Welcome to this year’s edition of Lights and Shadows. Don’t worry; I won’t keep those of you with reading appetites waiting... too long. In the following pages, you’ll find a varied assortment of literary creations. Each one was carefully selected for its freshness and flavor. Then our group of editors chewed on and debated over every piece, before placing them into our magazine. The finished product lies before you. Dig in, read hearty, and enjoy.

-Candace Herron

Very few people would enjoy sitting down with a small group of peers for two or three hours and going through piles of literature criticizing it, praising it, and basically picking it apart. This is one responsibility I’ve had as a co-editor of Lights and Shadows and I’ve loved the experience. It wasn’t the choosing that was fun—in fact, that was a very difficult task - it was the reasoning and debating. I was able to develop my professional methods and opinions about editing and selecting literature for a compilation, something I intend to do for the rest of my life working in a publishing house.

I was challenged to defend those opinions and selections and I was able to learn from the opinions and selections of others and, most importantly, learn to accept when I was wrong and admit that someone else was right. I was challenged to step away from my personal tastes in literature and read and select objectively as I will undoubtedly have to do multiple times in my future.

I despise some challenges—these have brought me joy. Thank you, readers and writers alike—you have given me an opportunity to experience my passion and prepare myself for the future.

Few people would choose such a project or such a field, and many people would tell me I’m chasing an impossible dream. You’ve given me the opportunity to begin to defy them.

Do what you love; live what you love; keep your passions.

-Misty Jones
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WHAT IS BLESSED
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I believe
in the power of limits,
the beauty of woven cane,
a winter’s worth of food.
A life filled with necessary things:
a five-point blanket,
grandmother tales,
food over a fire.
Need renders all things sacred:
three cords of firewood
against the cold.
THE LAY OF HOWARD RAYMOND VAUGHAN, 1927-2004

Kathleen Marshall

When every bird upon his lay
Among the green leaves singeth.
—Confessio amantis, John Gower

A worm of robins,
three hundred force,
wheeled and flowed
in tidal equilibrium
into the gray hackberry
mighty with age.

Below, the goings of ants or men,
Above, the most inoffensive creatures shelter.

The tree: formidable,
with hard gray bark.
Growing deep into the sky,
it gray limbs spread to shelter
in final testament.
Its roots, lace-black amid the earth.

Below, the goings of ants or men,
Above, the most inoffensive creatures shelter.

The man: resolute,
shaped by war.
Having seen tides of men
swept like flood-trash,
realizing it is the minor evils that kill us all,
eventually declined his gaze to lesser battlefields.

Below, the goings of ants or men,
Above, the most inoffensive creatures shelter.

The birds: feasted and cried and sang
in coats of red propriety.
It was a sign from heaven—
A warrior, they told each other,
has entered this day
the kingdom of the air.
TALE OF THE GOONGA BOONGA
Rebecca Mitchell

In the time before the earth tilted on its axis and sent me tumbling into adulthood, I lived in my grandmother's house, much to the dismay of my Uncle Johnny. He was an impressionable thirteen-year-old who swore that I had stolen his mother's love and that I was the reason for all of his troubles. This last part was probably true. Being four years old, and the only grandchild whom my grandmother had forbidden anyone to spank, I was spoiled rotten and into everything. Whenever I got into trouble I would run screaming to my grandmother and wrap myself around her legs, holding on for dear life. My grandmother would laugh and shelter me with her arms saying, "Don't whoop the baby! Don't whoop the baby!"

My uncle's bedroom mystified me. I would creep into the room when he was at school and play with all his things. I remember throwing a model airplane out of the window that he had been working on for weeks, wanting to see it fly. It crashed into the oak tree beside the house and shattered. I remember his passionate cries when he got home, sending me flying to my grandmother for protection.

He was into photography. I was into exposing his film, trying to figure out how he got the little pictures onto the paper like that. His girlfriend would stop by the house on her way home from school and they would sit in the swing on the porch to talk. I would sneak to the window and make fart noises on my arm and tease them, making kissy-sounds. I chased his best friend, Stanley, off with the BB gun. I painted his school letter jacket with fingernail polish. I was forbidden to go upstairs to the attic where he kept his model trains and the National Geographic magazines with the naked dancing ladies, so naturally that was the place where I had to be.

One day, after being yelled at for locking me out of the attic and making me cry, my uncle whispered to me softly where no one else could hear, "Don't go up there, Rebecca, the Goonga Boonga will get you." I didn't really believe him. Not really. Yet there was something about the way he smiled at me and the look in his eyes. It was a look that spoke of secrets and danger and scary things in the dark. I didn't really believe him. Not really.

One liquid hot summer day, my cousin Ellen came to visit. The grown-ups wanted to talk about grown-up things, so we were banished outside in the sweltering heat. My uncle whispered to me as we went out the door, "Remember, don't go upstairs; the Goonga Boonga will get you!"

We played in the chicken yard where there was shade and cool, beneath the muscadine arbor. At that age we were unstoppable. We were superheroes. We were Mouseketeers. She was Miss Sis Boom Bah and I was Miss Van Aster, and we lived in a grand castle made of dirt and vines, sipping tea from pecan shell cups balanced daintily on oak leaf saucers.

As the sun moved to the spot where it burned beneath the trees, our clothes stuck to our skin, and our hair glued and plastered down the backs of our necks. And we grew hot and tired of the dust in the chicken yard and our leafy muscadine castle. We decided to slip inside where it was cool and play in my room with the Barbies beneath the bed where the grownups wouldn't find us and make us go back out into the heat.

I remember growing bored with the Barbies and it wasn't long before we found the need to go in search of new adventures. My companion on my many expeditions to the attic, Ellen, was eager to return and look at the dancing ladies and play with the trains and see what else might be discovered that was supposed to be hidden from the prying eyes of little girls.

I remember telling my beloved cousin, my faithful friend and my trusted companion, of the Goonga Boonga that my uncle had promised was lurking in the dust and twilight of the attic. I remember my cousin, with all of her four-year-old wisdom, convincing me that the Goonga Boonga was just something that he was telling us to keep us from going up there. Her verification of my suspicion was just the thing that I needed to hear.

We crept on tip-toe up the squeaky steps to the shadowy realms of the attic. We squinted our eyes and peered through the dim light...
that filtered through the musty curtains that half hung on cracked windows on the other end of the attic. Dusty boxes, filled with mysterious treasures, were stacked around the room and forgotten. Furniture was piled against the walls and left to rot beneath the remains of old clothes and moldy papers. We picked our way through years of collected junk to the train set that sat in the middle of the room and beckoned us to come and play. Our eyes lit up and impish smiles played across our lips as we both reached out to touch the forbidden wonders of the tiny trains.

A movement from the corner of the room caught my eye and I strained to see through the half-light and dust of the attic. Ellen had seen it too. She caught my arm. “What’s that?” she whispered.

“I don’t know,” I said.

It was about this time that the thing started howling so loudly it rattled the windows. Its red and green eyes flashed, off and on, off and on. First the red eye. Then the green eye. And the thing moved in the darkness toward us, howling and screaming so loudly that it hurt our ears. Its eyes flashed and smoke came from the thing that looked like a nose in the middle of its face. We screamed. Then stopped. And we screamed again, too afraid to run. Then my best friend, my companion, my sister in arms, wet her pants and ran, leaving me to stand and face the monster alone.

I screamed and made the dash down the steps, passing Ellen on the stairs. She cried out and grabbed my shirt to pull me back, afraid of being left alone with the thing that shrieked in the darkness. It was at this time that one of us lost our footing and began tumbling down the steps and the other was caught in a tangle of limbs and followed. And we rolled to a stop at the foot of the stairs, both crying and screaming. Our mothers and my grandmother all came running to our aid. I heard my uncle call to us from somewhere, “I told you the Goonga Boonga would get you! I told you!” And he left us to stare after him as he walked out the door with his hands in his pockets, whistling a little off-key tune.

Ellen and I never ventured up the stairs to the attic ever again without a grown-up. I never went outside alone in the dark. I never slept without a nightlight. And to this day, I won’t sleep with the closet door open, because I know that, somewhere, the Goonga Boonga is still waiting in the dark to get me—along with the Garbage Can Monster. But that’s another story.
Strongly tied with the handle of my black suitcase
I find a yellow piece of cloth. Seeing it,
I remember my mother’s hair.
Long, black and mostly covered with a scarf.
Still shining in that handle, and it’s still
telling me “Your suitcase has character.”
It brings me back to my mother’s shoulders,
makes me smell her hair again.
She tried to hold her tears in,
but no way; I still feel her sigh.
I think of that early morning when
she took it from the back of her hair
and tied it strongly in my black suitcase handle
so I never mistake it in the baggage claim.
Whenever he had no reason to immediately go to bed and everyone was asleep, he would toss off the covers and walk to the corner of the room in the dark. He would plug headphones into the stereo and put in the CD, hit play, and turn the volume up to its maximum. He’d roll the dial until the stereo’s display hit track 4, “P.S.,” and he would watch his entire room disappear, replaced by whatever his imagination wanted. An empty meadow, a standing-room-only concert hall, a prison cell.

