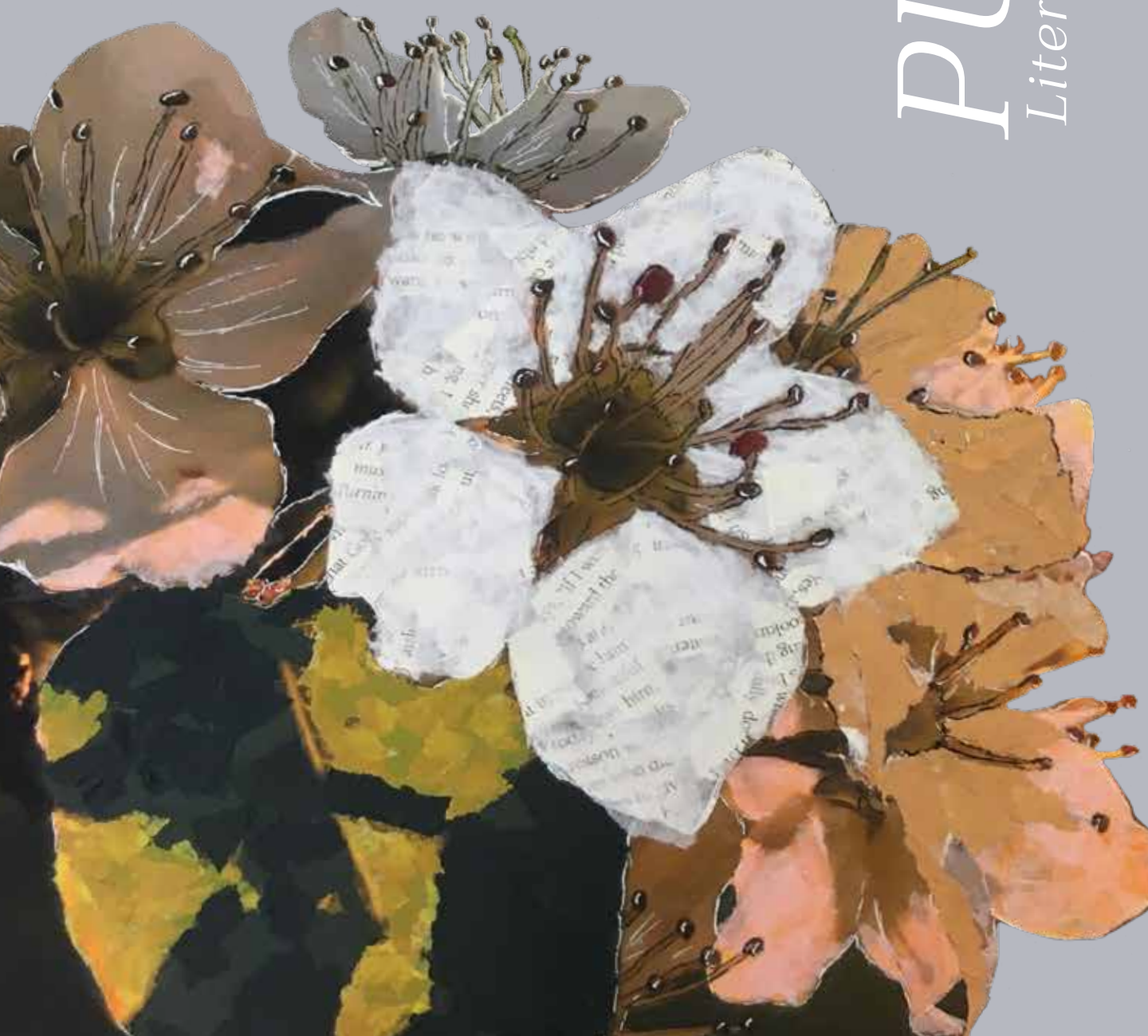




Marietta College

PULSE

Literary Magazine



PULLSHE

Literary Magazine



Marietta College

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Sydni Wilson

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Grandma's House

Julie Schlanz

Grandma's house held us together.
House contract signed by fatal ink
Spreads us like wind pushing feathers.

Only one is left, my father,
who smears warm tears straight down
the sink.
Grandma's house held us together.

My cousins don't call or bother,
Time always doesn't make us blink,
Spreads us like wind pushing feathers.

Days drive increasingly faster,
Faces don't laugh and warm to pink.
Grandma's house held us together.

Time between talking is vaster.
Our memories no longer link,
Spreads us like wind pushing feathers.

My family builds disaster,
and no one even stops to think
Grandma's house held us together.
Spreads us like wind pushing feathers.



Kaitlyn Gough

Optimistic Jerry

Wyatt Saxton

We sat in the 1984 gold Dodge Caravan as the sun glistened off of the water-filled potholes in the parking lot ahead of us. The headliner was filled with cigarette burns and hung away from the ceiling as if it was the vehicle's cry for retirement. The smell of old tobacco smoke and Dollar General air fresheners was overwhelming when mixed with the aroma of curdling milk from the Alice-Bradley Elementary School's dumpster just feet away from the opened windows. The air conditioner only worked a fraction of the time, and Jerry didn't have enough money to run the engine to only use air conditioning when he wasn't moving.

The entire van was spotless. Well, actually, there was stuff everywhere, but it was in an orderly way. He lived out of his van now, so everything that he had was in there with him. However, there was not an ounce of trash. Not a single cup, hamburger wrapper, or straw paper littered the car. His clothes were folded neatly in the back hatch on the far left. He had three full outfits and two sets of sleepwear. Beside his clothes to the right was a tacklebox full of coupons for various stores and items. Beside that was a box full of books that he was determined to read before the end of summer to give him something to look forward to each day—another chore to be accomplished and checked off the list. In the back row of seats was his purple sleeping

bag and a Winnie the Pooh pillow from when he was a child that, because of stains and worn marks, had seen better days of the 100 Acre Wood. Some shoes were slid under that row as well. In the row of seats directly behind the driver was the "kitchen": a cooler was filled to the brim with lunch meats, fruits, berries, cheeses, and a few colas for special occasions. Next to the cooler was a case of water and a few loose Gatorades. I sat in the passenger seat waiting for the next burst of conversation to start in the way that they do between two people after a silence. I played with the glove box latch—opening and shutting again and again—while peering across the elementary school parking lot. A heavy downpour had just passed, and the entire world seemed to be masked in a blanket of melancholy golden-brown. Jerry sat beside me in the driver seat and was nodding his head to the 2Pac being played by the group of teenagers at the nearby basketball courts.

"So what's the next move, Jer?" I finally mustered the courage to break the pause.

"What do you mean?" Jerry asked without missing a beat to the song.

"Well... what's the plan for tomorrow, man? Got anything going on?"

"Yeah. I'm going to go hit up the Seventh Street businesses tomorrow and... oh. Never mind, tomorrow's Sunday, huh? I'll just relax I suppose. Read one of those books, or at least attempt to. Maybe actually shoot some hoops with the kids. Show them some of Jer-Daddy's moves... ya know, the ole hook-in-the-post," he said while acting out the move in the beaten down vehicle. His knuckles scraped the sagging headliner as he pretended to hook shot into the imaginary net. "The job hunt will have to be postponed

until Monday," he said with a smile on his face and a chuckle.

