”

“Cameron Hudson, I’m here to see Lucas Michaels.”

“Is he expecting you?”

“No.” I muttered. The guard waved me in, I walked in and saw all the inmates out in the courtyard. Lucas sat at one of the tables off to the side by himself. I walked straight for him, ignoring all the stares from the other men.

“So you decided to come back to me after all.” Lucas didn’t even look up at me when he said that. I rolled my eyes.

“As if,” I rolled my eyes, “I’m here because it’s time we had a talk.”

“About you getting me out of here?”

“Never, if I had it my way you’d rot in here for the rest of your life.” I glared at him. “I’m here to take my life back.”

“Take your life back?” He laughed. “I’m the one in jail sweetheart.”

“You may be the one in jail but I’ve been in a living nightmare every single night.” I seethed.

“What are you looking for? An apology?” He asked, “Sorry babe, I don’t apologize.”

“I learned that,” I muttered. “I want closure Lucas, I deserve that much.”

“And here I was hoping we could pick up right where we picked off.” He said sarcastically.

“Never, I will never come back to you.” I stated firmly, placing my hands on the table he was sitting at. This time, I was standing above him, not the other way around.

“Sit your ass down,” he growled, “you do not stand above me.”

“That’s the thing, Lucas,” I stared him down. “You don’t give the orders anymore. I am not your bitch anymore. You’re a pathetic, bastard who gets off on beating woman. I heard what happened at the bars you used to go to, you got your ass kicked by men so you came back and beat me. So guess what, in here, you’re my bitch.” Lucas stood and raised his hand at me, a guard ran up and pushed his torso and head flat on the table with a loud thud.

“One hit on a woman and you’ll be in here much longer, Michaels.” The guard said gruffly. “Anything else you’d like to say Miss?”

“One more thing,” I answered him. “You will never harm me again, physically or emotionally, enjoy the rest of your pathetic life.” I turned and walked away from him with a new found confidence.

Lucas was my past and he would never bother me with my future. We may share a daughter but as fate would have it, she looked just like me. I would never have to deal with Lucas Michaels again.

“Mommy, mommy! Look at how high I can go!” Mia squealed as she pumped her legs to go high on the swing. I smiled at her.

“Good job baby.” I cheered her on. Mia jumped from the swing and landed on the sand.

“Tada!” She took a dramatic bow. I laughed and applauded her.

“Beautiful honey,” I smiled at her. She giggled and ran off to the jungle gym.

Life had become a little easier after the blowout with Lucas at the jail. I still had nightmares from time to time. I made the decision after my daughter was born that the best thing was to move away, far enough to

feel safer, close enough for Mia to have her Auntie Dani and Uncle Jake in her life. I strived to do everything right by her, she was my light, my life, and my motivation. My perfect little angel.

She waved at me from atop of the slide and yelled, “I love you Mommy!”

“I love you too baby!” I called out and waved back.

Crysta James
“The Brothers”

Two brothers sat in a crowded bar. Just a few years separated them in age. The younger brother Noah looked to be nervous. He was anxious about something. His eyes landed on a girl.

The small town bar was packed to the brim. It smelled like booze and sweat. The window was open despite the cold January outside. It was dark. It was almost always dark these days. January in northern Wisconsin was dark after four thirty. He played with his glass nervously. He looked to his brother, who was also staring at the same woman. Out of everyone here. Through the noise. The jukebox blaring. The televisions flashing football and beer advertisements. The walls and windows lit with neon signs of all sorts. They advertised to the drunk. Amused and drew them in with specials. Through the dim lights and wood counter tops. The cracked leather seats of barstools that wobbled. Through all of the loudness of conversations around them, she stood out. A beacon of light in this dark world.

The song changed. A table cheered. Someone’s birthday. Laughing and drinking all around them, the two brothers sat and watched this girl. Her hair was loose in curls. Soft, warm burgundy in color. Her eyes a wondrous hazel. The boys didn’t know what to do at first. Noah, the youngest, a small-framed young man with jet black hair and deep green eyes, looked to his brother.

“I want to talk to her.” His timid voice was barely audible, swallowed by the thumping and deep beat of bass in another oldie rock song.

“Then go.” Caleb, the older of the two, gave him a nod. “Go on and don’t be a girl.”

Caleb was bigger than Noah, he shared the same hair and eyes as his brother, and growing up people had often confused them as twins. Now that they were grown some differences stood out. Caleb was bigger and stronger, built tough after working in construction since high school. He had a strong face, a jawbone fit for a model, and sharp eyes that all the girls seemed to like.

“I don’t think...” Noah let his voice trail off his eyes went back to the girl. Fear held him back. Curiosity burned. He had a desire to know her name. To sit with her and talk to her. They watched for a little longer. She was alone. No one was with her, and she wasn’t drinking. Not alcoholic at least. She stood out. An angel in a place full of demons. Light in a world of dark. She picked up a can of Coke. She brought it to her lips, she drank. Noah couldn’t break contact with her. She hadn’t looked up yet. She didn’t notice them, and she probably wouldn’t.

Behind them a beer bottle crashed. He felt the cold splatter on his back. He didn’t turn. Not at first. Silence rushed over the whole bar. For a moment the music was too loud. The voices too hushed. He turned to look at the drunk.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” The man behind him repeated his apology. Words slurred together. Drunkenness showed in the dullness of his eyes. Again in how he tried to pick up the shattered beer bottle with clumsy movements.

“It’s fine.” Noah turned his attention back to the girl. She saw him. She smiled. She didn’t come over she didn’t say anything either. Just picked up that cool sweating can and took another drink.

Noah blushed. Cheeks burning, red eyes going down to his own drink of choice. Microbrew of the week on tap. He picked up the glass, and he drank. This brew was bitter. Not caring for it, he only drank a little. Letting flavors wash over his tongue, to see if the taste had changed since it had last passed over his lips. No. It was still awful. But he wouldn’t waste it. He didn’t have that kind of money.

“You need to go talk to her. I think she likes you.” Caleb turned to his brother, talking once the bar had started to raise its volume. The roar of the crowd once again matching the volume of the music. “You never know, Noah, she might really like you.” He looked at the girl in question, “She’s beautiful. You might never see her again. You don’t want to lose this opportunity. I know you don’t.”

“What do I do?” He drank again, searching for liquid courage.

“Just go up and introduce yourself. Ask her name. Be nice. Smile. Put on a little of that charm you always used when talking to mom’s friends. They always thought you were cute.” Caleb drank from his own glass. “Buy her another drink.”

“I don’t think I can.” Noah’s foot bounced anxiously on the footrest of the stool. His hands spun the glass nervously. He looked to the table, rings of water sat pooled where he’d let the beer sit too long. He let go of his glass to trace the circles.

“Just go say hi.” Caleb encouraged him and elbowed him a bit more. “Stop fooling around and listen to me for once.”