He kept the volume loud to build up a barrier against the outside world. He wanted it dark and void of other stimuli so he could concentrate solely on the feeling and the sound. His mind processed the notes and the words and turned them into a reality right in front of his eyes, projected like a movie reel on the white screen.

Sometimes he wondered about it. Dreams came from your mind when you slept. But he asked, “Can I create dreams when I am awake? Can I force my mind to live, for a moment, inside of something that isn’t real?” It felt real enough for him.

He thought sometimes too he was completely crazy. He knew anyone would think he was. He never knew if his parents ever heard him; in the silence of the night, the joyous rapture of the music taking over him, driving him to far extremes. Part of the thrill did come from the idea that it was almost forbidden. He was supposed to be sleeping, supposed to be happy, to be behaving normally. What would they say if they caught him, thrashing his head back and forth in oblivious distraction? Deep inside, he didn’t care. It was liberation.

Every last detail made sense to him. And it was all his. He never heard those songs on the radio; the media didn’t wear these songs out on him. It was really all his, his private treasure. When the notes came out, when they entered his ears, they were like electricity and fire in one concentrated burst. It was like having a battery put inside of him that made him work, made him move. It felt so special to him, how all the instruments and the singer made a singular, living, conscious sound instead of four separate strings of noises.

All the words were so intelligent. It was poetry, accompanied by this kind of unattractive beauty. He was so amazed that someone could write like that, think like that. And he thought how much Schwab’s attitude, his perception was so much like his. He felt like it was a second version of himself that had seen and experienced everything he had, and turned it into words and song. What he loved most was how he sang, shouted, screamed. The singer didn’t stay in one mode through every song. He felt like this man he was listening to knew what he knew; that something was inherently wrong with the world, that life was more than magazine covers and cliques of friends. It was a frustration he understood well. He’d mouth the anthems in perfect synchronicity.

If they only saw what those eyes have seen.
It always keeps us longer than we wanted to stay,
It always takes us further than we wanted to go.
But you don’t mind, no you don’t mind at the time.
Begging to be set free...from what we were meant to be.

He would never hear another song like this. The way the guitar was tuned, the way the drums were hit so incredibly hard, but stood up to the pummeling. He would always think of the end of the world when he heard “P.S.”; the way the vibrations were like the fallout of atomic bombs. It was the sound of fire if you took away the crackle and the pop and listened only to the movement of flame.

Every note was a story of its own. A million stories that he could listen to inside of six minutes.

He fell away from the Project years after that. The band would put out albums later on. And he would feel incredible excitement in those days before he would hear that new material, those unexplored notes, stories. But, of course, it couldn’t be the same. Nothing can live up to that reputation. That’s why it becomes your favorite song or your favorite album; it’s perfection. So he would stop wearing the T-shirt he bought at the first show he saw them play. He stopped wondering when they would tour. He stopped listening.
But whenever he had that day where nothing could fix it but that fire-music... When he would take long drives on interstates... He could listen to that song, that album, and hours would pass like minutes while he blanketed himself with memories and emotions that hadn't lost a spark, memories that were tucked away in a safe place where they would never fade.
REN
Lisa Roper

You told me I could do anything,
painting with gnarled, tree-root fingers
I so wished to be my own.
I hated your cigarette and coffee breath.
I loved the way you cooked gumbo.

You told me not to be like the girl
gyrating her hips on MTV.
You told me I could do anything
else. And I did, although
I sometimes danced in the secret of my room.

Spinning to music, tossing my hair,
grooving in front of the mirror, I heard your voice:
Run with boys, argue with adults,
think for yourself, never smoke.
My spinning stopped.

I found myself in the mirror,
blue eyes just like yours.
I found you looking back,
eyes twinkling with amusement
a fellow rebellious spirit.

But a smoky haze, a gray fog
quickly obscured the view.
When it lifted, you were gone,
my lone heartbeat left to mix
with the pulse of the music.

You told me I could do anything,
but for all you told me
you could not make yourself quit,
you could not stay,
and I dance with no purpose now.

You told me I could do anything
and I believed you.
But you let me down.
You taught me I can do just about anything
but live forever.
SLAVE BLOOD
Cameron Green

Run as thick as sticky, candy-coated thighs in June,
Tucked sleepily under a veil of a summer dress,
Waiting until marriage to be awakened.

Run as smooth as the beads of sweat that lace my back,
In the dark alleys and back roads of the ghettos,
Where there are fistfights against hunger, and bar brawls against poverty.

Run as hot as bootleg moonshine, traveling the lonely road
Of depression down suppressed and muted throats,
Causing plush lips to regurgitate French towards America.

Run as strait as razorblade creases that slice through
The clay obstacles, and cut out displays of ink-stained lambskin,
Posted on the jail cells of illusion.

Run as violent as fingernail scratches on backs,
And toes grasping at ceilings, battling on soiled mattresses...
To forget and live.

Run as powerful as Atlantic waters washing royalty into peasantry,
And baptizing women and children in blood.

Run as wet as the ink that traveled the glorious path of the quill pen,
Promising liberty and guaranteeing pain.

Slave blood, Run.
If anyone in the Exodus reads this, maybe that means there’ll still be hope one day. By the time anyone finds this record, it’ll already be too late for me.

We’ve been fighting the underground war for decades now. It may not be the 400 years in Egypt, but it feels like practically forever. I wasn’t born when it started, but my parents were among the Patriarchs, that original group of dedicated fighters who finally stood up to the Gentiles. I think that was back in the time of Abimelech, or maybe it was even Nimrod. I never cared much about who we were fighting, and I was too young to remember for a while. They’re all the same anyway.

So running and hiding is really all I’ve known. Learning to lurk in the shadows, sleep by day and move by night, half a dozen languages and accents as well—great that they’re all so related, you know? But I had to figure that it’d all end some day. And hey, I no longer have to hide, right? It’s been such a hard life sometimes, living with all the things I’ve done. When my parents named me, surely they were thinking of the wise and honorable priests. Surely they didn’t foresee me following in the bloody footsteps of that tribe’s father, but maybe they did. Eloi, may the guilt not haunt me much longer. Let me go to Sheol in peace.

But here I am waxing poetic about my imminently concluding life, and I need to finish this account. If any of my brethren find this, please take it to Caleb...

All things considered, it should’ve been a fairly easy mission. Of course, when I say easy, I mean that the chances of exploding in a horrible, fiery death were roughly even to all other possibilities. I guess I can be grateful for the little things, huh? I’m still alive for now, and maybe at least I can get this story out somehow. Although my death will likely be horrible and fiery anyway.

You see, we’d found an old water station a couple of years ago, eventually making it into one of our few (mostly) above-ground...
bases. The derelict structures had been abandoned thirty years before when everyone thought the aquifer had dried up, but we discovered that it'd replenished itself somehow. We tried not to hit it more than once a quarter, but it was one of our best supplies, and inevitably a few fools decided to settle there. Some of Joshua's men, I think, and he went along with it despite some misgivings. I think in some ways he was just exhausted by the constant moving. Yahweh knows he'd served his time.

So the outpost was there, even though it wasn't much. There were never more than twenty of us around at any one time, and usually only a dozen stayed on. Caleb hadn't liked the whole planting down idea much either, but once Joshua set it up he'd usually leave a couple of us to help every few weeks. For the past month Miriam and I had been with Joshua's squad, and their edginess was getting to me. Last time I'd been hadn't been nearly as nerve-wracking, and Joshua's health hadn't been failing him so swiftly.

The days were quiet, though, and I think Miriam was glad for that. She can certainly handle a gun—our field medics don't last long without that—but she was probably more worried about me. She always did say I think too much, and being holed up didn't help any. I started reliving some of the Calf Revolt in my dreams—nightmares—usually waking up to find her sitting there with a tranq pack. It was really hard on her, I know, but she was probably worried about what more fighting might do to me. Maybe Caleb was, too, and that's why he'd left me there.

But praise Yahweh that nothing happened over those weeks except my nightmares. I never could've known Miriam as well if we'd never been assigned there together, and I hope that somehow her life was easier because of it. All the running had taken its toll on her, too, so it's nice that she got a break. She needed some relief. Yeah. I can be happy about that.

Caleb and the rest of our squad finally got back with a tanker and brought with them a surprising treasure. The suitcase Simeon handed me as they disembarked was filled with diamonds. The sight when I opened those clasps was stunning. Now, I don't care how pessimistic you are, but those shiny rocks could have funded the Children of Israel's operations for an entire year. There are always suppliers if the price is right. Caleb told Simeon and me to take care of it, so we hid the thing before coming back to help fill.