Jerry was a large guy, standing at 6'4" with an arm span that matched. He was built, too. He weighed about 260lbs and was stronger than anyone I've ever been around. He was wearing grey Adidas sweatpants with a blue Alice-Bradley lacrosse championship shirt from nine years ago. His wiry brown hair looked like a mess due to a haircut that was over three weeks old. He wore a ragged pair of Saucony running shoes that he used to get a daily workout in in the gravel pit where they load dump trucks with stone for all of Fairview County. Two holes showed his pinky toes on either foot, continuing the shoes' symmetry.

"Well, let's talk then Jer. How are you? Honestly," I asked. He'd been through a lot. More than he should have been able to handle. But he was still standing.

"I'm fine Russel."

"Well don't you ever want to talk about what happened? I mean, it's fine if you'd rather talk to a professional or someone at the VA office, but at least talk to someone." I knew I shouldn't dig that deep so fast, but we'd been down this road before...nearly every Saturday night actually.

"I don't want to Rus."

"Jer, it could seriously help." I wanted him to open up. I knew it was eating him up alive inside. The post-storm ambience quickly degraded to a grey dusk.

"Leave."

"I'm not leaving yet, Jer. Okay? I'm not until you-"

"Until I what, Rus? Huh? Say that you're right? That I am a fucking disaster? Is that what you want to hear?" His eyes focused

on the Caravan's dash and his face turned vermillion.

"Is that what you need to say, Jer? This is about you. For you. Okay?"

He pulled at something underneath his shirt and held it away from his body. After a few moments of staring intently out the windshield at something that only he could see, one-thousand yards away, he pulled his dog tags out through the collar of his shirt.

DANISON

JEROLD MICHAEL

9527462396

B POS

ROMAN CATHOLIC

"This is it man. Alright? Okay? This is all I have from that hellhole. Nothing but two lousy pieces of metal that I wear around my neck every day because I feel naked without them. These tags, and some nightmares. That's all."

"Why don't you talk about those nightmares, man? What happened over there?"

"It's not about what happened over there! It's what it's like over here, man!" With the force of a swinging sledge, he punched the center of the steering wheel so hard that you could nearly hear his two knuckles scream in anger as they were forced into the heavy dark material. Evidently, the car's horn hadn't been working; if it had worked before, Jerry broke the switch with that single swing. "You don't fucking get it, alright. You just don't."

"Okay Jerry. That's fine. Talk to someone who does then."

"But I don't want to. Don't you get it?"

Jerry gripped the steering wheel with both hands to the point where his knuckles turned white. He sat there. A million thoughts seemed to circle his mind. I folded

my hands in my lap. I twiddled my thumbs in a small, slow fashion; I thought of the first time that I had ever seen someone else twiddle their thumbs and how odd of an activity I thought it was. I think I was nine or ten. It was in the winter sometime in Iowa. My dad and I were calling for foxes.

"Listen man," Jerry said after taking a moment to cool off. "This is how it is. Alright? It's all fucked, man. Okay?" He kept looking over briefly to see if I understood the kind of emotion that he was going through. He kept asking if I understood, as if I actually dared to make him explain what he was trying to say. "You know all of it. Every single chapter. You just never read the damn pages, man. You see? You have the 'CliffsNotes,' you just never took the time to read the novel." He was nearly in tears. His bottom lip trembled in a symphonic pattern as if it were conducting its own Carnegie Hall piece. His eyes shifted to different details in the distance; the cool blue iris mixed with the bloodshot vessels created a deep violet that seemed only possible in violent shark attack movies. The sun was officially over the hill, leaving the sky in a grey-pink swirled mix. Shades of brown seemed to mix in, creating a melted Neapolitan ice cream look across the horizon.

"Okay Jer," I said cautiously. "What do we need to do?"

"You don't want to read this book."

"Yes. I do, Jer."

"No! It's a shit-ass book, Russel. Okay? Don't you see that? I don't even want to waste my time on it. That's why there are CliffsNotes. Right? So we don't have to waste our time on the terrible ones. I'm the book that kids are forced to read in high school, then learn nothing from other than how to hate reading

and how to cheat on reading quizzes. I'm The Catcher in the Rye, or The Great Gatsby. We want to read Martin Luther King's book, man. Or Buzz Aldrin's. Not Jer Danison's. His book is just a magazine ad for a tobacco product; nobody wants to read it, even the people who smoke the damned things."

"Yeah, but I want to, Jer. I want to read the entire thing. Cover to fucking cover. Okay? So why don't we quit being so damn stubborn and dive in. Chapter one. Now go." I was over it at this point. I didn't know why talking about his issues was so hard, especially with the only person who truly loves him and knows him. He had nobody else. Nothing else at all. No family. No woman. A couple mutual buddies that we both had before the war came around to chat with him maybe once every other month, but other than that, this was it for him. If I didn't help him, nobody would.

"No."

"Now, Jer."

"I said no motherfucke-."

"I'm not asking again, Jer. You're going to lose me if you don't open up. Alright? That's why this is important. You aren't Jerry anymore. You're someone else. Same body, different life, mind, and soul."

"Oh." He looked me dead in the eyes and nearly whispered. "So you're telling me to do something? You're ordering me to open up? Is that what it is?" The intense stare was enough to make anyone's teeth clench.

"Jer, I know you can kick my ass, but that's not what this is about."

The last trinkle of sunlight left the sky about fifteen minutes ago, and the sky showed the first few stars appearing in a dull dark blue atmosphere. Jerry looked out the windshield again towards the horizon, where the sun

had just dropped minutes before, and left out a sigh and chuckle.

"Shit man. That's funny. You getting all scared and shit? Hell. I know I can beat some ass, but we're on the same team, Rus." There were about thirty seconds of silence that seemed to last weeks. "You wanna hear something about the book?"

"Yes," I replied sternly.

Another few seconds passed before he began to speak again.

"Alright," he said in a completely different tone and approach. "A lot of bad shit has happened in my life, Rus. Obviously. My parents both died within four months of my ship date for Afghanistan. Dad from leukemia the week before I left, and Mom from suicide a few months after I was gone; she couldn't stand being alone and it ate her up without me and Dad. Anyway, I went to the war. The pointless war. The one that shouldn't exist anyway. Everything was normal on the patrol until the lead skimmer hit an IED... my SL, Kennedy. The dogs and the bombs, dead women and children... body parts... Lieutenant Cobb's blood. The innocent civilians... hostages. The chopper's thudding as I was extracted from the mess... Then, well, I got home. My girl didn't come to see me when I arrived stateside. I healed up after seven months and I was discharged with a purple heart. Shrapnel, a couple bullets, and whatever else they had to stitch. She left me, man. When I got home, I figured she at least kept Dad's place for me. She fucking sold it, Rus. I drove here in this van, which I picked up right outside the airport for \$900, and saw a whole other family playing in the front lawn and cooking on the grill... Dad's fucking grill, Russel. I didn't lose the house because I couldn't afford it like everyone thinks. I never

even had it while I was here. Mom died, then my own girl sold it from under my feet. Now here we are four months later. Sitting in my same shitty van on a Saturday night talking about how lame my life is. And you keep saying you want to help me, Rus. But I don't want your help. I want to do it myself. I'm a SF Army guy. Airborne Ranger. I do things by myself with pride over here. But nobody gets that, do they? Oh God no. They all want to "help" the vets. But only with new cars, clothes—maybe a house. And they want the vet to go get help. Motherfuckers. They know better, too. They know the vets won't want to go. But I'm not telling you the details either, Rus. Especially about the war. But the thing is, the war was the easiest part. Shoot when shot at. Don't step on IEDs. Follow orders. Eat chow when it's time. Pull security when it's time. Sleep when it's fucking time. Over here? After living that life? It's chaotic. There's no reason for it either. Everything is stressful over here. Over there, getting shot at is routine. Here? You're lucky to pass the same guy on the sidewalk two days in a row, man. And some really messed up shit happened over there too, Rus. But I will not talk about it. We never did over there, and I'm not going to now."

