

# PULSE

LITERARY MAGAZINE



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# LOVE A LADY

Anonymous

To love a lady whose heart is fair  
Perfected with beauty, not one tear  
Would be the best thing in the whole wide world  
You'd be lucky to love a stainless girl

But to love a lady whose heart has been hurt  
Trampled and kicked around in the dirt  
Would be the smartest decision you've ever made  
Though through tough times in Gahanna she's laid  
Even though some cannot tell  
You'd be smart to love a lady who has made it through Hell

# IS HAPPINESS A FLOATING DREAM?

Rachel M. Ewing

Is happiness a floating dream?  
Is it a red ribbon tied to a fence  
catching my eye and making me smile?  
Is happiness the taste of mint  
so strong your eyes sparkle  
and your cheeks tingle?  
Is happiness the feeling of stepping into the warmth  
when you've been cold too long?  
Is happiness the glossy pages  
of a magazine promising things you  
don't yet have.

How do I choose between right  
and a floating dream?  
Should I hand over my pride  
for the chance at a taste of mint?  
Do I give up who I was  
for the potential to love who I could be?  
How many pieces of myself must I cut for my cut of the ribbon?  
If I'm used to the cold why should I trade  
the snow for the unfamiliar warmth?  
Maybe I'll give away the glossy magazine  
and hold on to numb but familiar me.

# PIZZA

Tom Farish

"Need help." That was the text I decided to send Amanda. It was short, and I thought it got across the point I was trying to make rather well. I had been standing in the kitchen for 15 minutes waiting – praying that she would walk through the door soon. Every minute that passed seemed to stretch on and on as I stood, unable to use my hands. They weren't injured or anything, just absolutely covered in slimy, cold raw chicken. I had thought that I was going to be the big hero. I was going to take the chicken out of the freezer, have it all thawed out, and make dinner tonight. But, of course, the meat stayed frozen rock solid.

Amanda and I live one floor apart in our college residence hall. We have been making dinner together every night in the communal kitchen just down the hall from my room. This kitchen is spacious, with large windows overlooking the immaculately kept college lawn, two oven/stove combos, and one full size refrigerator. We kept all of our food in my fridge though. You never know how dirty those public spaces are. Before we had gone our separate ways earlier that day, we had made a plan for when we were going to meet back up.

"5 o'clock for dinner tonight?" Amanda asked as we were walking home from our daily workout.

"Yes, 5 o'clock on the dot" I replied with a smile. I knew how she always liked things to happen at nice round times. She is a planner through and through, and she makes plans about everything, from when she's going to do her homework to how many episodes of Netflix to watch, right to the minute.

So, at 4:55, when I first checked to see if the chicken was thawed enough, I couldn't believe it – my heart sank. I had taken it out of the fridge around lunchtime, maybe 11 or 11:30. But sitting on my counter in my room was an icy brick of poultry, more suitable for building a house with than cooking dinner. I knew there was no way the schedule would be met. Quickly, I cleared all the dirty dishes out of the sink. A salty popcorn bowl, three coffee stained mugs, and a plate with some breadcrumbs and a little bit of peanut butter; all of them came out and in went the package of meat. I cranked on the hot water and rushed over to the door of my apartment and opened it, just enough so it wasn't latched closed. I ran back to the sink and, on the way, looked at the clock on the microwave: '4:58' it read. I reached into the drawer to my right and grabbed a knife. I sliced open the packaging in a flash of blade and fingernails. Once it was open, I grabbed the lifeless bird and plunged it into the stream of steaming water which had been heating up this whole time.

As it was heating, I thought about why I was so worried about being on time. I'm always the late one in our relationship; late to class, late to pick her up for dates -- I was even late on the day I proposed to her. That's part of what makes our relationship work. But today, she had specifically told me to be ready to make dinner at 5. She had reminded me to take the chicken out of the fridge before I left for my morning class -- guess who forgot. I needed this chicken ready.

I looked back to the clock: '5:00'. I expected a text from Amanda any time now asking if she could come up. She hated to be late for things, but she also didn't like to arrive uninvited. Her explanation for this is that if I happened to be in the shower or something, then she would be stuck out in the hall for who knows how long. I thought this was a little silly, but I always appreciated the warning she gave me. Luckily, I had remembered to unlatch the door for her; any moment she would walk through the door and see me struggling.