Reuben and Eli had attached the hose, and Leah was already activating the pumps. It was always a risky operation, but so far we hadn't been caught. Those Gentiles can be blind fools sometimes. This time, though, I think it had made us cocky. Caleb seemed nervous as we waited to fill before going off to confer with Joshua. Deborah and Reuben stood on guard by the tanker while the rest of us moved inside. Miriam stood next to me, and I ran a finger through her long curls—they were more like springs, really—as we watched through a window. She looked tired, almost sad. I still wonder if she had some premonition, but I guess I won't wonder for much longer.

We were just standing there watching, when a bright beam slashed the sky and destroyed the hose. Yahweh must have been angry with us, or else those Gentiles simply weren't as blind as they always seemed. One of their pesky Hornet fliers had spotted our shindig and reported back to base. Well, Pharaoh's chariots were certainly upon us, and Moses with his rod was just a few millennia too early right then. He'd brought a whole wing of their scouts after us. Deborah was cut down by another Hornet sting as she headed to the tanker, but Reuben scrambled to replace the hose while everyone else returned fire. We knew it was hopeless, but if we were lucky, at least Caleb or Joshua or maybe even the tanker or diamonds could get away. Thank Eloi they scattered from our shots—did they think we had larger guns on the ground? Or maybe they were worried we'd somehow hit their unprotected weapons. Yahweh knows those stingers were remarkably easy to target from below.

The Hornets stopped firing and gave us a mild respite, but it was a deceptive peace. A set of bulky Frog transports landed, encircling our base with their bloated hulls. Several Goliath officers marched from their yawning jaws, powerful armor making the soldiers all but impervious to our blasts. I think we wounded one, but it cost us Eli and Jephthah and Jael. Those shots were destroying the station around us, and my only thought was to salvage whatever we could. I briefly saw Joshua as he urged his men on, but one blast killed the
aged warrior instantly. That old hero with his wild sense of humor had often kept us relatively sane, and a pang of regret lanced my heart.

I’d lost Miriam in the fray, but Reuben had almost filled our tanker with the spare hose and Simeon had recovered the diamonds somehow. He thrust the suitcase at me and yelled, “Go!” So I did. I looked back to see him holding a doorway against the Goliaths, buying the others time to get underground before their beams tore him apart. He really may have been the fiercest of us all.

The Goliaths had cut me off from the rest as I helped Reuben launch the tanker. Eloi be praised that we’d left it running. I detached the hose and activated the tank’s valves. I knew he didn’t have time to wait on me, so I jumped clear as the lumbering bulk rose into the air. I almost cheered when the ground forces let it leave, but my hopes were dashed. A couple of Hornets swiftly appeared and surrounded him. Reuben was good, but I wasn’t sure how long he’d stay alive with those odds.

Then, almost absurdly, he appeared: our greatest current threat and the king of the nations, Lucifer himself. He almost seemed to rob the atmosphere of warmth, or maybe that was just my hatred toward him. He smirked behind his immaculate suit and brilliant white crop of hair—at his age, he can’t be a threat much longer. Of course, then we’ll get a Belshazzar or Artaxerxes or Herod, but I won’t have to worry about that now, will I?

The Goliaths made room for him and at the same time clustered thickly to protect their leader. I got an idea as he disembarked from that Frog. Miriam never cared much for me keeping them, but I had a few blast grenades clinging to my belt that hadn’t fallen off. I was sure that ol’ Lucy would survive somehow, but I needed a distraction. Praise Yahweh, the orb sailed past the Goliaths and bounced right at his feet. I think he had a force shield on, but the resulting explosions were so close to their ruler that his guards panicked. And not that I’m bragging—Yahweh knows I’m not—but I think I may have even killed one or two of them.

In the chaos, I managed to seize one of the Frogs the Goliaths had so kindly abandoned and take off, diamonds in tow. The pilot was paying far too much attention to my diversion, so it was a simple matter to take control. The enemy forces likewise didn’t seem to realize I’d stolen the craft until I was already on my way up. Their beams made little more than dents in the plating, and I rose to where Reuben was still evading one Hornet in midair. What happened to the other I never found out.

I had a choice to make, and in that moment I put Reuben’s life ahead of mine, and the life-giving water above my own cargo. I radioed him my intentions (he was shocked to hear from a Frog as an ally) and explained my plan. “What about the suitcase?” he asked, and I told him I’d take care of it. I asked him to confirm the plan.

“Are you sure?” he asked me. Yeah. I was.

The impact was incredible. Almost the entire back of the Frog was ripped off as the Hornet collided with my craft. The cockpit plunged to the ground, and praise Yahweh that I somehow survived. I wasn’t out long, but I awoke to find my right leg completely numb and the diamonds at my feet. Miriam had, amazingly, found me, cut open the wreckage, and pulled me out. My ears were pounding, but they divulged the unmistakable sound of Hornets circling overhead.

“You have to go,” I tried to tell Miriam, but she refused.

“You need me to stay.” Just about the last words I heard from any of the Children.

And now—oh, Yahweh—I hear footsteps coming for me, and this record is incomplete. I can’t finish it now—the last thing I could have done for the Exodus, and I’ve managed to fail at that, too. Eloi, elo, why not more time? Miriam would not be proud. Please, Yahweh, save—
RACING THE WIND

Erick Alexander

I used to race the wind,
    as a child on the playground.
On a swing knifing back and forth,
    I sliced clouds from the red clay floor.
I used to race the wind,
    as a child on the playground.
I learned to fly while others ran.
While swing chains squeaked and wind whipped by,
I was free.
Free to race the wind.
Free to fly without wings.
Free to fall back to earth's embrace.
GREEN-EYED MONSTER

Erick Alexander

Money can't buy happiness
only make me giggle
all the way to the bank.
More money
More problems—They say
I say
More money
Less bills
More time to be
Me.
No longer crazy
Now eccentric.
A SLOW SHOT
Erick Alexander

I killed a man
with a shot of gin.
Head hit the bar
body falling
slow—gin to the floor.
I killed a man
with a shot of gin.
Neat
rocks to the side
tumbling down
dashed upon the rocks
with a twist of lime.

GULF COAST SERENADE
Rebecca Mitchell

Having lost my taste for funerals and the pyres of the dead,
I took a stroll down the narrow stretch of beach,
Across the street from my cheap hotel.
There, the sugared sand, stained pink from the setting sun,
Stuck to the bottoms of my feet and worked its way up between my toes.
Down by the crimson waves, the fires of Hell made sweet
By the sun’s last sparkle on the molten sea
A sandpiper darted between surge and foam.
Dining on periwinkles and silvered minnows,
He stayed just ahead to safely keep me company,
As a distant marimba band serenaded the sun to sleep.
Ruby clouds pushed by the evening breeze
Danced across the sky like ships on fire to disappear behind the row
Of condos that skirted the beach and vanished where the sea met the sky.
I stopped for a moment and breathed in the salty, sweet air, scented
With banana, coconut, and from somewhere, shrimp frying,
Making my mouth water.
Over my shoulder the rising moon
Paled against the scarlet light that was
One last blaze of glory before surrendering to the night.
I stopped there, watching, and thought
That’s the way I want to leave this world.
One last blazing explosion of crimson light,
Turning the sea to liquid fire
While the gentle rhythm of a marimba band serenades me down to sleep.
Cousin Angela is here from California.
It’s July.
I’m nine.
My birthday is in October, and then I’ll be ten.
But it’s July,
hot and sticky.
Heather and Angela are mature.
They sing songs in the back of Dad’s pickup truck.
Sweet Child of Mine
They teach me the words,
but not on purpose. I’m a good listener,
Mom says,
too good.
She Talks to Angels, singing loud as wind.
My ears stick out to catch a sunburn.
Our sand bar, that’s where Dad’s taking us in the pickup,
Into the Great Wide Open.
Because Angela is here for July only and then it’s back to California,
where it’s hot but not sticky enough to sing to forget how skin sticks to other skin in the summer.
Sadiqi lived in a little dark room at the top of a traditional Moroccan house, which was located in those small alleys in the old Medina. The room was a space of liberal arts. A Fake Mona Lisa painting, Bob Marley’s poster with guitar in his hand and a joint in his mouth, a big map of the world, and Che Guevara’s picture were on the room’s walls. Near his bed, there was a bookshelf, which combined both Arab and western novels and literary books. Each book belonged to a different author and a certain era. Beginning and End, a novel by Najib Mahfoud, an Egyptian novelist and a Nobel Prize winner, was next to The Winter Wind of Mobarak Rabie, a Moroccan author. There was another section where Silas Marner, an early Victorian age novel by George Eliot, was under Jude the Obscure, a late Victorian age novel by Thomas Hardy. There was also a collection of stories by Edger Allan Poe, an American short story writer.