He stopped, waiting for another question or a sign of acceptance from me. I knew everything he said was hard for him.

"Can I just ask one more thing, Jer?"

"Shoot for it."

"Why don't you ever talk about it? The details, I mean. With me or even the other guys in your squad?" I asked as tenderly as possible. I knew this was probably going to be the last part of the conversation for the night. The sky was littered with flashing airplane lights and a mix of unlimited stars. I could hardly

see the emotions on Jerry's face anymore and relied on his tones as clues for the next five minutes.

"You have to stay optimistic," he said with the innocence of a child. "When you think about something enough to start talking about it, it means you've thought about it enough to analyze the situation. If you don't think about it, or more specifically talk about it, then you can ignore it. It doesn't exist. It was a dream that nobody else can recall because only you dreamt it. With everything that's happened, what you know and what you don't know, I don't want to talk about it, okay? It just brings pain. I want to ignore it. I want to be optimistic."

I left the van that night, after sitting there with Jer in the school parking lot for a couple hours, with an entire new outlook and perspective on optimism. Maybe it's ignorance of a situation. Maybe it's ignoring the truth in order to be happy. Maybe it's simply lying to yourself to be happy.

I never asked him about his past again. I only helped him with his future efforts.



Ben Heckathorn

From Trashy to Classy

Leah Wietrzykowski

Oscar the Grouch stands
before the mirror.
He combs his luscious green hair
behind his perfect browline.

Oscar steps outside
of his mansion. His
silver trash can was recently
traded in for a B.M.W.

Oscar pulls into the
parking lot. He straightens
the bowtie on his black
tuxedo and smiles wide.

Oscar steps inside
of the Men's Warehouse.
He applies a few spritzes of
his special Armani cologne.

Oscar approaches a
tall, disheveled looking
customer. His
distinguished voice rings out

"Hello sir, ready for me to
change your life?"



Kaitlyn Gough

Thunder

Boone Jones

The thunder rolls
Six o'clock in the morning
dragging my butt to work
An ever-changing world taking
advantage of me
From the stars to the streets
Coming from somewhere
I wish to be again

The lonely little corner of a kitchen,
Washing dishes till the end of time.
The kitchen works like a well-oiled
machine, smooth and fast.
Its workers put blinders
up to the things they let fly by.
This is my future
but no one knows my past.
Nor do they think hard enough to care.

They listen to the dance on
their lonely regretful drives
Without a thought in the world
of where this old cowboy stands.
Deep in my heart, I am proud of my past
At the forefront of my mind, is the
thought of how I stand outside the fire
And the criticism of my overly persistent
coworkers show I have friends
in low places

My thoughts swirl with frustration
A chance is all I need
To remember my name
The storm clouds gather
And the thunder rolls



The Pink Giraffe

Julie Schlantz

Liam's jaws and dirty blonde curls bounced up and down as he chomped on his spearmint gum. The rhythm of his jaws slowed as the gum hardened and lost its flavor. He leaned against the entrance to the bathrooms in the zoo gift shop and gazed out the window at the giraffe enclosure. A giraffe appeared to be staring right at him through the window as it chomped on some leaves. The hot coffee in his hands and the janitor jumpsuit that he was wearing were not enough to prevent his whole body from shivering. He quickly looked away from the giraffe.

The gift shop was empty since it was about closing time, which meant that his after-hours cleaning routine was about to begin. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw his boss get up from behind the register on the other side of the room for his routine bathroom break. A grunt released from his boss's belly as he shuffled his way into the employee's bathroom behind the desk. A heavy weight lifted off Liam's chest as his boss left the room. He was glad to be out of the man's keen gaze even if it was only for a few minutes.

As was habit, he began to roll the gum in his mouth with his tongue into a compressed ball. He pursed his lips and fired the gum out of his mouth. At the same moment, Alice skipped out of the women's restroom next to Liam.

Alice bounded towards the volunteer

sign-out sheet at the register, but her eyes latched onto the pink giraffe in the glass cage in the middle of the gift shop. The giraffe stood tall above all the other displays. The setting sun caught the giraffe's sparkly mane, which sent little rays of light across the walls. The giraffe's soft eyes watched over Alice, and Alice's body grew warm as the edges of her mouth pulled up slightly. She made a mental note to buy the giraffe after she signed out and logged in her volunteer hours but paused as she felt something land on her head. A familiar coolness reached Alice's nose, and she reached her hand to her head and felt something squishy. Her hand withdrew quickly, but strings of green goo stretched from her fingertips to her strands of hair.

"Ew! Ew! Get it off me!" Alice shrieked.

She swatted at her hair and tried to wipe the gum off her hands and onto her pink cardigan. Suddenly, she froze as she noticed that she was not alone. She stared at Liam and then narrowed her eyes as she realized that she did not hear the familiar chomping of his teeth. He was always leaning against trash cans and walls and glaring at the animals while his lips and teeth smacked together, but just then, he was the quietest that she had ever heard him. Liam was staring at the ceiling, daydreaming, and oblivious to his surroundings as he fiddled with the phony gold chain around his neck.

Liam was going through his plan in his mind. He just had to stay at the zoo a month longer, and then he'd really be making money. Ever since his biological father came back, his future had been set. His father promised him that he could take over as editor of The Columbus Dispatch once he retired. He told Liam that he was going to keep his promise this time, and Liam believed him.

"Ahem," Alice interrupted Liam's thoughts.

Liam looked down at Alice, but she would not look him in the eye. Her mouth opened and closed a few times, but no words ever came out of it. Liam's eyes narrowed. He recognized the girl as Alice, the shy girl who regularly volunteered at the zoo. All he wanted to do was leave his lousy janitorial job at the zoo and become rich. He never understood why Alice would work at the zoo without being paid.

"What do you want?" Liam asked.

Alice quickly pointed to her head and then shoved her hands into her cardigan to stop their shaking. She swallowed hard, but again, she could not force any words out of her mouth. Alice quickly walked to the middle of the gift shop to the stuffed pink giraffe and then stood next to the glass cage. The display extended far above her head. She tapped continuously on the glass cage as she stared at Liam's work boots. Eventually, Liam rolled his eyes and sauntered over to Alice.

"You want this giraffe?" Liam asked.

Alice just stared at his shoes and placed her hands in her pockets, which made Liam sigh and once again roll his eyes.

"You don't talk much," Liam said. He reached into his pant pocket and brought a loop of keys into view. He looked at Alice's school ID attached to her cardigan.

"You go to Ohio State?"

Alice's mouth remained unmoved but her head nodded slightly. Liam shook the keys in his hand until he found the one that he wanted.

"Aren't you a little old to want a stuffed animal? Who's it for?"