No one else had approached her yet, as if no one else could see the stunning beauty sitting before them. The music stopped. The voices continued to roar around them. Drunks got drunker. Sober men and women came in and took their places at the bar. The bar tender bounced back and forth. Exchanging empties for full bottles. Mixing drinks and stopping to chat only when they could. Caleb and Noah came here often. Usually they did homework when it was quiet; other times they would just sit and watch football or whatever sport was in season. Tonight they’d come just for a drink. And look. The beauty of the place had captured them.

“Just go say hi, my name is Noah. What’s your name? See there’s a seat next to her, excuse yourself, and ask if someone is sitting there.” A breeze came through the window, and the girl shivered in her tank top and sweater. “Bring your coat, offer it to her to keep her warm. See if she

needs another drink. You'll do great." Caleb wanted to see his little brother have some luck for once in his life. It was frustrating for him to see his younger brother struggle, especially when it came to the girls. Caleb could have any girl he wanted, it only took a smile. Noah, just didn't have that charm, it was sad almost. And just like Noah, Caleb wanted to go and talk to that girl, but he'd let his little brother have the first try, it was only right.

"I don't think I can do that. I'm terrible with girls." Noah looked up at his brother than back to the girl. Something compelled him to get to his feet. He rose up. He looked to his brother and sighed. Someone fed cash in to the jukebox. There was deliberation, and songs were selected. It started to blare again. One foot in front of the other he made his approach. He weaved in between the closely packed bodies. Apologizes he made were unheard. His focus was on the girl in front of him.

"Hi." He looked at her with a nervous gulp. His legs trembled, for a moment he thought he was going to fall flat on his face.

The response came after what felt like an eternity. He could feel her eyes on him. He could feel her judging him and his movements. Every breath he took needed a monumental amount of force. He could see her mouth moving. He couldn't hear her words. The sounds behind him dampened. He could hear his heartbeat. He could see her. His chest swelled. His lungs started to burn.

It was like he was out of his body. Around him were the familiar lights. The neon signs. The open windows inviting the icy cold air that would cool the bar jam packed full. Standing room only tonight. He stood outside of himself and watched. The girl was talking to him. He yelled a response. But his body just stood stupidly staring at her. Silence greeted her. He couldn't hear her name even. She introduced herself. She indicated to the empty seat beside her. She wanted him to sit down. She wanted him to be next to her. He yelled again. His body didn't move. People continued on around them.

“Just go say hi, my name is Noah. What’s your name? See there’s a seat next to her, excuse yourself, and ask if someone is sitting there.” A breeze came through the window, and the girl shivered in her tank top and sweater. “Bring your coat, offer it to her to keep her warm. See if she needs another drink. You’ll do great.” Noah snapped back into the reality. He looked over at his brother.

“I’m terrible with girls. Maybe I should just pass this up.” He looked over at his brother, unsettled by what he’d just seen himself do.

“I’m serious, Noah. If you don’t go say hello, then I will. And if she falls for me, you’ll be missing out on what you could have had.”

“Fine. I’ll try.” He didn’t know what he was doing. Getting up awkwardly he ran his hands through his hair and realized he probably looked stupid now, so he flattened it out and held his breath. Things seemed so strange in that moment. He walked up to her. The crowded bar pressed in around him. His nerves made his hands shake, his throat went dry. It was just like his dream. Suddenly he stopped and returned to his brother.

“Fine then, Noah. I’ll go talk to her. I’ll show you how easy it is, maybe next time you won’t be such a little bitch about it.” Caleb got to his feet. He stretched and smirked, taking his empty glass up to the bar like he was ordering a second he leaned on the counter next to the girl. He spoke, his words muffled by the people around them. Noah didn’t know what Caleb, did but the girl smiled and let him sit down next to her. She didn’t look back at Noah; it was like he no longer existed.

Caleb spent the rest of the night with her. Talking and making her laugh. Noah was ignored, abandoned by his one brother. His best friend. He felt like he was missing out on his one opportunity. Watching as this girl slipped through his fingertips. If only he’d listened to his brother and gotten brave, if only he knew how to do what Caleb did girls wouldn’t look at him like he was some kind of freak. That’s just what he was—

some kind of little bitch. Caleb was right, Noah was a wimp, and no one would ever even want to talk to him. Not without the charm that Caleb had. He would never learn how to pick up girls like his brother, no matter how many times Caleb coached hm.

He leaned forward over the tabletop, he held his beer in one hand and let himself be swallowed up by the noise and the bustle of the bar. At least here he was safe, as long as he had a beer in one hand he wouldn't be required to talk to anyone, as long as he didn't talk they wouldn't know how much of a freak he was. He emptied his glass, he asked for another. This cycle would continue on.

Stacy Van Veen

“My Fiancé’s Roommate”

Louise set her jaw and hauled out one of the numerous boxes that had been shoved in the back of the closet over the years. The junk had piled up enough that it started to interfere with hanging up the clothes, so she was determined to sort through it all and toss everything there was no reason to keep. The box she had randomly selected to work on first seemed to have all the old photos that hadn’t been put into picture albums.

She picked up one stack that had been rubber-banded together; if they were duplicates she would toss them, if not she would set them aside to put in albums later. The third photo in the stack caught her eye, however, when she noticed the two college aged men in it.

First there was her fiancé Casey. It was interesting how they got together: he just introduced her as his girlfriend one day and she didn’t correct him, the rest was history. They were engaged within a year, though it was decided to put any wedding plans on hold until after graduation.

And there was John, her fiancé’s roommate; now he was a character and a half. A good example was the discussion they had the second week after being introduced.

Louise had just gotten out of her American Lit class and was headed to Geology – gen eds, ugh – when a male voice called to her from behind. “Hey, Lou.” She cringed at the hated Elementary School nickname and turned to see her boyfriend’s roommate – what was his name? Jack? Jim? No, it was John – jogging to catch up with her.

“I’d prefer if you called me Louise instead of Lou, John,” she said once they were side by side, forgoing a proper greeting in her haste to correct him.

John must have been the baby of the family, because he actually managed an adorable pout even at 18 years of age. “Aw, but I like calling you Lou.” And he was whining like a pro.

“Why?” Louise asked, keeping her brown eyes averted from the blue puppy eyes pleading down at her.

She really didn’t like the smile that spread across John’s face. He proved her worry was well founded when he said, “Because whenever I go over to your place I can tell the guys I’m going to the Lou.”

“John!” Louise could feel the heat rising in her cheeks, though whether in anger or embarrassment was still up for debate. John’s eyes lit up like a kid’s at Christmas time.

“And whenever you come over to my place you can just say you’re going to the John,” he continued, making Louise groan in disgust – she would never use that idiom, ever. “Now all we need is a friend named Ralph.”

Curiosity, unfortunately, got the better of her. “Dare I ask?”

“Because then we can call Ralph on the Big White Phone.” And there it went, killing the metaphorical cat.

“Ugh, you are absolutely sick and disgusting!” Louise used this as a good reason to escape this unheard of discussion. She purposefully turned her back on him and started marching to her next class – thankfully it was in this building instead of across campus or she could have been late.

John shouted after her, “But you love me anyways, right?”

“I’m not even going to dignify that with an answer,” she shot back at him, over her shoulder. Her last glimpse of the boy was him standing like a dork in the middle of the hallway, a goofy grin on his face that was dangerously contagious.