It was Friday midnight, but Sadiqi was still sitting on his sofa in his dark room which was lighted by some candles. He was smoking kiff, drinking his mint tea and listening to “Redemption Song” by Bob Marley, the song that he appreciated the most for it was “a mind song,” he said. He was not getting stoned any more; he had smoked too much. But the song made his mind evaporate from that little dark space to the world of those he had on his bookshelf. He always joined their fiction as he found a sort of pleasure. He understood their themes, which “dramatize a certain point in fictional frame,” he said. His mind started thinking about the Moroccan literature and Jamaa el Fna in Marakach as a space of popular culture, which “artists should bring up to the consciousness of the world” Sadiqi whispered.

At the middle of his mental journey, he heard someone knocking on his door. He turned off the music and went to open the door without bothering to hide his kiff and Sebsi. His friends visited him all the time, and the room smelt of kiff anyway. As he opened the door, he found Professor Said who hadn’t shown up for a long time.

“What’s up Prof. It’s been a long time,” Sadiqi said, wondering why Said would visit him after all this time, for the last time he saw him was seven years ago, before Said went to America.

“Yes,” Said answered shortly.

“Who let you in downstairs?”

“Alhaja, and she says she needs to talk to you.”

“Ah I see. She needs her monthly payment. I haven’t given her a penny. I owe her six months of rent.”

Said didn’t say a word. It seemed as if he didn’t need any kind of communication with Sadiqi any more.

“Well, let me go to the kitchen and make you tea very quickly”

“No. I have no time for that. I came to say something and leave” Said didn’t hesitate to refuse.

“I am going to make tea for myself anyway. There is no more left in my cup.” Intelligently he made Said accept the tea invitation and went on, saying, “I am going to the kitchen. It’s going to take two minutes.” As he moved to the kitchen, which was no more than another small room next to his bedroom, he said jokingly, “Enjoy my room smell, but don’t get stoned.”

Acting as if he didn’t hear, Said opened the room’s window so the kiff’s smell would vanish and sat on a chair near the window. The room didn’t seem that it was changed at all, but he didn’t like it any more. He forgot the days he spent in this room with Sadiqi and many people from a different world, America, from which he had recently got his PhD. This room no longer reminded him of his mental journeys, Sadiqi leading, turning the Sebsi around and telling stories. At this moment this room was “a crazy space,” he whispered. Now Said was an English professor, and a writer. He was a man with a nice suit, and that’s it.

Sadiqi came into the room with two cups of tea, laughing.

“People come from far away and spend a lot of money on a plane ticket only to inhale the smell that you opened the window for to go away.” He handed one cup of tea to Said and put his on a small table near his sofa. He picked up his Sebsi and said, “I can’t smoke without drinking my favorite mint tea and vice versa. Do you want to take some Shqaf?”
“No. I just came to say something,” Said said as he stood up.
“Ok, Prof. You have the floor,” Sadiqi said.
“All I want to say is that I don’t like you to talk behind my back.”
“What?”
“I think you heard what I said. DON’T talk behind my back.”
“What did I say?”
“You said stuff about me.”
“No, no, no, hold on a second. I always talk about my stuff, but I don’t talk about you.”
“You think people are going to believe what you say?”
“Well, why do you want me not to talk since no one will believe it is so?”
“I want you not to mention my name. Just look at the mirror. Ah! You don’t have one. I will buy it for you so you can see yourself, but let me tell what you are going to see.” While Sadiqi was quiet Said went on, “You are going to see a history of a loser who spends his time just talking and bringing these hippies to his little crappy room to smoke hash and fuck them. Everyone knows that.”
“At least they paid for the hash they smoked, and you never did, but that’s okay because I know what kind of person or bacteria you are. You know what? You are a parasite.”
Said got mad, but he could do nothing. He just slammed the door and left without any resolution.
Sadiqi felt like a victim, and he shouldn’t keep quiet any more. The people that he always talked to in the café can’t do anything about his problem. They might not even consider it a problem as nothing concerns them but smoking kiff, looking for tourists to trick them, and then going back to the café in these alleys where they talked about the day’s adventure. Feeling naïve for taking everything and everyone for granted, Sadiqi spent two days in his room without going to the café. He just lay on his bed thinking about his life that he had messed up. His mind couldn’t stop thinking about the moment he saw Said’s collection of stories in the bookstore. He still recalled that moment when he felt happy for seeing his friend’s book published, but this happiness turned to bitterness as he figured out that Said had done nothing but type stories and have them published, nothing more and nothing less. He felt he needed to talk to someone that could help him with his problem. He couldn’t think of anybody but Dr. Hamid, the head of the English department.
Monday morning, Sadiqi went to see Dr. Hamid in his office. He found his secretary who told him to wait as Dr. Hamid had a meeting. Sadiqi took a seat. The secretary gave him this weird look as he didn’t seem the kind of person Dr. Hamid knew.
Sadiqi was skinny, with dark skin and long curly hair. His eyes were red as he couldn’t smoke in the secretary’s office. He had these old jeans whose blue color had vanished and a wrinkled white shirt. He was so quiet as he was sitting on the chair waiting. At this time, he was not thinking about his life. He didn’t remember when he dropped out of the university. He used to spend all his time with old tourist ladies traveling around Morocco showing them the beauty of Tangier, the hash of Chefchaouen, the traditions of Fes and the story tellers of Jamaa el Fna in Marakech. He didn’t even remember going to jail because he didn’t have a permit to guide tourists. He forgot when his dad was trying to convince him to focus on his university studies and leave those hippy ladies alone. He got in a fight with him and left his family to live alone. Nothing could remind of him those lectures on English literature that he enjoyed and the discussion he used to lead with Ms. Sue, an American professor. He didn’t even recall his presentation he made about “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison where he discussed the concept of identity and the limitations of racist ideologies. He hardly remembered Jessica, a hippy girl from California that he dated. They spent nights in Fes alleys’ motels smoking hash together. He dumped her and used her for money. He couldn’t even think that he was forty years old and had no future, and that he hadn’t paid Alhaja her monthly payment for six months now.
All that Sadiqi could remember were the things that used to happen in his room. He remembered Hamid, who was a senior in the university, and Said who was still a freshman when they used to visit him and spent nights smoking and talking about English literature with those American hippies that Sadiqi invited. Said and Hamid were much younger than Sadiqi who used to help them understand English grammar and analyze literature. He could think of this night when he got stoned with hash and started telling a
story about this Moroccan playwright who had successfully made a play dramatizing the life of a storyteller in Jamaa el Fna and who then presented this play in the Fortune Theater in London. He remembered Hamid, who was deeply immersed in this story, telling him, “You are a reference of fiction and a source of experience.”

The secretary asked him to go in to Dr. Hamid’s office. He stepped quietly into the office, expecting Dr. Hamid to welcome him.

“Yeah, come in and have a seat,” Dr. Hamid said and continued, “is there anything I can do for you?” while acting busy with papers on his desk.

“I am here to say that I am used and you know that.”

“No, I don’t.”

“You know that the stories that Said has just published are mine.”

“You must be kidding. Have you ever published something?” Dr. Hamid said sarcastically.

“No, but I used to tell these stories... you remember, right?”

“It doesn’t matter whether you tell stories or not. You have to have them published to prove they are yours.”

“I see, but this is plagiarism. You know they are mine. Just admit that.”

“Uf, you know what Helen Keller said? She said, ‘It’s not good to have no vision.’” Said is an English professor and has a talent for writing, and you don’t. You just say stuff, not even stories, like those who spend the whole day in Jamaa el Fna in Marakech collecting tips with this stuff that you call telling stories. It’s just like begging.”

Sadiqi replied, noticing that Dr. Hamid had misquoted Helen Keller. “Helen Keller said, ‘It’s a terrible thing to see and have no vision.’ You messed up with my stories, but you better not mess up with Helen Keller quote.” Sadiqi flipped the chair over, knowing that Hamid would not admit that.

He got so mad because he felt he had been used, and left talking to himself as he was heading back to his room. “Jamaa El Fna is a traditional space of arts, and what you call begging is an art of story-telling, which needs a persuasion skill. It’s an art that you try to deny.”

He arrived at the house and started going upstairs. As soon as he reached the roof, he saw Said again waiting for him. He acted as if he didn’t see him and moved to the kitchen. He started to boil water to make his tea. Said followed him to the kitchen and said, “You can do whatever you want. No one will believe you are a story teller, but I am a story writer and I have proof.”

Sadiqi no longer cared for what Said was saying. He fixed his tea and pulled his Sebsi out of his pocket. As he started smoking, he said, “A parasite doesn’t need proof to act as such.”
HOW TO FIGHT
Matt Braddick

Being nine years old I am obsessed
with giant robots and soldiers in cartoons on TV,
waging war against darkly dressed enemies
shooting their guns and flying their planes.