"Foster mom," Alice said.

"Foster mom?" Liam asked as his eyebrows rose.

Alice nodded.

"I was adopted," Liam said.

"I never was," Alice said. She narrowed her eyes and looked down at her shoes. She wondered how Liam got adopted but she never did. Alice made her hands into such tight fists that she could feel her fingernails piercing her palms. She shoved her fists farther into her cardigan pockets as she felt her face getting hotter.

"Why do you work here if you hate animals so much?" Alice snapped.

"I don't hate animals. I'm scared of them, especially giraffes. Their beady eyes and big ears... Anyway, this is just

temporary. I plan on making it big and getting rich," Liam said. It only lasted a second, but Alice noticed Liam's mouth pull slightly to the side and his eyebrows come together.

Liam leisurely opened the glass cage and began to reach inside but hesitated. The giraffe's black eyes bore down into his own. A familiar sensation rushed over him, and he suddenly felt very small. He remembered all the times when his biological father assumed a position similar to the giraffe's. If only his father had been as quiet as the giraffe.

Liam quickly shook out of his reverie and freed the pink giraffe. Alice tried to pull pieces of gum out of her hair as Liam placed the giraffe on the floor. Alice turned her head away from Liam to hide her blushed face. Her angry outburst bothered her, and she instantly regretted it. Once the giraffe hit the ground, Alice automatically snatched the giraffe and walked toward the exit next to the register. Her mind was focused on getting away from Liam as soon as possible.

Liam stared at Alice's back and expected her to stop at the register, but she walked right past it. Liam glanced at the door to the employee break room. Liam was afraid that his boss would blame him for stealing the giraffe if he saw that it was gone.

"Hey, you have to pay for that!" Liam yelled, but Alice was already through the exit. Liam's mouth gaped wide open as he stared at Alice's fading back. He expected that behavior from most people, but not animal-loving and shy Alice.



Leah Wietrzykowski



Annabel Malone



The Endless Night

Colten Hall

Darkness brought that blots the sun
has destroyed plenty of other stars too.
The darkness this brought, an endless night,
surrounded the dead star in his coffin.

When the star fell into the endless night,
ache was brought into the hearts of all that knew him.
For the tears shed bring woe to the toughest soul,
and like cowards we ran away from his remains.

The pain dealt from death's approach,
took a toll on our minds through the years.
Yet even knowing the enemy would bring darkness,
we mourn the star lost to the endless night.

Slowly over time we began to heal,
as order of the world started to repair.
We effectively cope with the endless night's existence,
under dim artificial light that only mimics the star.

Come present day no sadness in our hearts,
as even without his bright light we find direction.
For we already saw our paths clearly,
before the star faded into the endless night.

Love

Payton Brinks

Athena: Greek goddess of wisdom,
vowed to never marry
They sing, those muses, of Athena,
The Wise One
They do not sing of me, the small mortal
who worshiped at your feet
I without guidance, and you
Picturesque, a marble statue worn by eon
and culture's shift.
I was young and never knew
that one could live without love,
marriage as my sole option
and final destination
and yet you were wisest of all vowed to only
yourself. I wanted that same freedom.
So blinded by the promise of
knowledge I couldn't see
Your arrogance, pettiness, and jealousy
I knew the gods were blinded by lust and love
and yet
You were different. You were like me.
Too much, too like me,
reflecting all my worst qualities
I forgot perhaps that it is not only love,

not only a partner, that makes us whole
One's lack of love doesn't make one above
others; humanity is so much more than that
For all of your wisdom you fell to the same
lows as any other
And I ignored those flaws, our flaws, until I
saw I had no one but you
I did not need your superiority, godhood does
not suit the mortal
Still, I cannot help but want to worship and
go back
To cold detachment and distant
viewing from afar
But lofty Olympus was never meant for me,
and thus I left you
You will never change,
etched into the halls of history
Forever ageless, perfect, and beautiful
And I? I will move beyond the comfort you
used to provide
In navigating a world without romance, I will
find love in new ways
I don't need you to tell me I'm not alone
Not anymore.



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Annabel Malone

Heaven

Rebecca Guhde

It was a cold day in November of 2008 when I sat bouncing in the backseat of my mom's silver minivan. We drove down a familiar gravel road to Sail Creek Marina in Soddy Daisy, Tennessee. I was headed to my weekly court mandated visits with my dad. My sister was supposed to go with me, but she was always incidentally sick with a tummy ache. She was thirteen and I had just turned eight, so it was not a cool thing to have to hang out with your little sister and dad on Saturdays.

The car smelled of spearmint gum as Mom sat in the front seat with her head bobbing to country hits on the radio. I played with the baggie of partially crushed goldfish in my front sweatshirt pocket that I had sneakily packed for a snack just in case Dad had forgotten to buy food. The car stopped at the end of the road in a gravel parking lot above the docks. The sign for the marina was almost completely eroded, but a picture of a sailboat still sat between the worn and moldy wooden boards. I grasped my fingers around the rough plastic handle of my Barbie sand bucket that I had filled with worms that morning to use them as bait for my Snoopy fishing pole.

"Bye Becca Boo. I will come pick you up at 8:00 tonight. Wave to me when you meet your dad," my mom called to me as I slid the heavy minivan side door open and jumped out of the door.

My pink rain boots stomped through the deep rivets in the remaining gravel pathway, where all of the rocks had eroded away and left little rivers of sand and sludge. I was excited to go fishing with my dad. He was a storm chaser, so he wasn't around much, and I was used to him going away on long trips, but he always told me when he was leaving.

I stepped up onto a long wooden dock with slightly squeaky boards and uneven nails that my dad and I would take hammers to on hot summer days. My dad always told me to walk like a soldier and lift my feet up high on the dock, but I didn't realize until later that the reason we did this was so your feet wouldn't get sliced by a rusty nail or rogue wooden spike. My rainboots squeaked as I walked past various sailboats to the very end of the dock where I knew Heaven was anchored.

Heaven, my dad's boat, was a 60-foot-long blue sailboat that my mom, dad, sister and I had lived on in the Virgin Islands. She was our home before the divorce, but now she was in rough shape. Her portholes were corroded shut, barnacles hung to her hull, and she'd occasionally flood her engine, making herself unable to move. But to me, Heaven was beautiful. The music of the Grateful Dead and Santana would flow from the speakers strategically placed on the gunwales, and a subtle smell of stale water and oil would seep through the

cracks of the bilge. Citrus air fresheners hung from the hatches, propped open with driftwood. This is where my father found refuge from his inner demons in the company of a bottle, which he called "self-medication." I always knew that he was drinking, but he never let me see.

I stepped up onto the milk crate that served as a step to climb onto Heaven's deck. I scrambled up the blue side and accidentally scraped some of the cracking paint off of the hull. I flinched to myself hoping that my dad wouldn't notice. I climbed onto the main deck and froze. My dad was nowhere in sight. He must've gone to the store and forgotten what time I was coming, I reasoned. I thought excitedly about the tuna noodle casserole, Dad's favorite, that we would share when he got back. I lifted my hand and waved to my mom who was still sitting in the driver's seat of the minivan. I saw her hand wave back out of the open window and the red brake lights go out as she drove back down the road back to our house. I went to the bench locker and pulled out the small blue buoy that held the keys to Heaven. I opened the companionway and I felt my stomach drop into my pink rain boots. It was empty. I went to the saloon and it was empty. I checked the pantries, bare. I looked into the clothes locker, gone. I felt the tears well up in my eyes and my hands began to shake. In one last effort I looked into the berth which held his bed. He always

kept his favorite photos of my sister and I in a wooden double frame right above his pillow, so I looked for it as a sign that he still lived here, but it was gone.