He never did stop calling her “Lou”, and she gave up trying to use the stink eye on him after a month – it was ineffectual anyway. The

nickname even started to grow on her after a semester, but she didn't allow anyone else to get away with calling her that, not even Casey.

Louise flipped through a few more photos and came to stop on the one taken at graduation. This one was her standing between “her boys” Casey and John; they each had an arm slung over her shoulders and she had her arms around their waists. Her cheeks were flushed a little, reminding her of what had happened right before the picture was taken.

“Well, we made it all the way to graduation,” John had exclaimed, his pride at being a first generation college graduate evident. “We should celebrate!”

“Sound’s dangerous,” Casey commented. “What did you have in mind?”

“C’mere, Lou.” Louise stepped closer her John, who wrapped an arm around her waist and said, “Don’t freak out.”

That was all the warning she had before he dipped her. It was so low that Louise was half afraid he – as skinny as he was – would drop her, and half exhilarated to experience what every girl dreamed about – sort of, John certainly was no Prince Charming or Knight in Shining Armor. At the deepest point of the dip, John leaned in and gave her the tiniest, most chaste peck on the lips; then he hauled her back upright.

Thrill turned to horror when Louise noticed that they were not alone. Their triad had been joined by none other than her parents, and they were looking quite aghast at the very forward display – never mind that John was just teasing. Casey, being the unhelpful fiancé that he was, was of course, laughing hysterically at the scene.

It hadn't taken too long for her mother to haul her aside and ask, “Who was that boy?”

“John Vaulting, I’ve told you about him, he’s a friend.”

“He kissed you.” It sounded like an accusation. Then again, her parents were from an era where a kiss was practically a marriage proposal; Louise just hoped her father didn't try to threaten John with his rifle –

which hadn't worked properly in a decade – in some skewed attempt to protect his daughter's reputation.

“There's nothing between us, Mom,” Louise assured, glancing over at John who was getting a good natured ribbing about girlfriend theft from Casey. “He's just a friend.”

The memory made a tiny smile touch the corners of her mouth. She had later learned that that was John's first kiss, and she was deeply honored – and not a little bashful – that she had been the one he chose to have it with.

If Louise had thought that college was crazy, it had nothing on the real world. The next photo in the stack wasn't until a year after graduation, when the three of them had made an appointment to meet up each other for a day. Casey and John were still rooming together, but Louise lived in a whole other city.

Also by then she and Casey had broken off the engagement: Casey had his career that he was trying to get on its feet, and she had hers; it was too much of a hassle to attempt wedding planning and marriage on top of it all. They had agreed to try getting back together once both were in stable positions.

Of course, John wouldn't be John if he didn't do something ridiculous despite the distance between them. For her 24th birthday he made plans to come take her out for a dinner date to celebrate – Casey hadn't been able to come because of his work. Though, what she got when she opened the door to her apartment that evening was not what she had expected.

“Hi, John, um...” Louise paused uncertainly, at a loss at what she was seeing – as far as she knew, John had never in his life owned a name brand anything, much less a Macy's sweater. “Is that Casey's sweater?”

John looked a little sheepish as he rubbed the back of his neck with the hand that wasn't behind his back. “Yup. I'm borrowing it.”

Louise blinked. The boys hadn't ever traded clothes before, despite being similar heights and builds – that is, thin as a bean pole. Then again, they had been living together for going on six years, maybe it was a new development. Also, was John blushing? “Uh, why? Is there something going on between you two that you haven't told me yet?” the words escaped her mouth before she could give them permission.

“What? No!” John denied, his eyes widening and his face now obviously red. “Just because everything I'm wearing right now is his except my underwear-”

Louise made a face, attempting to get that mental image out of her head. “You're kidding, right!? How long has this been going on?” she asked. This had gotten into uncomfortable territory way too fast, and it was affecting the filter on her mouth – that is to say, dismantled it and threw away the pieces.

“No, stop, you're not understanding me. I'm straight, I swear,” he insisted, an unreadable but passionate emotion in his eyes as he looked at her. “And I'm positive Case is too, since he talks about girls all the time.”

“Casey talks about other girls?”

“Ugh! This isn't how it's supposed to go!” John ran his free hand down his face, and then back up through his hair. He took a few deep breaths, and Louise took the time to compose herself after that swell of information and suppositions. Finally, John said, “Lou, listen: I told Case I was taking you out for your birthday, so he dressed me up in his clothes. Even the aftershave is his,” John admitted.

Well, that explained a few things, including the very much not-John smell she had noticed. However, something still wasn't making any sense; John hadn't dressed up for her before – then again, he'd never taken her on a date before.

“Okay, I believe you; but still why?” Louise questioned.

John looked extremely relieved at her answer; his characteristic grin was soon back in its place. “Apparently nothing I had was stylish enough to take such a lovely lady on a formal date.”

Louise’s cheeks flamed. It didn’t help that he handed her a beautiful red rose, which he had hidden behind his back until then, with a quiet wishing of Happy Birthday. “I see,” she said, trying to reign her control back in. “Well, in that case, you do look nice tonight, John,” – try devilishly handsome – “but please wear your own clothes next time.”

“I promise, Lou, the next time I ask you out you won’t have any doubt about my sexuality,” John replied, his tone turning her as red as her flower for the second time that evening.

The misunderstanding still made her laugh, even years later. The date had been a success, and John had been true to his word. Smart, witty, charismatic, chivalrous... they were all words to describe John. Louise smiled to herself as she packed the photos away again. Yes, John is the type of man that any girl would feel lucky to have.

The sound of a slamming door pierced her thoughts. A familiar shout came from the entranceway. “Guess who’s home!”

“Daddy!” five year old Kate screamed. The exclamation was accompanied by the sounds of running feet from the direction of the living room.

I do feel lucky, Louise thought as she got up and walked downstairs to greet her husband. After all – her lips met his, to their daughter’s protests – I married my fiancé’s roommate.

Kelci Greenwood
“Siren Song”

A life at sea – that had been Nathaniel’s dream since he was a child. He grew up in an orphanage in a small fishing village. No one had enough money to take him in. He hadn’t made any friends in the orphanage, and with no family to leave behind, he’d taken the first opportunity that presented itself. Sure, pirating wasn’t exactly what he’d always had in mind. He would have rather been in a more reputable business. Captain Carver hadn’t even been the only one hiring at the time Nathaniel arrived at the closest port town, but he’d instantly fallen in love.

The Morgan le Fay was an older ship, a bit rickety, but she was the most beautiful sight Nathaniel had ever laid eyes on. Her hull was a mix of light and dark brown, a result of many different types of wood being used in her construction. There was, however, one large stripe around the top of the outer hull that was painted light tan. She had three masts, the tallest of which, at the center of the ship, stood no less than 120 feet above the deck. The sails had all yellowed from years of use, and each of the black, triangular flags that were perched on the topgallant masts were tattered and worn.

“You any good with a sword, boy?” Captain Carver had asked immediately upon introducing himself. He was a grizzled old man with a well-trimmed beard and dressed in an expensive-looking white shirt and blue pants.