At recess, Johnathan and I are yelling
back and forth, calling each other names.
And I am tired and frustrated and I want something
to feel the same way I do.
I'm hitting him, punching him wherever my fists
can make contact. He pushes me away and he tries to walk away and
I chase him. I start hitting him again and now it's a fight.
The sun is tinting everything yellow. It's a pretty day.
We are like warriors struggling up the hillside.

When our teacher asks me why we were
fighting I tell her I don't know why
because I don't. I sit outside in the hall on the floor.
I feel ashamed. I can't look at my classmates.
I think Johnathan might feel the way I did before we fought
But I feel different now.

Everyone was cheering me on, shouting.
What are my parents going to do to me? What will they say?
I remember reading about gladiators in Rome fighting for their lives
a hundred thousand years ago.

My mother is very sad. We hardly speak.
It was just a provocation. Mom asks me
what happened. I tell her everything 'cept about what I told myself
And why I did what I did. I tell her I bit Johnathan and
she acts surprised then laughs a little bit.
She says that dad needs to teach me how to fight while
we walk to the car, then she drives me home from the battlefield.

I tell dad what I did at supper later on while I
eat my carrots. He doesn't say a lot 'cept he asks me what mother
asked me and I tell him what I told mom. And then they both
say I'm grounded. After dinner I lay in front of the TV
watching cowboys and Indians.
My father never made time to teach me how to fight.
The other languages come during sleep mostly, sometimes in the middle of sex. Her college education leaking through from her subconscious. Her German boyfriend thinks of her as petite, dark, mysterious. “Mein exotischer schmetterling.” His language is milk; his words nourishing. He whispers foreign phrases, foreign dreams into her skin—his hands grasp her hips, his mouth wet against her neck.

She burns to leave this place. Her one-bedroom apartment is shrinking, or so she thinks. Each month she feels more claustrophobic. This life she’s formed is stale and tepid as mosquito water. Her dreams are filled with boxes and tape. The clear, shipping tape stuck to her hands, her mouth. In her sleep, she cringes against her partner’s back. The night goes by so slowly without air to breathe. Stifling, she rises at all hours to do laundry, vacuum, read Goethe.

When the time comes, two tickets are purchased. Her boyfriend smiles beside her, smiles again at the patient travel agent. On leaving her office he begins giving her vivid, fervent descriptions. Berlin, Cologne, Munich... his eyes are aflame with home. She takes two weeks to rid herself of her meager possessions—making sure to send some photographs and crystal stemware to her mother for safekeeping.

The apartment seems more like home when empty. The newfound space relieving her of the once-persistent feeling of suffocation. She can breathe easily now, her sleep calmer the night before leaving than it has been in years. Her partner’s endless tossing fails to disturb her. A restless mouth stays closed.

On rising a morning later, he is missing. Her salvation, her ticket evaporated. She wanders listlessly through a vacant place, her lips moving without sound.
VENUS
Haley Sylvester

I thought I saw Venus the other night
As I was looking up at the stars
In Cherry Hill.
It might have been Venus,
The fake-star with a greenish-yellow glow,
The brightest thing in our night sky.
It could have been a security light.
There are lots of security lights
In Cherry Hill.
What if it were Venus without arms?
Or the goddess on a half shell,
Cleverly covering her body parts with her hair?
But then I think of my luck,
And I think of all the things I see.
I bet it was an airplane!
No wishing on stars for me.
I'll bet it was an airplane,
A really big jumbo jet,
With its sparkling lights,
And its stewardesses giving out salted peanuts
And oatmeal raisin cookies.
Or maybe it wasn't anything at all.
Maybe I saw nothing up in the sky
In Cherry Hill.

PARTICULAR DETAILS FROM JANUARY 8, 1998 JUMP OUT AT ME. I WAS WEARING A PINK SWEATER AND A BLACK SKIRT. MAMA HAD WORN A NAVY SWEATSUIT AND NOT TAKEN A SHOWER THAT MORNING, WHICH WAS VERY UNUSUAL FOR HER. MY FRIEND DANIELLE AND I WERE SINGING ALONG TO A SONG ON THE RADIO IN THE BACK SEAT. THE FEW SECONDS BEFORE THE CAR LOST CONTROL REALLY SEEMED TO HAPPEN IN SLOW MOTION. I CAN SEE THE EXACT LOOK ON DANIELLE'S FACE AS WE TURNED SLOWLY TO ONE ANOTHER: THE TENSION, THE SURPRISE, FOLLOWED BY THE MOST INTENSE FEAR I'VE EVER SEEN ON HER FACE. I SAW HER MOUTH SPREAD AS SHE SCREAMED, NOT REALIZING THAT I WAS SCREAMING JUST AS LOUDLY.

The second the car stopped still in the mud at the bottom of that ditch on Elm Street, the airbags hissed viciously. I felt a surge of pain up the back of my neck. From that moment on, time was no longer kind to me. It was no longer moving slowly, giving me time to grasp what was happening. Instead, it became a stream of consciousness; time began racing. I felt like a first-time racecar driver, having no control whatsoever.

Every 21 seconds, one person in the US sustains a Traumatic Brain Injury.¹

Struggling to maintain consciousness is a strange feeling. All day before my surgery I felt like I was having a conversation with every person who came around, only they couldn't hear me. Or maybe I really did say these things, always ending in exclamations, only they weren't listening.

"Who are you? Why are you holding my neck in your hands? I don't know you...let go of me!"

"My name is Erin. It's January. I'm twelve. Stop asking me questions. Leave me alone!"

I know I told the x-ray guy that I was going to vomit. He told me I was going to be OK, trying to reassure me.
He should have listened.

"Why are you strapping me onto a stretcher again? I thought I was fine...I don't want to get back in the ambulance!"

It was an overcast day, so I wasn't transported by Med-Flight. Being strapped to a backboard in order to hold my neck still and having frequent fits of vomiting was an extremely problematic situation to be in. The paramedics had to pick me up on the backboard, flip me over, and let me vomit the whole ambulance ride to Huntsville Hospital. I don't remember anything else that happened before the surgery. The last thing I recall is lying sideways on a table and my surgeon saying something reassuring to me as I finally faded into a heavy, drug-induced unconsciousness.

The first thing I remember after waking up was being rolled down the hallway in the hospital on my way to the Intensive Care Unit. Everything seemed very white, glaring brightly down on me as I looked up and saw my daddy's face. I remember a rush of warmth, of happiness filling me up, such an antithesis to the starkness of the hospital hallway. "Daddy!" I remember saying. Later Daddy talked about how thrilled he was to hear me speaking so soon out of the operating room.

I have just a few other gaping memories of that night. I remember seeing Honey, I Shrunk the Kids on TV (which is entirely different than watching something on TV) and telling my sister about it. I'm pretty sure I had a few visitors. Evidently there had been around 70 people in the waiting room. I remember getting a glimpse of the little girl beside me, who I later found out had been run over by a tractor.

The respirator was the plague of my existence that night, though at the time I didn't realize that's what it was. All I knew was that my throat was burning intensely, like no sore throat I had ever experienced. I slept fitfully, constantly asking for pieces of ice to soothe what seemed to me to be my blistered throat. That respirator would go on to plague me for weeks, causing miserable heartburn that no antacids could cure.

According to my surgeon Dr. Haus, I had suffered a depressed skull fracture, as well as a major blood vessel laceration. Basically, my head had crashed into the side window of our van, and upon impact a portion of my skull just behind my left ear had been crushed. The impact bruised my brain, and the jagged piece of bone had cut into a major blood vessel. Dr. Haus sewed up the blood vessel and, using a small metal plate and screws, fixed the largest remaining piece of bone in place.

What are the main causes of head injuries? A serious head injury is most likely to happen to someone who is in a car wreck and isn't wearing a seat belt...

One visitor surprised me by showing up at my house one day. He had been a witness to our accident, and was actually the strange man who had held my neck carefully in his hands. I was still staying only on the couch at that point, so that's where I stayed for his visit. I remember two things about that thirty minutes. First, he told us that we had actually spun up gravel and broken his windshield. This surprised me because I remembered the wreck as being much too smooth to have spun up gravel.

Then he leaned in a little closer from the rust-colored recliner where he sat. He proceeded to say, "You didn't have your seatbelt on, did you?"

I could barely hold my tears back. I hadn't cried very much through this whole experience, but the very idea that this man would march into my house and blame me for what had happened made the tears stream down my cheeks.

My seat belt had been buckled.

Long-term memory is memory that lasts for years or longer. It contains everything we know about the world, including semantic and factual information as well as autobiographical experience...

While I was in the hospital, everyone was always very perky around me, which was a little bit irritating, but strangely reassuring at the same time. At least they weren't all quiet, like I was on my death bed or something. One of the first mornings that I was going to get to eat a normal meal, my mom handed me a menu, so that I
could pick out what I wanted for breakfast.