My mind snapped back to the chicken at hand. The fire and ice effect of the meat-sicle and near-boiling water was too much for my hands, and I was forced to retreat. I decided to try to break the breasts apart; if they could be separated then they would be easier to thaw the rest of the way. I set my grip and strained with just about everything I had in me to break this chicken. Not even a budge. Slightly disheartened, I ran the meat back under the hot water. A minute or two later, the temperature difference became too much and I decided to try to separate the chicken again. This time the outer bit of the meat had thawed, and there was this nasty, squishy, warm layer covering the familiar brick underneath. I bent this chicken with all my might, and in one motion the pieces of chicken separated. It seemed like every corner of my apartment was misted by the chicken-y explosion in the sink, and at ground zero was my face. I could feel chicken juice on my chin, there were ice bits in my hair, and I felt like I knew everything about this poor animal's life and death from what I could smell.

I have never been closer to becoming a vegetarian in my entire life. Every neuron in my brain was firing, telling me to grab the nearest bottle of soap and cover my whole body with it. But, in order to do that, I needed to get the chicken out of my hands. I had not thought to grab a plate beforehand, and I knew I couldn't set the chicken down in the sink. I was well and truly stuck. I glanced at the clock; Amanda must be getting worried about me now, soon she will be running upstairs to see what's wrong with me. '5:04'.

So, after weighing the options in my mind, I made the decision to simply stand there by the sink, with God-only-knows-what splattered on my face, until Amanda came to save me. I stood there, ever-frozen chicken in each hand, glancing at the clock and thinking about my place in the universe. Each minute that passed brought its own string of thoughts along with it, none of them were very important. I began to grow impatient and hungry, a very bad combination in a stressful situation. My mind began to wander and think of all the scenarios which might be delaying her.

"What if she slipped and fell in the shower...?"

"What if her roommate needed to be taken to the hospital...?"

"What if she got lost and walked into a strangers room only to be kidnapped...!?"

I finally threw in the towel; I couldn't handle the uncertainty. I set the chicken in my right hand into the nasty sink, reached into my pocket with my slimy fingers, grabbed my phone and typed the words "Need help."

When she finally arrived and saw the mess I had made she made the face I've seen her make with her little nephew who is barely 3 years old. She helped me clean up and put the chicken away in the fridge. We ordered pizza that night.



# LOVE

Cole Longcor

Hatred is nothing more than the irrational phobia of love; which is simply the conclusion of events caused by the fear that no one could ever truly love you back.



# SUPERNOVA

Madeline Holbrook

It seemed all my power laid dormant  
swirling, boiling, just out of my reach  
always peeking around the corners of my mind, scared of what I might see  
take your hands off my eyes, let me escape  
I hated living in a glass box: preserved, complacent, obedient, as a woman  
who should 'know her place'  
if I was angry at your attempts to tame me, I must be neurotic  
a woman who is angry must mean she's chaotic  
I became a character in your false reality, a slave to your fallacies  
silence is bravery, that is what you'd say  
keeping me quiet, shushing, and ignoring me  
I learned how to tiptoe around in my own head  
because you buried landmines around the words that needed to be said  
you said you were the sun, too powerful to overcome  
you laughed at my attempts to escape  
I never stood still, always running in place  
I was just a woman: a pretty face with too much emotion  
mollified me by decorating my pain with flattery and sparkly gems—how  
could I have known the difference between love and counterfeit affection?  
just a girl, too much in my head, dim, unruly, and unrepentant  
how could I have differentiated living in a palace from a prison sentence?

with every patronizing glance you insulted my intelligence  
but you forgot glass breaks, masks slip  
I decided to speak and down my glass castle went  
the words taste like copper, heavy as bricks  
ricocheted through my head and back  
my glass box began to crack  
I decided to scream  
sick of the smiling, ready to bare my teeth  
I decided I matter  
I screamed till the glass shattered  
a fuse straight to my core, an explosion—I became something more  
I draw my sword with war paint on my face  
perhaps I finally learned my place

you might be the sun with your makeshift, philanthropic persona  
you shouldn't have underestimated me; I will swallow you whole  
I will not be silenced. I am a supernova.