“I’ve never tried,” Nathaniel replied, “but I’d be willing to learn. Whatever it takes, just let me sail with you.”

Nathaniel’s eyes drifted back to the Morgan, his mind wandering, imagining the adventures he could have aboard her. Captain Carver noticed the younger man’s wandering gaze and smirked.

“She’s a fine ship, isn’t she?”

“Yes, sir,” Nathaniel agreed with a nod. Captain Carver stared silently at him for several moments longer.

“I like your manners, boy,” he finally said. “I’ll expect you on deck in one hour, or we’ll leave you behind.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.” Nathaniel could barely contain his excitement, and he rushed off to gather a few necessities.

It had been seven months since that day, and Nathaniel was fairly happy – as long as he was left alone. The other men onboard were not as passionate about the sea as they were about the money. That was why many of the others Nathaniel had been recruited with had already moved up the ranks, while he was still stuck swabbing the deck every day. Of course, his position wasn’t the main thing he was mocked for.

Nathaniel had never been interested in women, or men, for that matter. He just wasn’t sexually attracted to anyone. Because of this, he never left the ship when they made port, and he stared aimlessly out at the dark water while his crewmates spun tales of wild escapades with the local women of the night.

“You’d do good to find yourself a woman, Swabbie,” the ship’s surgeon, Robert Stuart, had told him about two months after Nathaniel boarded as they all sat around eating dinner.

“He’s probably ashamed,” a sailor, whose name Nathaniel had yet to learn, laughed, “that they’ve all got more experience than him.”

“Aye, there must be something wrong with him,” another sailor added. Nathaniel huffed out a breath, hurt by their words but unwilling to let it show. It would only serve as fuel for even more jokes.

“All right, that’s enough,” the Quartermaster, Thomas Myers – a tall, bulky man only a few years Nathaniel’s senior – ordered. The men grumbled but complied. Myers turned to Nathaniel. “Swabbie, go do your job.”

“Sir, I’ve already finished for tonight,” Nathaniel explained.

“Do it anyway.” Nathaniel slumped in his seat, took one last drink of wine, stood, and headed for the door. He could feel all of the eyes following him out, and he imagined them chuckling after he was gone. Nathaniel brushed a hand over the Morgan’s inner hull. She was the only reason why he stayed.

Other than the normal sounds of the ship moving through the water and Nathaniel’s fellow crewmen working, it was a quiet afternoon. This had Nathaniel a bit worried. It wasn’t usually this quiet, this peaceful. There was no petty bickering amongst the men, no seabirds squawking overhead. Nathaniel had just dipped his brush in a soapy bucket of water and was about to resume polishing the ship’s railing when he heard a faint noise in the distance. The further along the Morgan sailed, the louder the noise became.

The sound was so distorted on the wind, it took Nathaniel quite a while to realize what it was. He was even more confused when he finally did. Someone was singing, badly. He wasn’t the only one to hear it, either. The ship changed course so fast that Nathaniel was nearly thrown to the deck.

“What’s that heavenly sound?” a Rigger named James Martin questioned after making his way down from one of the yards.

“Heavenly?” Nathaniel scoffed. “It sounds like something’s dying.”

“How dare you? You’re nothing but a Swabbie.” James shouted, turning wild, glazed-over eyes to Nathaniel. “Never speak of her like that again!”

“Her?” Nathaniel asked, suddenly confused. “James, what are you talking about?”

“I must go to her.” As James began walking towards the side of the ship as though in a trance, it finally dawned on Nathaniel what was happening. This was the call of a Siren. He’d heard the tales, but he never believed they were real.

“Wait, no!” Nathaniel called to his crewmate, but he was too late. James leapt over the railing and hit the water with an almighty splash. When he failed to resurface after several tense moments, Nathaniel turned to yell to the Boatswain to drop anchor. It was unnecessary. He was already doing so, but his movements were too stiff. He was also caught by the Siren’s song.

The Boatswain and the Sailing Master, along with the rest of the Riggers, soon joined James in the water. Unwilling to risk anyone else by calling out for help, Nathaniel rushed to grab a rope. He secured one end to the rigging and threw the other overboard. His hands were already tied tight with bandages from the many long hours of hard work he endured on a daily basis, so he wasn’t worried about rope burn, and his arm muscles were certainly strong enough to haul himself back onto the ship. His only worry was carrying someone else while he did so. When he felt the waves hit his boots, Nathaniel looked down at the water. He couldn’t see any of his crewmates in their dark depths. He couldn’t even see his own reflection. Suddenly, though, something surfaced in front of him. It looked like a woman, but her skin was tinged blue, and her eyeballs were bright yellow with black irises. Her long hair writhed as if it were alive, dripping black, like oil. This was the Siren, but she was nothing like the beautiful creature he’d heard about in stories. The Siren held out a clammy, webbed hand to him as she screeched a wordless tune. Nathaniel recoiled.

“Excuse me,” he spat, “but your little song doesn’t work on me, so be quiet.”

The Siren’s mouth snapped shut in surprise, and she stared at him with a cocked head, studying him intensely.

“Good,” Nathaniel continued, unnerved but determined. “Now, tell me what you’ve done with my crewmates.”

He didn’t know if the Siren could speak, or if she could even understand what he was saying. She opened her mouth, but instead of a

direct answer, Nathaniel was met with rows of sharp teeth still flecked with blood. She lunged for him and managed to catch the leg of his pants with a set of claws that burst from her fingertips as he scrambled to ascend the rope. The fabric tore, and the Siren shrieked in rage at the loss of another victim.

“This is insane,” Nathaniel declared to himself as he lay sprawled on the Morgan’s deck, gasping for breath. “This is completely insane.”

“What’s going on out here?” an unexpected voice demanded.

“Captain.” Nathaniel rolled over and hauled himself to his feet. “You need to go back inside, right now.”

“In case you’ve forgotten, boy,” Captain Carver jabbed a finger at Nathaniel with a hard glare, “I’m the captain, and you’re the swab.”

“I’m aware of that, sir, but please...” Nathaniel trailed off when he noticed the captain’s eyes droop and his jaw go slack. With horror, Nathaniel realized that the singing had started again. It was further away this time. The Siren had retreated. However, her voice was still hypnotic, even at a distance.

“Beautiful,” Captain Carver murmured, taking a few steps forward. Nathaniel frantically looked around for some way to stop the older man from jumping ship.

“Sorry, Captain. This is for your own good,” Nathaniel said before picking up his bucket, emptying its contents over the side of the ship, and swinging it at Captain Carver. It connected with the back of his head, knocking him out cold.

Dragging the captain to the mainmast, Nathaniel secured him against it with another rope. Just as he completed the task, however, Quartermaster Myers emerged onto the deck. At first, the two simply stared at each other in shock. Then, Myers’ gaze drifted to where Captain Carver was slouched against the mast, and he became enraged.

“Sir, this is not what it looks like,” Nathaniel tried in vain to explain himself.

“What have you done? I’ll have your head for this, you little-” It was then that Myers finally took notice of the singing.