As I looked down at the page, excited that I was going to get a real meal (if you can call hospital food a real meal), I suddenly felt the strangest sensation. I couldn’t read what was on the page. I kept looking at the piece of paper, blinking a few times, trying to focus. What was going on?

“Mama,” I said, “I can’t read this.”

She didn’t really know what I meant. I knew I was supposed to be able to read. I hadn’t lost my ability to communicate clearly because I could speak normally. But I looked at what I knew were words and sentences representing eggs and toast on the page, and they didn’t mean anything to me. It was like looking at a foreign alphabet, just scribblings on a page with no meaning to me.

I soon realized that I was absolutely incapable of reading, writing, or spelling. Not only that, but as more and more visitors came, I realized that I couldn’t remember anyone’s name. I knew exactly who they were, but I simply couldn’t recall their names, not even my best friends.

I could kind of feel a little bit of panic issuing from my parents, which was understandable. According to my doctor, the part of my brain responsible for reading and visual images had been injured enough to inflict temporary impairment of long term memory.

Losing the ability to read and write is traumatic enough for anyone, but I had always been such an avid reader and writer that it was particularly painful for me. Now that I look back on it, I am surprised that I was never worried about losing it permanently. It never really crossed my mind that maybe I would have to learn everything all over again. Instead, after a few weeks of struggling with recognizing even the smallest words and getting to cheat on spelling tests when I returned to school, my memory finally returned. I think perhaps my joy in the return of this knowledge is evident in the fact that I am now working towards a degree in professional writing.

I am a firm disbeliever in existentialism. If I don’t remember something, then it never existed, they say. I have experienced temporary memory loss. I could actually remember that there was something I wasn’t remembering. I knew I should be able to read and write and remember my best friend’s name. And I couldn’t remember the split second that my head had crashed against the window of our bright blue Ford Aerostar, but, trust me, I knew that it had happened.

Now, eight years later, I always have a small moment of confusion when I realize that someone I know doesn’t know about “the wreck,” as my family and I have come to call it. How could you not know that I once had to have metal screwed into my skull? How could you not know what I went through? And then I realize how. It’s because I have let that part of me go, that fear that kept me from getting my driver’s license until my senior year in high school. They can’t see it any more, can’t read it in my face as I’m sure people could when the memory was fresh.

Memory fades. Sometimes memory is snatched from you in a split second, in a terrifying moment that changes your outlook on life. Other times memory fades slowly, the edges blurring until you’re left only with fragments that you piece together with metal screws, that you bind together so you can heal.


metal walls encircle the sidewalks
the path to the Great Opening in the city
it is a giant hole in the black pot
8 million people live in
give or take a few thousand
silver chain fences guard the edges
soaked with flowers and commemorative plaques
and cards hand written in reds whites and blues
looking all around where color used to be
sucked out of everything and
there's a dry residue left behind
to the west a blasted-out apartment building
draped in a black shroud

the flash of Kodak disposable cameras
in Japanese hands
the posh hipster cafes serving sushi
ceaseless blares of taxi horns
drowned away by fearful whispers
and pointing fingers
boys riding rebel skateboards on office stoops
merchants of the bazaar
peddling pretty pictures of disaster
MISS IDA

Rebecca Mitchell

Once it was said that she dressed as a man to ride the dark mountain,
An avenging angel on a great black horse,
That night her children were sick.
He'd been gone three days when she rode to the sporting house
To fetch my great grandfather home.
The men in the yard fell silent as she dismounted.
“Oh my god, it’s Miss Ida!” one whispered.

A cigar stump glowed in her teeth as she pulled the whip from her saddle
And slowly brushed back her long black coat.
Pearl handles gleamed in the moonlight like polished bones,
And the men parted to let her pass.
Spurs singing loudly as she mounted the steps and opened the door.
The room fell silent.
A glass dropped and splintered across the floor.

Daddy John looked up from his poker game.
A painted woman slid from his lap.
Miss Ida took a long drag from her cigar.
Then slowly exhaled. “I need you at home. It’s time to go, John.”
She turned and walked from the room.

No other word passed between the two,
Her eyes had said it all.
Great Grandpa meekly rose and followed,
Pulling his hat from the hook beside the door.
As he screwed the Stetson down on his hanging head,
He tossed the barkeep a coin.
Then he quietly closed the door.

The full moon paled to a ghostly light
In the mist that clung to the trees.
Miss Ida threw herself into the saddle,
And disappeared into the night.
In the yard his horse was waiting,
John’s friend stood by, deathly pale.
“Thought you was a dead man, John,” he whispered,
Fearing that Miss Ida might hear.
“Me too, friend,” said John, smiling weakly.
“But it’s dark and I ain’t home yet.”
I remember my great grandmother,
Old and withered,
With twisted arthritic fingers,
Like the leafless limbs of winter trees.
Looking at her gnarled body,
It was hard to imagine,
That once she was young and rode
The dark mountain in black.
TIME, O TIME, GREAT THIEF AMONG MEN

Eric J. Hanbeck

Time, O Time, great thief among men!
Vile, contemptuous king over sands!
Elevation aloof, thou bid me stay low,
Forever descending into the unknown.

Life, O Life, thou art but a word:
Injustice to creation, true voice unheard.
Ill-fated reverence, struck down to the earth,
Never fully upheld, nay, even since birth.

Death, O Death, prince of all realms,
Surcease of sorrow, or chief of the damned?
Reign thee in silence. Do cries reach thine ears?
Reap now the deeds done for thee in true fear.

BUSINESS ETIQUETTE

Lisa Roper

She opened one eye slowly, and then the other. She began
to breathe in the burning scent of the asphalt, searing her
nostrils. She could smell him, as well. Not moving, she began
to scan the area in front of her, illuminated by the lone streetlight,
with the numbness that comes of disbelief.

She saw the contents of her briefcase, scattered across the road.
No concept of time passing by, as she lay there sprawled, one foot
still on the curb. The heel of her left shoe pointed upward as if to
proclaim its refusal to go down, that it would rise above the body
of the secretary who lay beneath it, and move on to the foot of an
executive or CEO where it belonged.

Strewn around her were papers, pens, a red planner, and a bottle
of Flamingo Pink fingernail polish. One more item rested halfway
hidden beneath the papers, her initials engraved on the visible end.
The pocket knife had lost its shine with age and lack of maintenance,
and was covered in the residue of past lunches eaten at her desk. It
had been given to her by an ex-boyfriend who had hoped to awaken
her “dangerous” side. He had failed miserably.

She knew every curve of the metal handle, but couldn't tell you
the number of blades. She had never used the little scissors, but
kept it for the nail file, which she used at her desk. Sitting there day
after day, filing and polishing, polishing and filing, until her boss
would call her into his office. That's what two years of college had
gotten her: a parking space on the opposite side of the street from the
employee lot, thankless job, anonymous position, and perfect nails.
She didn't question. She simply accepted.

Her boss couldn't even get her name right. This had become
apparent tonight, as she lay on her back on his desk, his face
hovering near hers. His eyes clenching shut as he moaned "Oh
Shelly, Oh Shelly over and over." An occasional "Oh Sandy" was
thrown in, too. There was no point in correcting him. She was office
furniture. He called her anything and everything he wanted, and she
lay there beneath the promise of a promotion, night after night. All she had gotten was a perfect memory of every crack in the ceiling.

But that night something changed. She was aware of everything—the cold helplessness of the desk beneath her, her flawless nails glowing against the dim navy of his shirt. She turned her head from one side to the other. To her right, she saw her file and bottle of polish still out on her desk, all Flamingo Pink vapors and dingy metal. To her left, she saw the night falling outside the window. She was just as dark. It was time he learned her name.

She lay in the pale light of the street, knowing that the"morning janitor would find him the next day. Stuffed beneath her desk, his right eye gouged out. On his clammy forehead they would find a Post-It note, fluorescent yellow contrasting against the grey skin and dried blood—the name Sara written in flawless cursive in a vibrant shade of Flamingo Pink. They would know her then. She began to lift herself from the pavement, rising to join the night. So what if they found her? Every evening, from then on, would belong only to her. She had made sure of that. This was her type of promotion.
LET GO
Misty Jones

There are so many lessons to learn in this life:
How to cherish the joy and go on through the strife,
But of all of these lessons, the most toilsome I know
Is the tedious learning of how to let go.

One learns to cry tears when they need to be shed,
One learns what to say when it needs to be said,
One learns how to help those around one to grow,
But no one has figured out how to let go.

We can love, we can laugh, we can mourn, we can die,
We can smile 'til the time comes for saying goodbye.
We survive as the storm tosses us to and fro
But we cannot quite master just how to let go.

Man has built sturdy bridges crossing over the seas,
He has walked on the moon and has sailed on the breeze.
He has gathered more knowledge than any should know,
But none of it teaches us how to let go.