# B STRATEGY

Alex Kirsch

Fall back on  
plan B when  
plan A  
doesn't work.

So, prepare plan B.  
Produce a perfect buffer  
for that moment when  
plan A  
falls through.

Plan, prepare,  
and perfect  
plan B;

until you realize that  
you've spent 8 years planning  
plan B,

and 8 years ignoring  
plan A.



# SLUMPED AGAINST A WALL

Robby Allen

The other day I watched a mosquito try to escape from a spider's web for 20 minutes weighing whether or not I should help him I watched him struggle and flail and rage against his fate for that long and I did nothing. I considered the moral ramifications of what kind of life he might live or if I denied the spider a meal.

Either of those things could've been cruel. I watched an insect for half odd hour fight, claw, trudge, and thrash for his life.

Whether or not the reason I needed to watch the end of a creature's life said anything about me personally, maybe just my frame of mind at that time, I hope and choose to believe is inconsequential.

I ruminated the possibility of narcissism as my head wandered to how I mourned this, even though this isn't my death.

Why, this would make an excellent poem, I pipped. I remember reading a David Sedaris essay about this before. About being transfixed on a spider eating a meal, this is something that people have done and think is fascinating. Surely I can stare at this innocent bug while he attempts unsuccessfully to be free-to get free. Now I'm projecting.

Maybe I'll impersonate the mosquito, that would be cute, talk about the irony of him sucking blood and then being turned into the grossest smoothie.

I'll make it a boy mosquito first, that way the antecedents will align themselves.

And what if the spider doesn't win? What if the mosquito finally bursts to freedom and triumph? What if he triumphs? Will I then amend the story to suit its Burkean Sublime nature or will I tell the subjective truth of what I witnessed.

I'll write this later sitting on the toilet, typing into my phone on the same screen I search for porn on and text 'I love you' to my girlfriend.

Then just as that thought blipped in my mind, I saw him, her, them, or it fly away I thought I saw it crash into the concrete steps leading down into the basement

I did not check to see it after it escaped.

I should have checked to see if it was still alive, to see if my poem would write itself or if I would have to change it for everybody that is not me.

But I did not check, I just walked upstairs to figure out how to write about whatever the hell this was.

This is all I know how to do. God, I am so sorry.



# THE RAIN IS...

Anonymous

the rain is a baptism  
washing away the girl I was; the girl who trusted  
him  
the rain is a reminder  
of all the times I pried my heart open just to let  
him in  
the rain is a wake-up call  
bringing me some clarity  
even though I stand tall

he knocked the wind out of me  
the rain is a love song  
that showered over me from my head to my feet  
I am drenched and broken  
living in a world of what could have been  
the rain is a baptism  
I am struggling to decide  
if saying goodbye to him  
is the beginning or end of my life

# RED, WHITE, AND BLUE

Rachel M. Ewing

I wonder if there's a reason the lights on cop cars are red and blue  
They make me think of the Fourth of July  
But if cops are meant to be there for  
America does that mean I'm not American?  
Because my daddy always said cops aren't there for me  
The first time the cops came to my house I didn't get to say anything  
My sister told me that they had already decided we were bad  
Bad doesn't mean you did something wrong it means you were born in the wrong place  
The second time the cops came to my house I spoke to them  
And worried I said too much  
Because my momma said that the less you say to cops the less they have to use  
Against you  
Now even when I sit in my dorm room half a country away every time I hear a knock on the door  
I'm afraid  
Afraid that it will be a cop that will arrest me now and ask questions later  
I always joke I'm not my father's daughter because he's a self-proclaimed outlaw  
And I can't break a rule but I haven't lived in my father's  
Circumstance  
And I don't know who I'd be if he hadn't given me opportunities  
Are these opportunities why cops will shoot at them and arrest me?  
Will I be treated fairly when I leave the neighborhood?  
Will I be treated fairly someday when I get a PhD?  
I acknowledge the privilege that they don't hate me for my skin color and that  
I can hide from them in plain sight

I went to the right schools and I'm white  
But somehow that doesn't help me sleep at night  
Because when another unarmed black person is shot  
I know it's not the heat of the moment  
I know it's a break in the system  
It's a flaw that needs fixed  
It's a racist, classist, oppression-filled, fuel-filled, dehumanizing, system full of inequality that  
Can't afford to be left broken  
When the break costs people their lives  
The lights on the cop cars are red and blue  
That shouldn't mean blue spilling red blood  
Or that you're only protected if you can add the white  
The lights on the cop car are red and blue  
Good people should see the lights and feel safe  
Red and blue the colors of Americans  
But then again what is more American than systemic oppression?