“Oh, no.”

“Who is that?” Myers squinted into the distance, searching for the source of the noise.

“It’s not a who, sir, it’s a what. It’s a Siren, sir. You have to cover your ears, now. It’ll kill you.”

“Nonsense.” Myers waved a dismissive hand in Nathaniel’s direction. “I have to find her.”

When Nathaniel reached for him, Myers turned a glare on him and moved out of his reach. Nathaniel slowly reached for his bucket, but before his fingers even made contact with it, Myers’ fist struck him in the face, sending him crashing to the deck.

This trance wasn’t like the others. Before, the affected had been slow, almost heavy, and they completely ignored him, but Myers seemed aware, and he was angry.

Is this the Siren’s doing? Nathaniel wondered. Is she getting smarter? Picking himself up, a hand rubbing his aching jaw, Nathaniel rushed at Myers in one last attempt to stop him. He was too late, and Myers vanished over the side. Without thinking, Nathaniel threw out the rope once more. Then, he plunged himself into the freezing water. Unable to see anything, he groped around as far as he could while still keeping his head above the surface. Out of sheer luck, Nathaniel managed to find Myers before the Siren did. The other man was unconscious.

As Nathaniel began swimming back towards the ship, he felt something brush the exposed skin of his ankle. Instinctively, he kicked out, and his foot connected with a hard object. Then, it was gone. Suspecting that it was the Siren and that she would be even angrier now that he had injured her, Nathaniel swam faster, reaching out for the rope immediately once it was within arm’s length.

Nathaniel slung Myers over his shoulder and braced his boot against the hull. He hadn't even started trying to pull them up before the Siren emerged from the waves, reaching for him, mouth open wide, hissing. Remembering the knife he kept in his boot just in time, Nathaniel grabbed it and slashed at the creature's throat. With a wail, she managed to throw herself backwards and out of the knife's range. The Siren bared her teeth at him, and the two stared at each other for several moments. Then, it slowly sank beneath the water, disappearing from sight.

Nathaniel took the opportunity to try and clamber up the rope, but Myers' dead weight on his shoulder slowed him down. He hadn't made much progress when he heard the water begin to ripple beneath him. Readjusting his grip on both Myers and the rope, Nathaniel let go with one hand, clutching his knife with a sense of dread in the pit of his stomach. Finally, after an agonizing wait, the Siren burst out of the sea, arcing through the air towards him. Unsure what else he could do, Nathaniel closed his eyes and held the knife out directly in front of himself. He felt the impact and a sharp pain in his wrist. His eyes snapped open, and he instantly regretted the action. He was face to face with the creature. She snarled and attempted to catch his head in her jaws, but the knife imbedded in her chest prevented her from moving any closer. She had managed to seize his wrist with her claws, but her grip loosened with every drop of obsidian blood that poured from her wound. The Siren screamed once more and then went still. The body slipped off Nathaniel's knife, leaving a black stain on the polished metal. It fell, landing face-down in the water, and simply floated there. Nathaniel flopped onto the deck, tossing Myers down beside him. He closed his eyes and worked to steady the thrumming of his heart, but he knew he couldn't stay like that. There could be other Sirens in the area. As quickly as he could by himself, Nathaniel raised the anchor. The wind was beginning to pick up, which made steering the vessel that much easier. Finally, Myers stirred, and,

deeming them in safer waters, Nathaniel left his post at the wheel and went to sit next to the Quartermaster.

“You saved my life,” Myers exclaimed after a fit of coughing.

“My pleasure, sir,” Nathaniel sassed, too tired to hold it back. Fortunately, Myers was more interested in getting answers than he was in punishing insubordination.

“But how did you defeat it? How could you ignore its song?” Nathaniel managed to puff out a small laugh before answering.

“She just didn’t do it for me, sir.” Myers cracked a smile but didn’t have the energy to join Nathaniel in his laughter.

“It would seem,” Myers said after a long, contemplative pause, “that we’ll be in need of a new Sailing Master. Would you happen to be interested?”

“I’d be honored, sir.” Nathaniel lay back against the deck and sighed. Suddenly, a thought occurred to him, and he shot into a sitting position.

“What is it?” Myers questioned, tensing up. “What’s wrong?”

“I forgot to untie the captain.” Myers followed Nathaniel to where he’d left Captain Carver tied to the mast. He was still unconscious, and a seagull had perched itself atop his head. The pair looked at each other then burst out laughing. Once he calmed down, Myers shooed the bird away.

“I won’t tell him if you won’t,” Myers offered.

“Deal.”

Adam Strand
“Catharsis”

A pool of water always sits in the same spot on the table top. The one that leaves it never cleans it up, ever. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 11am, the pool will most certainly exist. The certainty of this routine is cumbersome to the student that sits next to it. The actions of the one that leaves the water is not necessarily that bad. The fate of the situation, though, brings the actions of another one, the teacher. The teacher puts the student’s graded reading responses directly into the pool of backwashed liquid, every time, perhaps on purpose. The exact spot where the liquid resides is an appropriate promised land of courtesy and distance from the student to place graded work.

Forrest puts his fingers clumped together on his right temple.

The thing that bothers me the most is how perfect it really is. Two actions, unrelated...combine to soak my reading responses. I have to shake the stapled pages between my knees under the table to air them out. I feel like a...jester thing, with the bells on the hat...never mind. People won’t get...just get out! Out! Out!

Forrest extends his arm and flutters his fingers eradicating the memory from his mind, at least for now.

Forrest has been staying in the same dorm room for three years and a semester. The last semester of his college career was upon him. A roommate was out of the question and his family was able to pay extra for a single room. The room had no entertainment, only stacks of paper that reached high like sky scrapers. The papers all had one name in the top left corner in Times New Roman 12 point font: “Forrest Moore.” The papers were graded mostly with red ink that surrounded the small dilapidated room. The art teacher used purple ink. I wonder what her bank account looks like. The piles were organized perfectly by the type of class, the year

the assignment was given, and the general fondness that Forrest had for the class. Art 101 papers live in the closet. He laughs to himself thinking about the people who have a major in art.

Forrest is a business major with a concentration in international business. The teachers within the program love him and will often laugh at his puns during a presentation. The liberal arts aspect of the university bothers Forrest. English 241 prides itself in two thousand year old poems and epics that sometimes deal with the human spirit. Pure Bullshit. The stack of English 241 homework assignments are all water stained in the closet next to the poor Art 101 pile.

The negative thing about having a single room is the walk to the classroom. Grandstand Hall houses all of the people who have a single room. Grandstand Hall is about 640 feet away from the nearest campus building. 540 feet away. He begins to walk at a perfect pace although he can't hide his slight limp. His eyes never look to the ground at any point. Forrest wears the same very casual business suit every day of the semester. He has a small beer belly from eating plain noodles, but the rest of him is skinny and starving looking. His hair is always drenched in style gel of some kind; the wind will never have a chance against it. A perfect reading response for Professor Warberg is grasped tightly in his left hand.