I have been many places and made many friends,
And I have discovered that everything ends.
I am brimming with wisdom of life, even so,
I'm forbidden to understand how to let go.
with each other over who ruled the mental.
   I can still remember some of her awesome quotes.

There was another friend I had named Lynn.
   She would tattoo all of these age-old quotes on her arm and down her legs.
   Lynn had just published a book called Neptune’s Narcissism.
   She was a free spirit, never held down by society’s standards.
   She never sparred with what was in her soul, never fought with her ideals.
   She was the one driving the beat-up Jeep and letting everyone else roll around in their shiny BMWs,
   a laughing Buddha dangling from the rearview mirror.
   She was the one that inspired me to write.

I’ve always dreamt of traveling across the country.
   To have my stories written across highways and exit ramps,
   calling myself a “wandering soul” with little air quotes.
Or maybe go off and find myself, take up drinking green tea
   and meditating like the Buddhists.
Who knows, maybe even hijack a space shuttle and take a joy ride to Neptune
   before taking a quick swing around the moon.
   Hopefully, I won’t drive straight into a crater and crash land.
   I’ll meet some aliens and they’ll spar over who gets my liver and who gets my brain before sparring
over whether to roast me in the rays of the sun after writing some intergalactic message with my human blood.
   But by now the arguing has driven me insane and I’ll spout some Machiavellian quote about knowing thine enemy before jaunting off back to Neptune but then I’ll remember that my spaceship has crashed and I’ll pray to Buddha

that some nice Russian cosmonauts find me.
   I’m babbling now so maybe I’ll throw in a quote from Shakespeare to keep you interested,
   but the only problem is I left them all on Neptune so I guess you’ll just have to settle for some nice books about Buddhism.
When I was in Orlando, Florida, in 2001, playing the part of Gooper in a small dinner theater’s production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, the director of the play warned me about Eve. “You’ll get along great with everyone,” he said. “Joel Patton, who plays Big Daddy, he’s extra nice, not at all like the character he portrays. Gloria Brooks, Big Mama, she’s just the greatest. And Dan Matthews, Brick, he will be your best friend. But Eve, our Maggie the cat, can be very aloof and intimidating. She doesn’t particularly care for newcomers; in fact she’s known for giving them a hard time. But we have promised her that you are a professional. So just do your best. Make sure you know all your lines, hit your marks, and you’ll be fine.”

I was terrified.

After a couple days of rehearsals, I was still unfamiliar with the beautiful actress. We had stopped rehearsing for the evening and were all at a local bar downtown when somebody said, “Hey Eve, do you want a ride back to your place?”

“No thanks,” she said, “a friend is picking me up; we’re going water-skiing.” She looked around the room and said, “Anybody want to come along?”

“I’ll go,” I said, under the influence of too many long-necks. And after looking at me sharply, she said, “All right then.”

I hadn’t been on skis in quite a while. I think Eve sensed this and was anticipating having a little fun with the newcomer. When I was out on the water, I could tell she was instructing her friend, the driver of the boat, to give me a hard time. They’d go real fast and then slow down, practically stopping, and I’d sink below the water. She was just awful—taking over the driver’s seat and trying to knock me down. She was not successful, and many intoxicating hours later, we were at her place, dancing around, listening to country music, getting pissed drunk and becoming the best of friends.

I went home to Alabama after the production ended, and she
began telephoning right away, saying she wanted me to come back. “I want you to move in with me,” she insisted. “I think we make the perfect pair and you know we’ll have a good time.” Any time with Eve was a good time, but I had deep reservations about going. It was evident that Eve’s fondness for me had advanced and I was uncertain about how to handle it. There was something about me that Eve did not know, a secret that I had told no one, and a woman’s affections, no matter how beautiful she was, only complicated matters. At the same time money was extremely tight and I tried explaining my situation to her, skirting around the real issue. “Is that all you’re worried about?” she said. “A few pennies doesn’t make a bit of difference, I’ve got plenty, sweetheart. I just want you here with me; we’ll worry about all that later.” Somehow, Eve had gotten the impression that I was a reasonably stable person, a well-rounded individual—predictable and coated in reliability. Somewhere she saw in me the man she had longed for, the one who could shield her from the world and protect that secret part of herself—her vulnerability.

The first impression one had of Eve was that she was beautiful. She would carelessly pile her thick black hair on top of her head and it would look great. She could walk out of the house without the least bit of makeup, wearing nothing but sandals and a simple sundress and look gorgeous. Her tall, curving body was extraordinarily proportioned; the way all her facial features were placed were perfect; she had a classic beauty—but her loveliest attribute was her soul. She was a free spirit, carefree and funny—a party girl who suddenly could surprise you by doing something sweet, like the time she sent four dozen roses to an elderly lady who lived around the corner from the theater, or the year she refused to give Christmas presents and insisted that all her wealthy friends join her in giving children’s gifts to a local housing project. I found it quite strange to see that sort of personality radiating out of such beauty.

Eve didn’t believe in herself, so she couldn’t process the information in a compliment, or perhaps she simply didn’t trust one, believing there was some ulterior motive. Once, we were out on the lake and the light reflecting off the water hit her face just so, and I said, “My God Eve, you really are the most beautiful woman.” And she said, “Oh, hell, I get so sick of hearing that bullshit.”

I guess by the time I met her, Eve was a damaged woman, battered by others who had come and gone—a life of missed opportunities that might have made her complete. She had been injured by men. Loneliness was a constant companion she fought with. I have often wondered if children could have made the difference, but a botched surgery had robbed her of that privilege, leaving only bitterness.

One of Eve’s problems was that she had been born lucky. She had been raised the old-fashioned way. As a trophy, her job was to look beautiful, keep quiet, and act like a lady. Elizabeth Preston Finishing School had taught her all the tricks of womanhood, and she played her role.

In spite of my reservations, I went back and stayed with Eve for the summer and we lived on the water—frolicking in the sun and staying wasted on martinis. At night we attended the best parties and were the center of attention at every gathering. The minute Eve arrived at a party she’d say, “Let’s have a drink. Where’s the bar? Let’s get it started!” So we’d have a drink right away.

Her need for liquor was not unlike my own. It kept our demons at bay, boosted our low self-esteem, and forced our shyness into the shadows—after a few drinks, we were center stage. We drank a lot that summer.

When Eve was drinking, it was an event, a moment full of electricity and excitement because one never knew what was going to happen next. With each cocktail she became more energetic, more spontaneous, and she never seemed to get tired. Sometimes she would lay her head on my shoulder, during a slow dance—a moment of rest that came abruptly to an end at the suggestion of going home. Just when it seemed she might be ready to call it a night—we were at it again—drinking and dancing wildly, shaming the devil with our unleashed bodies.
Once, when she had finally started coming down, when the
excitement of her hurricane had passed and her eyes began to
calm, we walked out to a lake and took a late-night boat ride. She
loved the water, especially at night, it was her time and it agreed
with her. The moonlight seemed to follow her like a spotlight and
her eyes captured the light of every twinkling star—I remember
laughing to myself and thinking, she's charmed them, too. While I
was busy fixing us another drink, she stripped off her cocktail dress
and plunged herself into the dark watery depths. I can still hear her
yelling, "Come on, Gooper," her nickname for me since our run of
the play, "the water's fantastic and I'm all alone out here." I gave in
to her beckoning, set the drinks down, and after freeing myself of
my clothes, dove blindly toward her siren's cry. We played about,
splashing each other and laughing like two spoiled children. At one
point, she disappeared beneath the water and all became quiet. I
closed my eyes and floated on my back, relishing the warmth of the
water against my skin and thinking of home.

My time in Florida was running short. Soon I would have to
return to Alabama, and it would be hard leaving Eve. No doubt,
she would try to make me stay, and I wasn't sure if I would have
the strength to say no. We had settled into one another, becoming
thick as thieves, and my reservations had calmed to the point of
inexistence. We were content, and I hadn't considered the thought of
leaving her until now. It seemed like a full minute had passed and
still she had not emerged. I became worried.

Eve was an excellent swimmer, but my thoughts of leaving had
created an anxiousness in me that made me keenly aware of every
second that passed. A sickening ache developed in the pit of my
stomach and I called out to her frantically. There was no sound, only
darkness and the lapping of the water against the hull of the boat.
My fear was increasing when finally she rose up from behind me,
wrapping her arms around my chest and laughing hysterically. My
worry turned to anger in a flash and I tore from her clutches, letting
out a violent chain of curse words in admonishment of her trickery.
That's when she did the most astonishing thing—she kissed me.
We had kissed before, but this was different. With both her hands,
she grabbed my face and pulled my lips to hers. Surprisingly, I
returned her kiss with the same fever and at the same time, pulled
her body close to mine. My fear had sobered me, an excitement
had developed out of my relief—a sudden burst of adrenaline that
released in my kiss and anxiously guided my hands along her body.
Her hands traveled also, and when they reached just below my belt,
she stopped and reality descended upon us both. Excitement had
overcome me in every way but that which would have bound us
closer and I could see the disappointment in her face. I understood
that she knew my secret and it shamed me. That old familiar feeling
of fear and dejection came over me and I broke away from her,
terified of what had just occurred between us, unsure of what it all
meant as I swam toward the boat, fleeing her, trying to flee myself.
I kept seeing her horrible, horrible look of disappointment and my
shame was unbearable. She called my name, but I would not hear.