My dad had vanished. He left me alone on Heaven that day. All that he left on board was two things. One was the deed to the boat which had a stained yellow sticky note placed on top with the word "Becca" crudely written in streaked blue ink. The other was my Snoopy fishing pole, which he had gently placed between the bunk beds and the dinner table.

All I thought at the time was that his leaving was my fault somehow. I could've done something to make him stay. Now I know that he gave up on himself. He was my father, but he would never again be my dad.

I waited on Heaven for six hours until my mom returned at 8:00. She had a McDonald's happy meal sitting in the booster seat of the minivan because she knew that I would be hungry. She held me as I cried when I told her what had happened. She took my hand, and we went home. We took the deed to Heaven and moved her out of the sludge and disrepair of Sail Creek Marina. My mom, sister and I spent years working on Heaven, fixing the engine, reinforcing the sides, repainting, finishing the woodwork, and dozens of other jobs to make her beautiful again. We all worked on her, but I worked on her the most. The more I cleaned and repaired, the

more I began to understand and forgive my father. He never came back; the next and final time I heard from him was from his hospital bed where he was dying from years of alcohol and drug abuse.

I am now 20 years old and still have the Snoopy fishing pole. Most of the time it sits on a hook forgotten in the back of a closet behind a cooler and some winter coats with stuffing falling out the sides. But every now and again I pull it out and head down to the river where Heaven is now anchored among other sailboats. She is the most beautiful boat on the docks, and she is characterized by the royal blue paint and angel wings. I still find myself walking like a soldier across a dock, though I know that the nails are nicely sealed, and the boards are replaced regularly. I climb the new fresh metallic ladder onto the expertly sealed and painted blue sides of Heaven. She's mine now. No longer are the portholes corroded shut or are there barnacles on the hull. Occasionally, Grateful Dead and Santana still flow from the speakers that are now embedded in the gunwales. The bilge is clean after years of scrubbing and repairing so now Heaven smells like sunscreen and oranges. My mom, sister and I take her out on the Tennessee river and cruise down the clean blue waters, laughing and enjoying our time together. I like to sit on the deck and cast my Snoopy fishing pole off the side of Heaven, content.



Kaitlyn Gough

Once Again to Survive a Day

Wyatt Saxton

Once again, to survive a day - fighting pain.

(The struggle to be at least "okay")

To fight the lion. To make it tame.



and news

was eating me up

...Noah? H
...pool for murder!"
...Daniels' fr
...to their guns
...he got bigger
...they mentioned Noah, he got bigger
...trained by
...more
...girls
...at paramilitary organization. The
...gun, though, they offered a
...hopping the robot—in a Daniels
...could have seen
...kind of uncool," Nussbaum

Anna bel Malone

Consider the Milkmaid: An Ekphrastic Poem for Vermeer's The Milkmaid

Braeden Wallace

Consider the Milkmaid: An Ekphrastic Poem
for Vermeer's The Milkmaid

By: Braeden Wallace

Bathed in light,
but also dirt,
her broad sloping shoulders melt carefully
into the trickling frothy stream
that fills the vessel below.

The work of callused hands
is watched by rugged walls and
coarse baskets of bumpy bread;
of chapped lips pursed in concentration,
an aching body yielding to dutiful grace.

Yet in this ordinary moment,
I find the simple Milkmaid observed by
another:
Myself.

An insatiable desire
to smell the must of stale air,
to taste the sweetness of milk,

to feel the heat of the footwarmer,
to hear the tranquil silence of loneliness
fills me steadily.

Neither beauty nor extravagant adornment
should add to the tender dexterity of the
cracked hands,
to the fixed placidity of domesticity and
industry
of the pouring maid.
Her perpetual task draws me to reach
beyond the canvas,
though my imposition would dispel its docility.
I muse on my enthrallment in monotony;
how the forgettable milkmaid beckons me to
eat and drink.

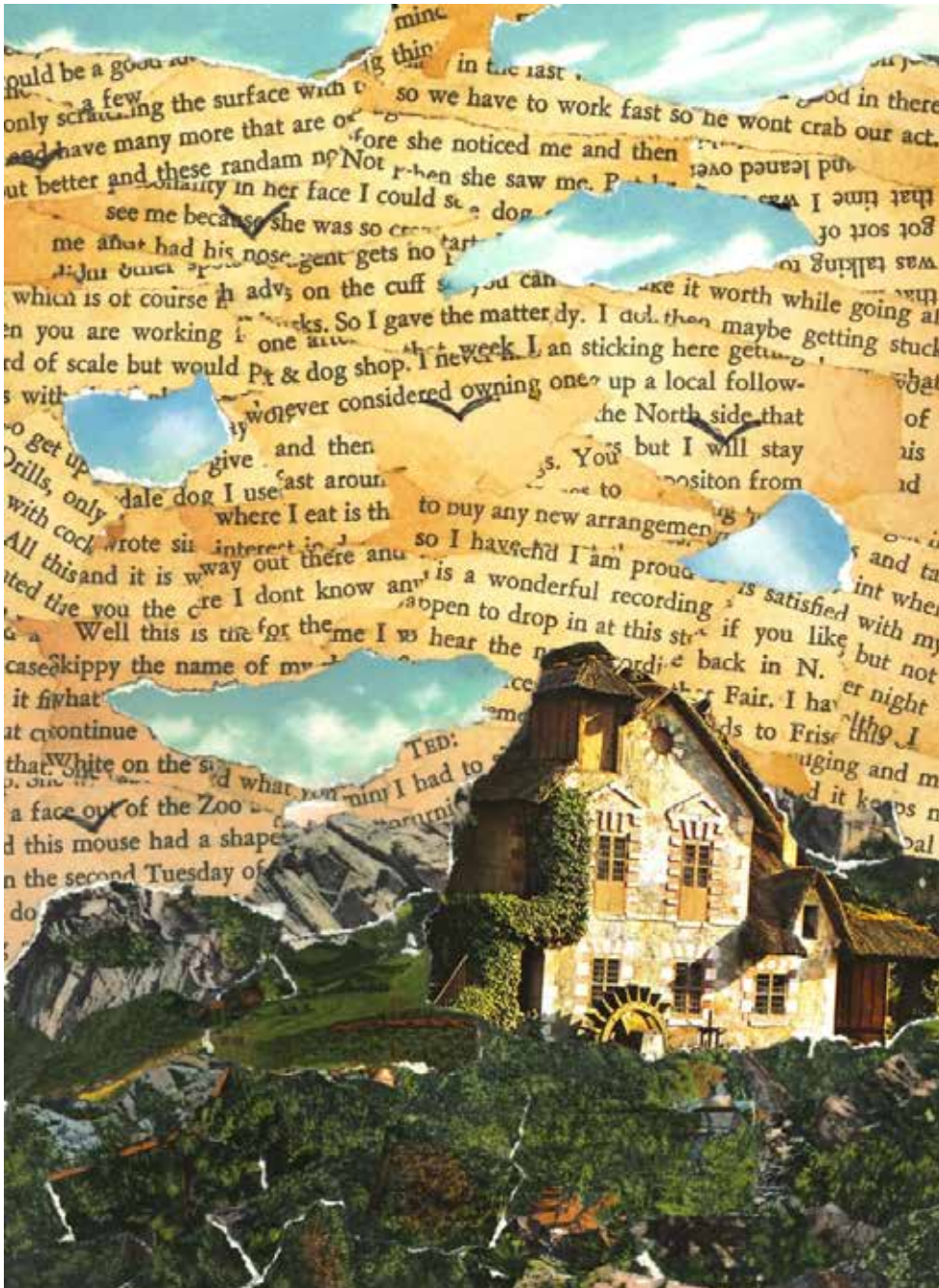
How is her commonness proven uncommon
by the stroke
of her creator?
On which day were her rounded, rosy cheeks
fashioned,