I have handed in seven responses getting the full ten points every time. A possible 1,000 points to gain in the class by the end of the semester. If bitch Warberg ever gives me a 9.5 on principle I will get her fired somehow. She does seem pretty desperate. Perhaps I could say she offered me sex for an A in the class. Would people in power believe this? I must brainstorm more ideas. Perhaps during anonymous course evaluations, write in that she offered sex.

Forrest reached the classroom and the routine played out as usual. He would once again walk back to Grandstand Hall with a water-stained ten out of ten-point reading response.

Becki Warberg often sits in her small office of the main university building. She is plain looking in every way. Average clothes, average body type, but a mind that is highly above average in knowledge of everything academic and pertaining to the emotions of other human beings. She corrects assignments, eats lunch, and watches old black and white movies in her cozy office. Becki never wants to go home to her apartment because it is lonely; she basically lives in her office. Endless textbooks and educational posters with positive messages grace the bookshelves and walls. Less than a year after graduating college, she got a teaching job. She was picked almost instantly which perturbed a friend that Becki went through school with. The friend substitute teaches grade school and works part time as a waitress. Becki feels bad the friendship ended because she honestly felt no animosity towards the situation and loved her friend. Educating college age kids about old epics was her dream. A few months into her first month of teaching and the dream has faded some. Becki loves her fellow teachers and enjoys seeing them around campus; it gives her life meaning.

I hate my students so much! If some of my students were not a part of this job, I think I could be happy. Everybody is too cool to learn anything. I dealt with the same thing in high school. I have some hot shot student who I know hates the class that single-handedly brings down the morale of the classroom. He made a point of saying that he did not buy the books and yet in class he knows everything!

The long walk from the office to classroom is one that puts painful tingles in the heart of Professor Warberg. She always watches an old comedy before class, but the inspiration from it always quickly fades. She knows she will enter the class and say hello, but everyone will be too afraid or unwilling to answer back. When she asks a question about the reading, it will make it clear that none of the students did the reading. The kid in the suit always waits to answer and then scoffs, sometimes doing an exaggerated accent with his prepubescent sounding voice. Becki often

looks to the ground and smiles nervously when this happens. Becki leaves her office and begins her walk slowly down the hall to reach everything that she knows will happen.

The awkward silence is like a spear through my heart. The next time he does an accent I will go off on him. I have to.

Twenty minutes before class starts, the whole room is a ghost town. Professor Warberg keeps the lights off as she enters the room. She walks to where Forrest always sits and slowly sits down in his chair. She opens a notebook and begins writing her resignation from the school. A rough draft that will contain the truth about how the students make her miserable. She closes the notebook because a few minutes had gone by and the students would be coming in soon. Them! Professor Warberg walks to the window sill which offers support to a dying plant. A small pink-handled squirt bottle with warm water inside sits full next to the plant. She picks it up and slowly walks back to Forrest's spot and starts spraying the table. The usual routine was to spray once or twice but she kept going today. The anger inside her kept squeezing and squeezing. The carpal tunnel left her whole arm numb. The whole table top was drenched in warm water. It started to run off the table on to the ground.

Forrest Moore did not show up to class that day. He found out that he could drop the class and take 3 credits in an independent study that pertained to money management. He is overly happy that he would not have to keep a record of English 241 anymore. At the end of the semester Forrest graduated and went off into the workforce. He made a great deal of money in a short period of time. No more water stained pages to deal with. A big house, a kitchen with custom pans, a lake house, a jet ski, and a wife with breast implants.

Becki Warberg felt saddened that Forrest did not see the water park waiting in his spot. It would have been perfect for her psyche for him to have seen it. Becki stayed with her job and found peace in higher level courses that more dedicated students enrolled in. Eventually, she only

taught English majors who were about to graduate. A big learning potential that gets exceeded, an office with updated volumes of ancient plays, intelligent conversations with fellow professors that span all subjects, and a tenured position.

Jillian Knutson

“White Trash Wedding”

My mom used to pack me snacks in her empty cigarette boxes. We'd be at the grocery store and she'd put fifty cents worth of M&Ms into an old Marlboro pack and hand it to me like it was a completely reasonable thing to do. She did this until I was about eight years old, when I started noticing that people were looking at me funny and I told her I didn't like candy anymore, something she still believes to this day. I think that alone should speak magnitudes about the type of person we're talking about here; what functional adult just blindly accepts that their eight year old doesn't like candy anymore? Geez mom, maybe it was because I couldn't eat three of anything without getting a tobacco stem stuck in my teeth.

“No she didn't,” Zeke says, when I tell him.

“She did,” I say back.

“There's no way.” He reaches for the two liter of Mountain Dew, drinks it out of the bottle because I live with a fucking animal. We're sitting on the floor of our apartment, the previously mentioned Mountain Dew sitting between us as well as a somewhat impressive collection of weed paraphernalia. It's ten in the morning and we're already high, but only because I'm talking about my mother. We both don't work today so we're only in boxers and T-shirts, Zeke's hair like a bird's nest and mine probably not looking much better.

“That's a whole new level of bad,” Zeke continues. “That's like...creatively bad. Like she had to make that shit up.”

“I know.”

“Most shitty moms would be content to just go the good ol' alcoholic route, but no, your mom had to get all creative about it.”

“She did the alcoholic thing, too.”

“Oh. Good.” Zeke takes a hit, passes me the bong with a shit-eating grin on his face, the escaping smoke swirling out of the corners of his mouth. “I was worried.”

My mom’s getting married tomorrow back in North Dakota, to this guy named Paul. I’ve never met Paul. I’m not sure if I really want to, based on the picture she emailed me. She said that the picture doesn’t do him justice and that he has more teeth than it looks like, but I don’t know; that doesn’t sound like a ringing endorsement to me.

“You know you don’t have to go,” I tell Zeke, for the millionth time.

“I know.”

“It’s gonna be a four hour drive for nothing, basically.”

“It’s cool. It’s not like I have anything better to do.”

“Yeah...but I mean, you’re not even invited.”

“Mel.” Zeke puts his hand on my shoulder, his eyes wide and intense, or as wide and intense as they can be in his inebriated state. “Melvin James Rydstrum. If you don’t let me go to the shit show that’s going to be your mother’s wedding, I’m going to break up with you this fucking instant.”

I met Zeke at a Starbucks, of all places; he was a barista or whatever you call it and I used to come in and get one of those iced coffee things almost every day that summer. It has a sort of romanticism to it, if either one of us were capable of that sort of thing. Maybe we were at the beginning, but it’s hard to remember. I lean in for a kiss, thinking about it, but Zeke backs up, a disgusted look on his face.

“Your breath smells like shit,” He explains.

“Sorry.”

“I mean, have a Tic Tac or something. Jesus.”

Zeke has never met my mom, and before we got the wedding invitation I was pretty hell bent on keeping it that way. I never talked about her much, never felt like I had anything to say. It’s a story you’ve heard

over and over again; she got pregnant in high school, had me when she was seventeen. My dad ran off, or maybe stuck around and just wasn't a part of my life, I'm not sure. She didn't know how to be a mom, never wanted to. She was dumb. I know it sounds like a sick burn, a beginning of a 'your momma' battle, but it's the truth. She's still dumb. I can't spend more than a few hours around her without wanting to punch her face in because that's how dumb she is.