When we were both on the deck of her boat, a silence developed
between us as impenetrable as the dark night sky. The moon and
stars had disappeared behind a thick blanket of clouds and as I lay
my head back against the railing, I related the loss of their light
to that look on Eve's face. Nothing would be the same now. Our
friendship was forever changed. My ridiculous thought of throwing
myself overboard suddenly became a pretty good idea. The guilt I
felt was so heavy it could have pulled me straight to the bottom of
the lake, ending my life and drowning my disgusting secret with
it. Eve sighed and I looked at her. A tear rolled down her cheek and
dripped from her chin.

"I know you love me," she said. "I know that as surely as I breathe."

My heart sank further into my chest as I tried to search for some
answer.

"I do love you," I replied, "but not the way a man should love a
woman, not the way you deserve to be loved. There is a part of me
that wants to be with you, to create a life with you and be happy, but
it would never work. We would only be fooling ourselves and you
would hate me in the end."

I lowered my head.

Eve moved over to my side and wrapped her arms around me.
"I could never hate you," she said.
Perhaps Eve had realized my fault all along, just as I had
recognized hers. Perhaps she was willing to sacrifice her need, that human need in all of us, for what little happiness she could hold on to with me. But I ran. I ran back home, away from her, away from the guilt that I felt every time I looked at that beautiful face, plagued with disappointment. I ran all over this damn country, trying to get away from me—booze helps, but only temporarily—guilt and shame are around the corner with every sobering thought. I ran into the night with some nearby stranger, then another one, giving a piece of myself away with every one night stand.

I'm still running, from the moment I wake up, to the early morning hour in which I finally find some remnant of sleep, running from my thoughts, trying to find some way to live with myself, and without Eve.
I love how it grows,
always changing form,
shape-shifting like
cumulus clouds in the wind.
I love the slope of my
neck, how its length would
make swans envious.
I love my tiny ankles,
how I marvel at their
ability to support my frame.
The way I gag at the
thought of eating flesh.
I love the relationship
of my tongue to my lips.
I love how my ears
peek out from behind
my hair like it's a curtain.
How I smell after a
shower. I love the way
my heart taps gently
just to let me know that
I am still alive. The passion
that burns me like
forbidden knowledge,
yearning to burst out
of Pandora's box. I love
this mind so tainted by
wonder and curiosity
that surely killed the cat.
I love my small feet. I love
every bend of my knees, elbows,
and fingers down to the
wrinkles in the creases

of my toes. My belly button,
perfectly carved out
and now home to the
scar that robbed me
of my gallbladder. I love
the way my breasts ascend
as if they are running away
from my heart. I love the
person that lives beneath my
skin, the one who died
and made me Queen.
As a young woman, my grandmother moved to Nashville. These days, that would seem like nothing special. We live in the age of the sports car, the supersonic jet, and the bullet train. We can type a letter on the computer, click SEND, and seconds later it has reached its destination. Travel is quick and simple, uncomplicated. But for a woman in her early twenties, who had always lived in the same house—built by her father's hands—to just pick up and leave, this was like walking on the moon. I knew nothing of this other life, this lunar life. There was nothing stellar about the woman I knew. She was Mrs. Morrow—a vegetable-canning, obituary-reading, hair roller-wearing, unchanging, stubborn kind of woman. She ate the same unsweetened cereal every morning. She saw the outside world on Maury Povich, and she didn't like it. To me, she was everything she should be, but nothing more. She was just Grandmother.

We sat there, my grandmother, my mother and I, at the kitchen table covered by an orangey-plaid cloth. A bowl of artificial sweeteners sat in the middle of the table like a lone boat lost in a pumpkin-hued sea. I wanted to climb aboard and sail away. Grandmother was seated next to me, her fingers sifting carefully through a shoebox filled with yellowing letters and photographs, postcards and newspaper clippings. Every so often she would take something from the box and lay it on the table with a remark like, "This is your Great Uncle Elmer," or "Here's the 1976 family reunion." Every so often, my mom would laugh or ask a question. I smiled and said "uh-huh" a lot but I really wasn't paying as close attention as I should have been. I thought about my boyfriend. I stared off into space. I was going through what most would call a phase. I listened to loud, angry music. I argued with everybody. I picked fights with my mom just to see what she would do. My favorite phrase was, "I want to be alone." I worked hard to perfect the teenage, angsty, "me against the world" look that I thought would piss everyone off and
would propel me out of the black hole of my so-called life and into a sort of liberated, fabulous, bitchy bliss. “Give me L.A., Chicago, New York, Mars, anywhere but here!”

I felt I couldn’t relate to anyone at that table. I didn’t want to relate. I was going places. Places that played music other than country on the radio. They would never understand.

Grandmother continued to thumb through photographs, Mom went to the refrigerator to get a soda, and I continued to pretend like I was too cool for either of them until I heard Grandmother say,

“You know, I went to Mexico once.”

I was stunned. I couldn’t even comprehend. All I could think to say or ask was, “Why?”

“To go to a bar.”

I was amazed. I had only known her to drink milk and water, and maybe a Coke on special occasions. The last place I would ever picture her was a bar. I was silent. I must have looked horrified because she continued.

“I didn’t go there to drink. I just walked in the door and then walked right back out.”

Confused, I found myself saying, “I don’t get it. Why did you go all the way to Mexico to set foot in a bar and leave a second later?”

She sat there for a moment looking at her box of memories, then looked up at me and said, “So that I could say I went.”

Then she smiled a little smile at me and returned to her box. She said nothing else on the matter. She has always been a woman of few words. I contemplated what she had told me for the rest of the day, and continued to do so for many years to come. As time passes, it becomes more and more meaningful.

My grandmother is a vegetable-canning, obituary-reading, hair roller-wearing, unchanging, stubborn kind of woman. To me, she is everything she should be and more. She is everything I could be, should I be so lucky. She is Mrs. Morrow, Grandmother—Jewel.
I dream a lot of nights about tornadoes. A talking one came
   Into our house and
Took my daddy. It woke my sister up.
   I’m afraid to sleep by myself
But I’m okay if mom is there because she puts her
   Arm around me.
I always beat the tornadoes. I’m a slow runner
   But I’m too fast for them.
I hate doing the shuttle run in P.E.—I think I run funny
   And I don’t like playing
(Dodge ball) either but Coach Hamilton won’t
   Let me sit out any more.
I like singing with my mom in the studio where they
   Brought me a cookie
Cake and drew a smiley face on the microphone to
   Help me sing. There’s always
Plenty of work I have to do since I’m missing school
   Again but I usually just
Sit and listen to mom sing the same song over and
   Over. I bet I’ll sing one
Day too since I already recorded one song and sung
   The solo at my school.
I’m going to Hawaii maybe this summer but I’m not supposed
   To say anything because I’m not
Supposed to brag. But with a pinky promise I’ll
   Tell you that my daddy
Is going to rent a red convertible—not another
   Van like we always get
And we’re going to ride with the top down and
   Go to the beach.
Tornadoes can’t follow me there because they only like to go
   Where the land is flat
I know because they told me and I get told a lot
   Of things like how to
CATHARSIS

Misty Jones

Thrice relive the day of destiny,
Engage in battle against the tears.
Thrice feel defeat crush the living heart.
Give in to secret, jealous fears.
Thrice drink regrets of years long gone,
Taste the dry waters of despair.
Thrice kill thyself with thy own bitter sorrow
For empty depths do not compare.
Listen to the holy angels weeping
As envy takes you by the hand
And leads you far into the darkness
Wherein more empty vessels stand.
O, purge thy soul of all these wicked sins,
Cut off the crimson course of hatred’s veins!
Feel thy revived heart pulsate once more.
Cleanse thyself of hatred’s hellish stains.
Open thy mouth toward the bleeding sky,
Shout catharsis with thy every precious breath.
Be purified through freedom’s grand creation...
By thy ever sweet release, deny thy death.

2006 HIGH SCHOOL
WRITERS' FESTIVAL WINNERS

Essay
1st Place
Amanda Yeardan, Florence High School
2nd Place
Chelsea Lawson, Florence High School

Short Story
1st Place
Daniel Williams, East Lawrence High School
2nd Place
Robbin Jones, Florence High School

Poetry
1st Place Tie
Amanda Yeargan, Florence High School
Micheal Griffin, East Lawrence High School