# THE WOMEN WHO CANNOT MARCH

Rachel M. Ewing

The day has come to a close and the chants echo in your ears but not in the air. Signs have turned into litter, even the ones that demanded we save the earth. The women have gone home, back to domesticity, back to their seventy-nine cents to his every dollar, back to the husbands' who don't even know where they've been, back to the doctor's appointments they can barely afford in Ohio, and the healthcare appointments they're not allowed to have in Alabama. The events of the day play through your mind and you try to be empowered and try to be angry but really you're tired. Tired of the barriers not moving, tired of the men in power, tired of the men who don't hold power but think they do, tired of the women pitted against you, and tired of having to comply with rhetoric that you only half agree with because it's the only way to get things done in a two-sided system that doesn't have room for you.

*"And to all those pro-life politicians, I can't wait for the day you burn in hell"*

Your hands freeze mid clap and for a split second you wonder if that's true. Is that what you're waiting for, everyone who disagrees with you to go to hell? Do you even believe in hell? Yet you still keep marching when you feel like you should stand up and disagree. How do you stand up and disagree when you're all already here to stand up and disagree? You scan the faces of the crowd but everyone else is fixed on the goal and you're not sure what the goal is anymore. You've lost the faces of the people you came with and the crowd is a blur with an angry motivation you no longer feel like sharing. You

look for the faces of pro-life women, maybe you don't share their side but you want to make sure that they're alright, and that her words didn't somehow send them straight to hell. You can't find anyone in the crowd, but then again how would you tell? Somewhere between chants of "No hate no fear" and helping lift a woman in a wheel chair over a curb you realize her words didn't send them to hell they trapped them at home. The divide feels too large and you wonder if you can even call this the women's march any longer, when all women cannot march. You take a step and then another, your lips move with the words, but really you're ashamed in going along with something that alienates women, that divides them, that tells some women that they aren't feminist enough, that deciding what they believe means they aren't welcome. The crowd has moved on and you feel yourself falling behind so you drop the thought and try to catch up, joining in on the chant.

*"No hate, no fear, everyone is welcome here"*

You lie at the top of your lungs.



# HOMELESS

Anonymous Student

My heart was always much louder than my mind  
Perhaps that is why thinking of him made my chest ache every time  
My mind begged me to let him go  
My heart told me to pull him closer and I said 'no'

Because I know the road and the steps I need to take to get over you  
But I am paralyzed—I can't move

Meeting you felt like coming home  
Then it all tumbled down

Where do I go?  
I am homeless now.



# EXCERPT FROM "GOD'S GREEN EARTH"

Braeden Wallace

There is nothing quite like the tranquility of a long drive on the seemingly endless Skyline Drive, with its peaceful meandering through the worn peaks of the Blue Ridge. Each ride through presents an opportunity to see something extraordinary, like a dazzling sunset or an elusive black bear. I feel drawn to Shenandoah because of its unparalleled beauty and opportunity to experience these special moments. As a child, I never thought twice about the significance of nature beyond just pretty views, but as I have grown up, I now realize a greater meaning. God has communicated through nature numerous times in the past, and now I realize that His reach is still evident after Biblical times. Instead of a burning bush, God resorts to an ancient Oak; instead of a beckoning star, He uses an untraveled forest path.

One of my favorite trails on the SNP is Bearfence Mountain. A short trail that seems fairly easy at the beginning quickly turns into a steep, rocky climb that leads to scramble after scramble of rocks. There are a few slippery slopes along the way, along with one particular ledge that my brother and I like to call "The