Zeke can't wait to meet her. Or Paul, for that matter. Or my cousin Bruce, the drug dealer with the skulllet, or my Aunt Joyce, who always smells like a used tampon. I have no idea why, but he can't wait; it's like he's going to go sit on Santa's lap. There's an amount of magic in it for him, an almost child-like glee. I've been trying to mentally prepare him as well as hopefully get him to change his mind about coming, but each horrific story I tell him just seems to spark his excitement even further.

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It's the next day and we're in my car, about five minutes away from my mom's house where the wedding's going to be. We're listening to some pop station, have been the whole ride up, but it sounds just like a death march.

"My grandma's super racist," I blurt out, a last ditch attempt to get Zeke to back out. He cracks his knuckles, stretches his neck from side to side and grins like he's preparing for a fist fight he knows he'll win.

"Let's do this."

The first thing I see is my Aunt Joyce, smoking a cigarette and leaning against the garage. She's not really my aunt; she's my mom's best friend from high school. Mom used to bring me there on the weekends, where they'd gossip and smoke blunts and leave me in the living room to watch PowerPuff Girls, something Joyce called me a pussy for doing. My first instinct is to run in the opposite direction but she calls us over, wiggling a finger at me.

“Where have you been?” She taps her foot up and down like my very presence is inconveniencing her. “Your poor mother’s been waiting to see you. She wasn’t even sure if you were coming, you never responded to her emails. Can you imagine that, her only son not showing up on her wedding day. I tell you, Mel, you’re cutting it pretty fucking close here.”

“Sorry,” I offer lamely.

She looks me and Zeke over, who for some reason has become awfully quiet. Maybe it’s the smell.

“You’ve gotten taller.” She says it like she’s commenting on the weather.

“Yeah,” I say back. I have gotten taller, and I was already too fucking tall to begin with. They used to call me the Jolly Green Giant in high school, which was weird because I would try my best not to smile.

“Who’s this?” She wiggles her finger at Zeke, her nails pink and red and square.

“Zeke.” I don’t think to add anything else; also, I’m not too sure how she’d react to me being gay.

She seems to accept this as enough; she stomps out her cigarette with her heel. “Go see your mother.”

We manage to avoid anything more than a ‘hi’ from the rest of my relatives bumbling around the yard and walk into the front door of my old childhood home, feeling almost nostalgic but more nauseous than anything. My mom’s sitting on a chair, my real aunts and my cousins surrounding her, putting makeup on her face and curlers in her hair. The first thing she does when she notices me is cry; it’s an alarming response, but she stands up and starts hugging me so I initially take it as a good thing. She’s in her wedding dress, but I only call it that because it’s her wedding; it’s blue, first of all, and when she turns around there’s no real back to it, only straps that look like seatbelts.

“You’re not supposed to see me,” she says, kind of frantic and mostly slurred.

“What?” I try to pull away but she holds onto me tight, her fingers digging into my shoulders.

“You’re not supposed to see me until the ceremony.”

I give her a look; she scowls back at me, but the anger is lost because her eyes are glazed, unfocused. Because she’s drunk.

“I’m Zeke, by the way.” Zeke—who else—offers, putting out a hand that no one takes.

“You can’t see me!” Mom goes on, loud, sloppy. She lets go of me, sits back in the chair and puts her head between her knees. “I don’t even want to marry him,” she murmurs.

“Nicole—” Joyce starts.

“I don’t!”

“You look beautiful,” my cousin April tells her softly. She looks over at me, smiles. I haven’t seen her since she was just a kid. She has a baby in her arms. She keeps smiling. No matter how hard I try, I can’t get myself to smile back.

“Paul’s a dick,” Mom spits. She snaps her head up, lipstick smeared in the corners.

“Don’t get cold feet on us now!” My Aunt Jen laughs. I feel like I’m in a fever dream. This isn’t normal. This isn’t normal, is it? This isn’t how it’s supposed to go. I look over at Zeke, who’s looking as uncomfortable as I feel.

“He hit me!” she howls. She punches the table, suddenly enraged. “The fucker hit me and now I’m marrying him!” She gives a curt laugh, eyes wild. “The fucker hit me!” She goes to stand up, sways on her bare feet.

“Where are you going?” Jen asks.

“I need a cigarette,” she mutters. “I need...” She goes outside, some of my aunts following her.

There’s an awful moment of silence, and I feel an overwhelming urge to leave. I feel sick to my stomach, sick that Zeke has to see this. I

feel myself resorting back to when I was a kid, when the funny looks of strangers used to send me into a tailspin; when she used to pack me snacks in her empty cigarette packs.

She walks back in, notices Zeke for the first time. “Who the fuck are you?”

I can’t stand it. I can’t stand the reality of it, seeing the woman who raised me black out drunk on her god damn wedding day. I can’t stand the depression, the desperation, stinking and swirling around our shitty kitchen, surrounded by my shitty relatives who can’t help but reek like it too. They look at me, and like a deer previously frozen in headlights, I run.

We don’t stay for the reception.

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Zeke’s quiet on the way home. He fiddles with the zipper of his sweatshirt, looks out the window like North Dakota is something interesting. He’s so quiet it’s scary. I wonder if he’s disappointed, now that the magic is gone.

“I’m sorry,” I say finally.

“For what?”

“I don’t know.” I sigh. “That we had to leave.”

“Mel.”

“That it wasn’t fun for you.”

“Mel.”

“That my life isn’t a fucking sitcom.”

He gives me a funny look; he grabs for my hand, kisses my mouth and doesn’t complain about my breath for once. It means more than words ever could.

“Let’s get high,” he says.

Except for maybe those ones.

Seth Lynch

“Land of Teeth and Scales”

The landscape is covered in trees, pine trees, for as far as the eye can see in every direction. Some are like fat Christmas trees and others look like towering palm trees, only with a bushy green dollop of needles on top instead of leaves. They're all massive. Huge. Their canopies loom over the dense fern growth that litters the forest floor beneath them. The only areas clear of ferns are where the block outlines of fallen trees web across the ground. The air is filled with a cacophony of sounds, most too low or high for human ears to pick up, if there were any to do so.

All of them would be foreign. Never would you hear the twitter of a song bird or the chattering of squirrels. In fact, the closest thing to a squirrel would be miles away, tucked in a burrow, lining it with patches of dried moss and grasses. This burrowing reptile had a speckled hide with tufts of course hair and simple glands producing a simple milk. It's the earliest common ancestor linking mammals and the collection of creatures that we now call dinosaurs.

As far back in history as it was, it was real. As real as you or I or the squirrels that chatter outside. Think about it. That rodent-reptile had a smell. That milk had a taste. And craziest of all, some 3 to 4 million generations later, that not-quite-rodent's grandson would write these very words. And let's not forget you, its 3 to 4 millionth grandchild, who would be reading them.