or the aromatic earth-toned loaves placed
upon the flowing tablecloth?
By what means did the moisture dripping
from the bland walls
come to perspire above my desirous gaze?

Arrested by normalcy,
what is she that Vermeer is mindful of her?
Yet he chose ultramarine to catch
the spattering milk
and flaky breadcrumbs.
Crowned the mundane with glory, and the
menial with honor.
Painter, let me rejoice,
for you have set your glory in the kitchens.



Annabel Malone



Kaitlyn Gough

Caution Ahead

Boone Jones

Run, Run, Run,
A horse through the meadow
Fly, Fly, Fly,
Like an eagle in the sky
Escape while you can before the
darkness pulls you in.

Their thick coarse hair,
Stuck together with clumps of mud
Luscious mane and tail,
Ratted with burs and bugs
Grabs at your soul, begging for
sympathy.

The sound of their hooves beating the
ground
Like thunder rolls through the sky
Fraying any loose soil up into the air
Hooves that are soft and filled with
moisture compacted together
Like a blister under a fingernail.

The horseplay is real as there is no joke
of the horse
One must watch for the Trojans
As their horses bear no gifts
Except for misery and despair
Run like the wind and fly high, above the
mystery of the horse.

Hypnotizing Experience

Leah Wietrzykowski

The song "Ice Ice Baby" is blaring so loud that I think my ears might start to bleed as I approach the hypnotism tent. I am at the Washington County Fair, which is hosted once a year in the small town of Marietta, Ohio, in an unassuming field across from Marietta Memorial Hospital. It is a warm September evening, the sun lazily making its way down towards the horizon, but not setting quite yet, and I am here at the fair with my friend Spencer, a tall, lanky boy. I glance at him for a moment, looking at his brown eyes and his long brown skater-boy hair. I also have long hair, but it is blonde and my eyes are green. I turn away from him and look at the man on stage. He looks drastically different from us, like a fifty-year-old, out-of-shape car salesman, who also happens to be a hypnotist. His clothes consist of khakis and a faded white and blue striped button-up shirt. I note that his faded clothes also match his short, nearly buzz-cut hair, which has faded from whatever color it once was to a whitish-gray.

The mixture of pop and hip-hop music that the hypnotist is playing is that which he thinks will attract the largest crowd of millennials and younger generations into his tent. It appears to be working as the small, metal chairs littering the grassy floor are nearly full. We sit in two chairs that Spencer's friends have left empty for us.

It doesn't take long for the show to

start, and the moment the speaker turns on I cover my ears to defend myself against the ear-shattering volume emitting from the speaker,

"TESTING TESTING, ONE TWO THREE! Can you hear me? Good! How's everyone doing this fine evening?" He pauses for a moment, just long enough for the audience to start attempting to respond before interrupting them. "Ah, great, great. Good to hear! So, how many of you have been to a hypnotist show before?" He talks fast, not quite as quickly as an auctioneer, but with the authority and rehearsed sort of tone one can hear in the voice of someone who talks into a microphone for a living. "Now, let me tell you a few things before we get started. Number one, and I know some of you might be skeptical, but hypnotism is real. Now, a lot of people ask, can I be hypnotized against my will? No. You cannot be hypnotized against your will. It's like sleeping. There is no risk when being hypnotized." He pauses, not for breath, but to let the fact sink in. While he does so he scans the audience with his brown eyes, their edges wrinkled with age and the many smiles he's put on for his shows. "Now, another thing you should know about hypnotism is that any of my volunteers who come up here will, in their 30 minutes on stage, experience 3 hours of deep, rested sleep. You see, being in hypnosis is so relaxing to the mind, that when they wake up they will feel like they've just had the

best nap of their lives. Now, who wouldn't want that? Do I have any volunteers? Any skeptics, believers, anyone on the edge? Come on, don't be shy!"

I look around, seeing that multiple people are raising their hands. I jokingly ask Spencer if I should go up, having to yell for him to hear me over the speaker. He shrugs, simply saying, "Do it," and raises a brow at me. It sounds like a challenge, and conflicting feelings begin to fill my chest. *Maybe it could be fun to go on stage. But what if I'm actually hypnotized? No, that's fake. Wait... that's even worse. I'm a terrible actor. What if I have to pretend to laugh? I'll make a fool of myself.* As I am sitting there, lost in thought, I neglect to realize that my hand is still tentatively being held up in jest from my previous question to Spencer. As I come out of my daze I look up to a hand pointing at me. It is the hand of the hypnotist. I panic, internally. Oh gosh... Now I've done it. I give the hypnotist my most convincing smile, wincing as I stand up and have to walk past the speakers towards the stage where around fifteen volunteers are now lined up side by side in metal chairs. Each of them is pressed so closely together that they're touching. *This is not up to Covid standards. What if someone is sick?* I sit near the end, trying to avoid having to be the center of attention. I'll leave those spots for young boys and the many middle-aged men and women participants who

are clambering onto the stage. As I watch I think about how it's a surprisingly mixed group of individuals. *Hmm, not what I expected. Actually, what was I expecting?* I don't have time to think about this as next to me, a very large, wide man, in his early thirties sits next to me. He has a big smile and looks like this is the most exciting thing he's ever done in his lifetime. I give a small smile back.

As I sit down I feel the cold of the metal on my back, shivering as I regret wearing a crop topped shirt for the first time. My shorts feel too short as well, and I can feel the same cold on my thighs. Mark, the hypnotist, who I notice has a thin and pokey-looking white beard to compliment his rounded face, is now trying to tell us to close our eyes and listen to only the sound of his voice. Despite my discomfort, I oblige. Closing my eyes, I start to feel the eyes of the audience disappear. It is almost relieving, but at the same time terrifying. I am on the stage with 15 strangers, all alone, without Spencer. Well, he is a few feet in front of me, but he is not looking my way. Suddenly I hear the sound of Mark's voice. It is loud, but also firm and reassuring. "All of you are floating in a bubble, you are safe from everything around you. Now, in this bubble is only you and my voice. You will be leaving this bubble, but you will not lose my voice. Do not stop focusing on the sound of my voice." He pauses, then continues. "Now as

you leave the bubble imagine you are in a black bus. The bus has black wheels, black seats, black floors, and ceilings. It has black windows, you cannot see outside. It is now getting hot in the bus. The AC is off and the windows won't open. It's getting hotter, hotter. It's boiling! Fan yourself to try and cool off." I furiously fan myself. *Am I supposed to be in a trance yet? Surely not. It hasn't been that long. I'm not comfortable. It's not hot.*