Cliff of Death." After enduring multiple climbs up scattered rocks, the mountain peak yields panoramic views of the scenic valley below. From the top, everything from the mountains of West Virginia to the deep valleys of Greene and Madison Counties are visible, along with a beautiful view of the chain of mountains to the sides. Sitting on the rocky pinnacle for a moment can really help to put your problems in perspective and step back from the struggles of daily life. I think that God uses the stark difference of size on the mountaintop compared to down on the ground to teach us the real weight of our problems. Worries that seem as massive as mountains seem tiny and distant. A life that bustles with obligations like a highway filled with cars looks like a line of marching ants. A world of limits can be looked down upon from where birds soar. There seems to be a separation between the bustling world below the clouds and the sky above- a separation of heaven and earth. The separation is more than just a matter of elevation, but of mindset. This concept is evident in Biblical times, such as in the case of Moses in the book of Exodus. God calls Moses out of a valley of sinfulness in Exodus 34 to the top of Mount Sinai to make a covenant with Moses and his people and establish the Ten Commandments. It was a place of seclusion that was free of all distraction, a sanctuary with a peace unhindered by even animals and hunger.

*"No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain" (Exodus 34:3).*

*"Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant—the Ten Commandments" (Exodus 34:28).*

This kind of focus is the same type I feel on a mountain peak in Shenandoah. Though I neither fast nor write Commandments on stone tablets while hiking, I do have a mind free of distraction. Just as a sky full of stars is able to be seen in its entirety in a night free of light pollution, an opportunity to hear God's message is best experienced with a head free of mind pollution. God wants us to listen to what is important by first eliminating from our brains what is unimportant for a little while. After descending from Mount Sinai, Moses' face is radiant with light from speaking with the Lord (Exodus 34:29-35). He shared what he had experienced on the mountain with his people who were still stuck in the real world full of darkness and sin. I feel that this is God's plan for me; to be so filled with His love that it radiates in my daily life, not just in special moments on the mountain.

In the same way, I think that God calls us to be our own kind of light in someone else's darkness, to be a sort of light solution instead of pollution. Light pollution takes our focus off of the stars and God's words for us and makes it difficult to see clearly. This pollution is what we see in the valley below that can make God seem distant, or like a star in a city sky; just non-existent. In the same way, we can radiate his light in a way which can instead drown out whatever struggles (or pollution) somebody else has been dwelling on so that they can experience God's truth; a sort of light solution. Those in the valley no longer see a promise muffled by worldly struggles, but in fact just the opposite: they see a life polluted with hardship and uncertainty overtaken by a Father that loves.



# HOMESICKNESS

Nina Hahn

Flashes of gray run through my veins;  
my heart turns cold.

My mind is cloudy as cotton candy,  
my senses flushed with melatonin that  
lingers in the foreign air.

I think I hear rain speaking Morse code to the mice,  
but a drawn curtain tells me otherwise.

I'm plagued with a sneeze that never comes  
and a sigh that never unfolds.



# HOLIDAYS WITH MOM

Alex Kirsch

My mom did not work on Christmas for the first time in years. She didn't have to prematurely run out the door, and she didn't have to hastily snag several cookies off of the tray and stack them precariously on her foil-wrapped paper plates of leftovers. But even though she wasn't working, my mom, a medevac nurse, still found her way to the ER: with me and with two plates of leftovers for her coworkers.

Ryan, a young, single man with a small immediate family was scheduled to work the 3 PM-3 AM shift on both Christmas Eve and Christmas. On Christmas day, he was scheduled to work alone. At 3 AM, Ryan got off of his previous shift, drove home, and went to bed on the morning of the 25th. If he's anything like my mom, he probably slept for about 6 or 7 hours, getting up at 9-10 AM, and almost immediately began preparing – both mentally and physically – for the start of his next shift 5 hours later.

Mom and I had a quick and easy drive to the hospital, considering there was little traffic. As we reached the ER's sliding doors, mom showed her ID to one of the security guards hovering around the entrance. Each of them was rigid and in uniform, with thumbs in their belt. Mom told me that as soon as 7 PM hits on Christmas, things get crazy. People will leave Christmas dinner and maybe finally address medical problems that had nagged them all day; they had brushed off until the dishes were done. Some family members left home drunk in cars after finishing an unwanted, unexpected argument at the dinner table. I looked behind me at the small parking lot and saw that it was already filling up.

I felt uneasy and enveloped by the rising tension and anxiety that the night would inevitably bring – and I wondered if every single night was like this. The hallway in front of us was long, quiet, and honestly moderately peaceful, but I am positive the peace was only a mirage, like an oasis in a desert. False peace may have fogged the walk down toward the helipad, but as soon as we reached the end, the dispatchers granted us access to their post for the night, and I felt waves, again, of that same tension and anxiety. I walked into the room.