As kids we are drawn to dinosaurs. How can we not be? They are creatures with an almost mythological stature that make us and our rule making parents seem almost insignificant by comparison. But as we grow up we seem to reach some group consensus that we need to outgrow them for more tangible fascinations like sports and gossip magazines.

We forget that we walk on the ground where monsters once tread. Every day we fuel our cars with the carbon from their pressurized remains and do so with no thought towards them or their lost world. We chalk up their absence to volcanos and asteroids as casually as we would the disappearance of a neighbor's cat.

I want this to be abundantly clear: Asteroids did not kill the dinosaurs. Volcanic ash and rivers of magma did not wash these great beasts away- although they might have helped. No, it was greed that killed the dinosaurs.

Let's return to the pine forest that time forgot. Out of the maelstrom of noises, we follow a cry—high pitched, like the yip of a dog and the laughter of sea birds mixed into one. It echoes from above, high above. There are countless trees with countless branches. This one is not much different than the others but for the presence of a small, winged lizard perched on one of the many oversized pine cones. It turns its broad mouth to the sky and sniffs. It cries again, making the branch bob slightly.

This pterosaur is a male. He kneads his surprisingly tiny feet into the coconut-like bark of the tree and props his elbows on the enormous pine cones. His wings are pointed. The soft skin stretched over its boney outline gives the creature a very bat-like appearance. Each elbow he rests upon is actually a hand with fingers that jut upwards, narrowing the wing tips to fine points that stand above his resting body. Without warning his eyes dilate and the tendons in his wings tense. He has caught wind of something. It isn't a predator nor is it prey.

The male leaps out over the forest floor that lies so far beneath him. A fall from this height would shatter his hollow bones and leave him dead or crippled—which is as good as dead in such a hostile terrain. He drops. His flapping appears to be in vain but with gradual persistence the fall lessens. The strange lizard dips up and down as he struggles to maintain his precarious flight pattern.

He doesn't have many branches to worry about at this height. If he flew any lower he might collide with the thick fern growth. This would send him tumbling into the jaws of the armored insects concealed beneath layers of dead vegetation.

The pine cone is now many meters behind him. As he nears his destination his flaps grow faster and his excitement mounts. He can see a snack waiting for him, an unexpected but welcomed treat. A bright blue mayfly the size of a human hand clings lazily to the brown wall. Its eyes reflect the green of the fern growth and the yellow of sun.

The dusty, rust colored lizard holds his wings taut as he glides gracefully in. His stubby tail does little to stabilize his flight. Some of his relatives however- especially those that fly on ocean winds, display long striped tails topped with demon-like arrow heads that trace their travels across the sky.

His jaws snap around the unsuspecting prey and he contorts his body for landing. His hooked toes grasp the cracks of the wall much better than they did the tree. His beady eyes take in the new scenery as he angles his mouth upwards and, after several tries, swallows the twitching insect. It would be the birds who would eventually lead to these large insects' demise. They are simply too large and too slow for the agile, feathered predators yet to come.

But for now the pterosaur lives happily on those he catches. The other mayflies are startled and great clouds of them lift off from the brown wall and circle a few times before settling back down to feed. Our small rust colored friend has found something far more important than just a meal however. He has found a home. The brown wall lurches forward and the muscles underneath prepare to shift the monstrosity another step forward.

The pterosaur secures his grip on the beast's large scales and ventures a few body lengths higher. Any higher and he would find himself

between two rows of small, dull pegs that line the spine of his home. They run from the head of his home and down its 40 to 60 meter long vertebra to end of its tail. The pterosaur can't even begin to comprehend the size of this organism. Nevertheless he hugs it, nuzzling himself between its scales and cooing a reptilian purr which roughly translates to the phrase, "there is no place like home."

This holds true even when your home happens to be the largest organism to ever set its four trunk-like feet on the surface of planet earth. The beast heaves itself forward and shakes the branches of overhead trees. The view of the forest steadily falls back and before the end of the day is through our little Rusty finds himself in the open plains.

Returning from laying her eggs in the safety of the forest underbrush, this Diplodocus lives her life in the prairies. No. Sorry, my mistake—making prairies...

...out of forests.

Not lightly wooded areas mind you, but redwood forests. The same forests that cover the west coast of North America today and are home to the tallest organisms on earth, the redwood pines.

You may be familiar with this dinosaur's close relative the Brachiosaurus. It is perhaps most famous for its cameo as the sneezing dinosaur in Jurassic Park. These giants stood 9 meters high and, using what we know about heart tissue, would have required a 100 kg heart to pump blood all the way up their massive throat. But while they may have been the tallest sauropod (dinosaurs that walked on all four feet) they were not the largest.

To visualize a Diplodocus, take a Brachiosaurus and bend its neck down so it's horizontal. Now stretch the body out to better hold that long, swinging neck and add the double row of dull spines down its back. The tail is long, almost longer than the neck, and rides high above the ground. The first two thirds are thick and stationary but the last portion thins out

and hangs a little more flaccid. It whips side to side and might have been used to communicate non-verbally to others. And when the need arose it could deliver a crushing blow when fish-tailed by their powerful hind quarters.

The beast is lined with a thick hide and levels everything that falls beneath their colossal feet. They move slowly. They are, in fact, so massive that three of their four pillar like feet must remain in contact with the ground to keep them from falling over. This limits their motion and would make fleeing predators very difficult. If they had predators.

The largest threat to them is the 8 meter tall Allosaurus. This is a frightening creature whose keen hunting skills and furious appetite often was superimposed on the much less daunting, but more popular, Tyrannosaurus Rex. This is one of the main reasons that the young Diplodocus are born and live the early part of their lives in the forest. There they consume up to one ton of fern growth each year. By the time they reach adulthood, that's how much they'll shit in one day.

Now I want you to imagine something. Imagine a dust cloud so immense that it keeps the sunlight from reaching the ground. Or imagine rising water levels and rushing rapids where rolling plains once stood. What happens when conditions change but tendencies do not?

Diplodocus are not solitary creatures; they travel in packs. The herds could desecrate miles of forest in mere hours as they uprooted the trees for the soft ferns underneath. It was because of this the herds never stayed in one place for very long. Driven by their hunger they would travel, only revisiting areas once the forest had time to heal. But what do you think happened when the floods came? Or the droughts? Or the fire or dust cloud or whatever occurred, be it from one massive event or decades of gradual change.

It was greed that killed the dinosaurs. A pre-programmed hunger that they could not learn to master by will or want. Yes, you can argue

they were simple beasts or that they couldn't possibly have seen or planned for such an occurrence.

But then what's our excuse?

I may have mislead you earlier. If you were ever under the impression that the dinosaurs were dead or extinct I must apologize profusely. They are not. Neither did they fail to overcome their insatiable appetite. They traded their size for agility and their scales for feathers, but they're still here.

They are our song birds, our birds of prey and even in our waddling penguins. They are direct descendants from theropods; the dinosaurs that only used their hind legs to walk and exist because they found a way to curb their hunger.

Our dinosaurs are doing fine. I hope we can say the same about us in a few hundred years.

But we have quite an appetite...

The Nemadji Review Volume 5



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