He continues to talk and my thoughts are interrupted. "Oh, someone has turned on the AC, it's getting cooler, cooler. You can stop fanning yourselves now. Ah, relax. Your minds are going deeper into hypnosis. I hear him click his tongue loudly into the microphone and startle in my chair, nearly jumping up. "Every time you hear this sound! 'CLICK'" I jump again, he keeps talking, "Every time you hear this sound! CLICK! You go deeper into hypnosis. Deeper. CLICK! Deeper. CLICK!" I start to get used to the sound and force myself not to react when it happens. Mark keeps going, introducing more scenarios and then clicking after, repeating that we are going deeper and deeper into sleep. I start to feel the slightest grip of dizzy tiredness on my mind. *Is it working... Maybe it's real. Maybe-* The man next to me, who is large, and rather sweaty, starts to lean into me. One of my eyes peeks open through my eyelashes and looks over at him. I shrink away, suddenly completely awake. *Uncomfortable. He's on me. I don't like it. Move away. Stop leaning on me.* He starts to snore and I shrink inwards, leaning my head the other way and scooting slowly across my chair to get away from him. It doesn't work, he leans

into me harder. I press my legs together and force my eyes to stay shut. *Help.* It is then that Mark addresses the audience, saying he is going to let us fall deeper into slumber as he explains what is happening to us psychologically. I am not listening. I am focused on how uncomfortable I am. Mark turns around after what feels like an eternity. "Later, when you hear the word HYPNOSIS you will immediately fall back asleep. Now with that in mind, soon you will wake up, and everything I have said to you you will remember." I squint an eye open while I'm sitting there, hoping Spencer will see me and give me encouragement. He's not looking. I close my eyes and inwardly shudder. Mark goes down the line, whispering in each person's ear what they are about to think they are doing. When he gets to me he says I will laugh uncontrollably when the man next to me jumps up. *Laugh? Why would I laugh? Does he mean he wants me to snicker? No, probably not? Hopefully not... I can't pull that off even if I tried.* Mark leaves and goes back to talking to the crowd while I lose myself in thought.

Suddenly he says a code word that I had not been paying attention to and the 30-year-old next to me has jumped up, howling in pain and glaring back at me. I stare at him in utter horror, before remembering I am supposed to be laughing. I give the most pathetic smile I have ever given in my life. The 30-year-old looks mildly confused but plays along. Mark walks over to us and starts talking, "Huh!? What happened?" He looks at the 30-year-old who shrugs, then points at me, rubbing his right butt cheek. "D-did she pinch you?" The 30-year-old nods.

"My goodness. Why would you do that?" I shake my head and shrug, too flustered to do much else besides looking at Mark and giving him a grin. The second Mark looks away, I look at Spencer, he looks straight at me, and then looks away at the other volunteers. I sigh. All around me shoes go flying at the mention of another code word as two volunteers kick off a pair of mint green crocs and black no-tie shoes into the crowd. As this happens, two of the volunteers, little boys who are much younger than the rest of us, yell, "HOT HOT! My shoes! They're lava!" A girl on the far left of the row of chairs counts eleven fingers on her hands, whilst another, older male volunteer next to her struggles to correct her, but has seemingly forgotten the number seven and cannot finish his reprimanding.

Mark introduces a new stipulation. When he makes a popping sound with his mouth, electricity will shoot through our chairs. I visibly wince. *I can't do this. I can't act. I should just get down off the stage. I-* "POP!" The noise nearly breaks my eardrums and my entire body goes rigid as I jump halfway out of my chair in a panic. The hair on the back of my neck and arms stands on end. I look around, wide-eyed, and see that half the actors didn't even move. Mark keeps talking as I sit there, petrified, and then suddenly in the middle of his speech he pops his mouth at the microphone again. I have nearly the same reaction, and glare at him for a moment, before I realize I am performing perfectly. The audience starts laughing and I can tell they're loving it. Spencer, who has had a straight face for most of the show, now has a huge grin replacing it. I blink,

the unfamiliar feeling of enjoying being on stage and getting attention creeping into me.

After this, Mark turns and starts to weed out anyone who is doing a poor job of acting, making them exit the stage and saying that they are not in a deep enough state of hypnosis. I mean to get off the stage, but the 30-year-old next to me is leaning on me again and I glance at him, trying to shuffle away in my chair and forgetting to get up. Then it's too late. *Crap. Now I have to do a good job...* Mark returns us to our 'sleep', and begins clicking once more. "Deeper into sleep! CLICK! CLICK! Now, your minds are empty. Everything before is gone. You're in the dark, alone, falling deeper, deeper. CLICK!" I feel the 30-year-old place most of his weight on me and I try to ignore it, leaning into the woman on my right so she can alleviate some of the awkward tension. Mark goes through a few more exercises, one in which the girl next to me thinks her name has changed to Haley. She is very avid about this name change, getting visibly angry and even yelling at Mark when he purposefully says her name wrong. When Mark walks away I decide to try my luck. *If anyone is actually hypnotized, it's her. If she answers, then it's real, and my mind is just defective.* I turn to her and whisper, "Don't worry Haley, I won't say your name wrong." She turns and stares at me, looking confused.

"Haley...? O-oh! Ha... yes. Thanks." She tries to recover from her slip-up, but it's too late. I know she's acting, and if she can do that, I can too.

We are nearing the end of the show. Mark is making one of his last hypnotic

suggestions after putting us to sleep. "Now, when you wake up you are going to hear a ringing. This ringing is coming from your shoe. You have the strong urge to answer it. It is your favorite celebrity. Hurry, wake up!" We all sit up, opening our eyes. I look across the crowd, then at my fellow volunteers. I see people taking off their shoes to listen. I take a more direct approach, bending my right leg up so that it's on my lap. I then lean my head forward, performing the motion that one would to put their foot behind their head, but stop and hold my foot near my ear instead. The crowd gives off muffled laughs and I see someone pointing. I start talking to my foot. "Hello! Oh, it's so nice to hear from you!" My heart is racing. The exhilaration of people noticing me and enjoying my act is holding my anxiety at bay. I let myself be free, acting like I'm completely lost to hypnosis. *I can do whatever I want. They think I'm asleep...* The thought exhilarates me and I grin. I hear people answering phones all around me. Then Mark intervenes.

"Oh- Oh are you getting calls? Who is it?" We pause our conversations as he goes person to person, asking their celebrity caller. LeBron James, Tony Stark, and Taylor Swift are all mentioned. I panic. I didn't think this far ahead. *Ah- who am I talking to? Think... Think.* Too late, Mark is already here. "And who are you talking to miss?"

"I- uh. It's Taylor Swift." Mark pauses, glancing back at the other girl who had previously mentioned her.

"She's on two calls at the same time? She must be talented!"

I nod, giving a grin. He nods and then

continues down the line. When he's finished we go back to talking on our shoes. Mark says that the celebrities are all asking us to do something with them. Then suddenly, the phone goes dead. I quickly look at everyone. They appear devastated. One is starting to cry. I do the same, pinching myself and slowly putting my foot down, looking at Mark in fake despair. It is quickly solved by Mark putting us back to sleep.