Mom and I handed the plates of food – now two instead of one – since Steve kindly and selflessly came to fill in the vacant second spot during the 3 PM-3 AM shift. When we passed over the goods, both of them thanked us profusely, and in that moment, the anxiety dissipated and I was so happy that I had asked my mom if I could tag along with her when she delivered their food.

For about twenty or so minutes, Mom hung out with her two coworkers and talked about the night, work, life, family; anything that came up naturally. Often, the subject changed whenever events external from the moment's setting intervened, as per the job of a dispatcher. The conversations were refreshing, yet they still carried falsified calm and security, and when the interruptions came, all of my attention as a guest and passive observer was pulled into the source of the distraction. One of them was an update on an incoming flight on their way to the hospital -- to the helipad right in front of us.

Ryan and Steve, in tandem, described to my mom the reason for the flight; they used

abbreviated language and technical terms that I couldn't understand. The only piece of their description that made any sense to me was the phrase, "to the back of the neck." Based on my mother's reaction and the small details I picked up from their jargon, I was able to assume two key properties of this injury: 1.) it was relatively serious 2.) it was an injury that happened frequently. My mom had responded by slightly dipping her head back and allowing her eyes to roll back and close. She inhaled and sighed, not necessarily a sad sigh, but one that was exhausted and exasperated; I knew at that moment that she was evidently familiar with the injury, and I could hear in her sigh that she was already imagining what the ER would be facing when the helicopter landed. Before she became a medevac nurse, my mother spent several years in the ER, on the receiving end of these incoming injuries.

Politely, I remained standing to the side and only partially listening. At one point, Ryan received an update from the flight crew: the patient had a stabilized airway. I still wasn't really aware of what the injury was. My mother remarked, "it was a good thing they at least had him stabilized," but she and the dispatchers quickly agreed that despite the crew's moderate success, "the kid would be lucky to be alive in the end, and if he did end up alive, he'd likely be paralyzed from the neck down."

Steve looked at my mom and said – in a tone similar to one somebody would use in conversation about the stock market – "the bullet hit so squarely in the spine that the victim

was already losing feeling and the ability to move some of his limbs below his shoulders.” My mom listened to this information, standing beside me, and she stood physically unmoved. Her arms remained crossed, and she closed her eyes and nodded with a look of solemn, and familiar understanding.

I stood by, with millions of thoughts rushing through my mind. A pit was forming in my stomach, as I had finally connected the pieces of their conversation to discern what had happened. A serious, yet common injury. An injury common enough that my mom had seen it both in the ER and as a flight nurse. An injury that required a stabilized airway. An injury so accurate that it could paralyze a person from the neck-down. An injury that was caused by a bullet.

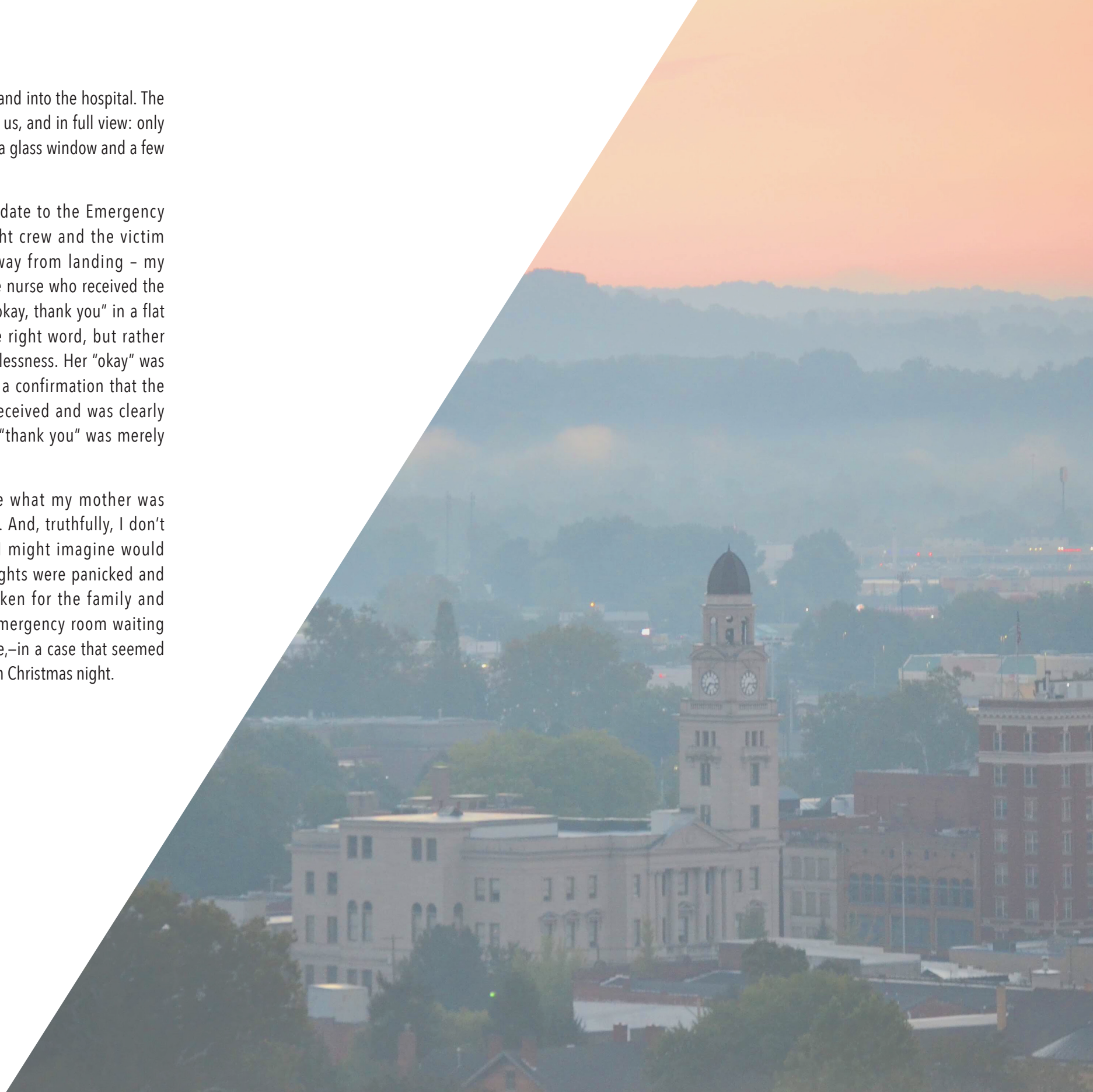
All I could think of was his family on their way to the hospital by ground as he’s in the air, on Christmas night. They’ll arrive in the waiting room for the ER, not knowing his status – not knowing if, by some slim chance, it’s good or more likely devastating. They would sit and wait, left only wondering how things could have changed within the time that he lifted off the ground until this very moment.

Mom is unsurprised – from what I can tell – as I glance over at her, my mind still fumbling to process what I had learned. Her face reveals only a quiet, reserved acknowledgment and sad familiarity with the situation. I was only imagining the amount of blood that would soon be passing hurriedly by the windows of this room as the nurses take the victim from the

helipad, past security, and into the hospital. The hallway is right next to us, and in full view: only separated from me by a glass window and a few desks and computers.