Finally, he begins to completely wake us up from hypnosis. As he does, he plays the song "Hands Clap." Every time there is clapping in the song the audience must clap along. Every time the audience does this their noses get longer. We are supposed to think this is hilarious. I use this last exercise to get over my fear of the crowd. I look at everyone, and then look at Spencer. I stand up when I am told to. I hear the song begin to play. I have heard this song countless times on the radio. I know when he will clap and I know I will laugh. At the first sound of two hands coming together, I hear everyone around me begin to laugh. I think of all the things that make me happy. I think of how much fun I will have on the rides at the fair later with Spencer. I feel free, my social anxiety melting away until only the excitement and pleasure of being included and on stage is left within me. I laugh in the face of the crowd. I laugh loud, I laugh hard, my eyes tear up, and I don't stop until the music ends.



Leah Wietrzykowski

Your So-Called Friendly Neighborhood Spiderman

Julie Schlanz

Peter Parker,
I realize now
that you spun
your web around me
that first day of high school
to pin my soul down.

When your beady eyes
locked with mine
and your teeth clicked together
with desire,
it startled me.
But the leafy smell of your cologne hid
your bitterness,
so I drifted toward you.

At this point,
everyone knew you were the so-called
“Friendly Neighborhood Spiderman”
and my friends implored me,

with forced smiles
like stretched rubber bands,
to accept your dinner request.
So I followed the thread
you held out to our first date.

You wore your red suit
to show off your popularity,
but the attention made me twitch
like a worm under the hot sun.
I saw your outburst
at the busy waiter
who brought out chicken instead of tofu,
the absence of thank you’s and please’s,
your constant complaints about the wait
time,
and my struggle against the verbal cage
you built around me.
My eyebrows flew to the sky each time,
but I knocked them down

because you were Spiderman.

So I decided to remain next to you
until I had no choice,
feeling the sadness settle
in my body like plaque
slowly
clogging
arteries.

When your silky words
of “I was just joking”
and “Stop being so dramatic”
cut far enough into my flesh
and your red back
was busy saving someone else,
I finally made my escape
and broke free of you.



Ben Heckathorn

Sweet Then Sour

Julie Schlanz

I ran my fingers over the thread of Shadow's leash and let the metal clasp dangle close to my feet as I walked behind the pack that consisted of my parents, my sister, my sister's boyfriend, and Shadow. I smiled at Shadow as her nose scanned Epic's carpet, smelling everyone who ever walked this hallway. Epic was an extravagant medical software company with different themes for each of their buildings, such as Wizarding World, Western, and Wizard of Oz. Since my sister was an employee there, we had access to all the buildings on campus. It was a weekend, and there weren't any employees in their offices or many people around, so we decided to let Shadow off her leash. Her two different ears, characteristic of her mutt breed, constantly swiveled back and forth as she listened to her pack and her surroundings. Shadow's black tail was also up and swinging from side to side as she reveled in her freedom from the leash in a somewhat new place. She had walked these hallways unleashed over a year ago when we last visited my sister in Wisconsin, and I was a sophomore in college, but I wasn't sure if she remembered.

Our feet didn't make much sound as they tramped across the swirl candy painted across the carpet. The name

plates on each door that I passed were the only reminders that I was in an office building and not an amusement park. This building's theme was based on Willy Wonka, but I think that the golden tickets lining the walls and the jars filled with candy explained that themselves.

There was a lightness to my family's voices as they talked in front of me. Then, Shadow stopped, turned, and began to prance down the hall behind me. I turned around, but all I saw was a flash of black turn right at the split in the hallway.

"Shadow!" I called.

My family turned around, and their eyes flicked back and forth as they tried to locate Shadow, but each one of them failed.

"Where'd she go?" my dad asked.
"Shadow!"

I ran down the hallway as my eyebrows lowered and scrunched together as the layout of the building vividly came back to my mind. Ten or more buildings were all connected to this one, and each one had multiple floors. I could still hear the clinking of Shadow's dog tags as they vibrated against each other, and the sound was sweeter than the candy that lined the hallway around me. I was only faintly aware of the rest of my family running through the halls.



"Shadow!" I heard my family members call out.

I took the same right turn that I saw Shadow take only moments ago, but there was no sight of her. I took a left and continued to run, but I stopped when I saw my grandma and realized that I was at the same place where I started. I turned and ran back the way that I came. I felt tears begin to form in the corners of my eyes as possibilities of losing my dog forever came into my head, but I shook them away. These thoughts were not going to help me find my dog any faster.

Everything was quiet. I could not hear the familiar jangle of Shadow's dog tags. My stomach dropped to the floor. I saw my sister's boyfriend, Layn, run in front of me and turn left down the hallway's intersection.

"Shadow! Snack! You want a snack? Want to go on a walk?" I called out into the labyrinth as I tried to recall all of Shadow's favorite foods and activities. Home was three states away in Ohio, and I had no idea what I would do if we lost Shadow.

"Woof!" I heard, and Shadow's piercing bark never sounded so pleasant.

"I've got her!" I heard Layn call out.

I followed Layn's voice and turned right. I was faced with a giant spiral staircase, and Layn was holding onto Shadow's collar as they walked down the

stairs together. I frowned as I realized that Shadow made it to the second floor. I reached for Shadow's collar once it was in reach and clasped the leash to it.

"Well, your freedom is gone," my dad said to Shadow.

"She probably barked when she realized that we weren't close to her anymore," my mom said.

"No, she barked at us," a lady with sandy blonde hair said as she walked with a man down the staircase behind Layn and Shadow.

"Oh," I said under my breath.

I hung my red face low, and it was hard for me to look at Shadow. As we continued our tour, my family made jokes about Shadow around me, but I did not join them. I glanced at Shadow, and I realized that I had not trained her as well as I thought and that our bond was not stronger than whatever scent her nose found. I also realized that the fun atmosphere of Epic's building caused me to be more lenient and take more risks, which was what the building's design attempted to do with its workers.

The Car Radio

Julie Schlanz

The twist of the car key
Growls me awake like a hibernating
bear
At the end of winter.
I wonder who is listening to me,
But I know when Green Day
Rumbles my speakers like rocks in a
blender
That it is Pam,
And she is alone
Since Christian music
Doesn't flood the car.
"It's okay. I won't tell,"
I comfort her as if I am her mother.
But her real mother,
Dorothy,
Would shake her head
and cement her lips down
into a scowl that reaches
the center of the earth.
When Dorothy pushes my buttons,

I am nothing more than elevator music
Or an infinite merry-go-round,
a constant repeat of "Almost Home" by
MercyMe,
And I hum in fear of being muted.
Dorothy would rip me out of the dash
Wire
by
wire
if she heard me now.
So in this moment,
I roar like a lion
Who just caught her prey.
I am in Pam's chest
Giving her a new heartbeat,
And I'm in her head
Crumbling down the replay
Of her mother screaming,
"You will never be good enough."

Pam and I howl together,
a pack of wolves
predicting each other's moves
on a hunt for freedom.
She drums her hands
Against the steering wheel
In sync with my vibrations.
Choosing to be in unison
Is the most freedom we find.

Like a rainstorm
On a sunny day,
Pam spins my dial
So that I'm hushed into a whisper
And the dust settles
Back down on me.
She must be close
to home.

Annabel Malone



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Marietta College



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