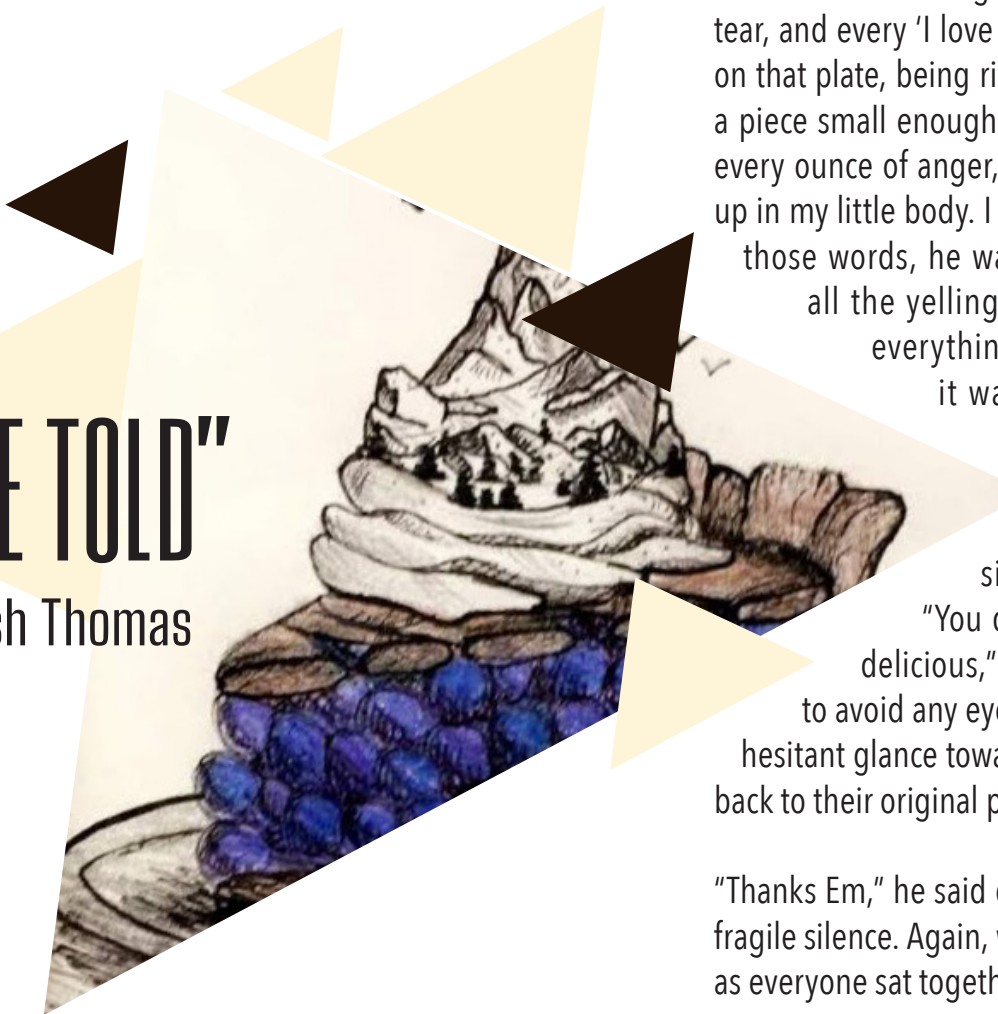
As I heard Ryan’s update to the Emergency Room – that the flight crew and the victim were ten minutes away from landing – my adrenaline spiked. The nurse who received the message answered, “okay, thank you” in a flat tone. Calm is not the right word, but rather monotonous, emotionlessness. Her “okay” was an acknowledgment: a confirmation that the new task had been received and was clearly understood, and her “thank you” was merely a courtesy.

I could only imagine what my mother was thinking at this point. And, truthfully, I don’t think that anything I might imagine would be accurate. My thoughts were panicked and distraught, heartbroken for the family and sympathetic to the emergency room waiting to try and save this life,—in a case that seemed absolutely hopeless—on Christmas night.



# EXCERPT FROM "DO AS YOU'RE TOLD"

Josh Thomas



Dinner was quiet, no, not just quiet. Silent. Death would have shuttered in the suffocating silence that had engulfed the room. I, rather angrily, stabbed my fork and knife into my steak and began to cut. I cut the tough meat and envisioned every emotion, every tear, and every 'I love you', everything that we had ever been, right on that plate, being ripped apart with every push and pull. I cut up a piece small enough and shoved it in my mouth, chewing it with every ounce of anger, sadness, and frustration that I could muster up in my little body. I imagined him doing the same, he was eating those words, he was chewing up all the lies, all the cheating, all the yelling and fighting and crying. He was chewing everything up and swallowing everything down like it was nothing. I, on the other hand, couldn't swallow all of this so easily.

I praised Emily for trying to break the silence and restore the humanity left in us. "You did a really great job on the dinner. It's really delicious," she said to Tom, who was awkwardly trying to avoid any eye contact from any of us. He made a quick but hesitant glance towards Emily and then his eyes quickly retreated back to their original position, his dinner plate.

"Thanks Em," he said quietly, as if being too loud would shatter the fragile silence. Again, we were washed with uncomfortable stillness, as everyone sat together at the table, alone in our own thoughts.



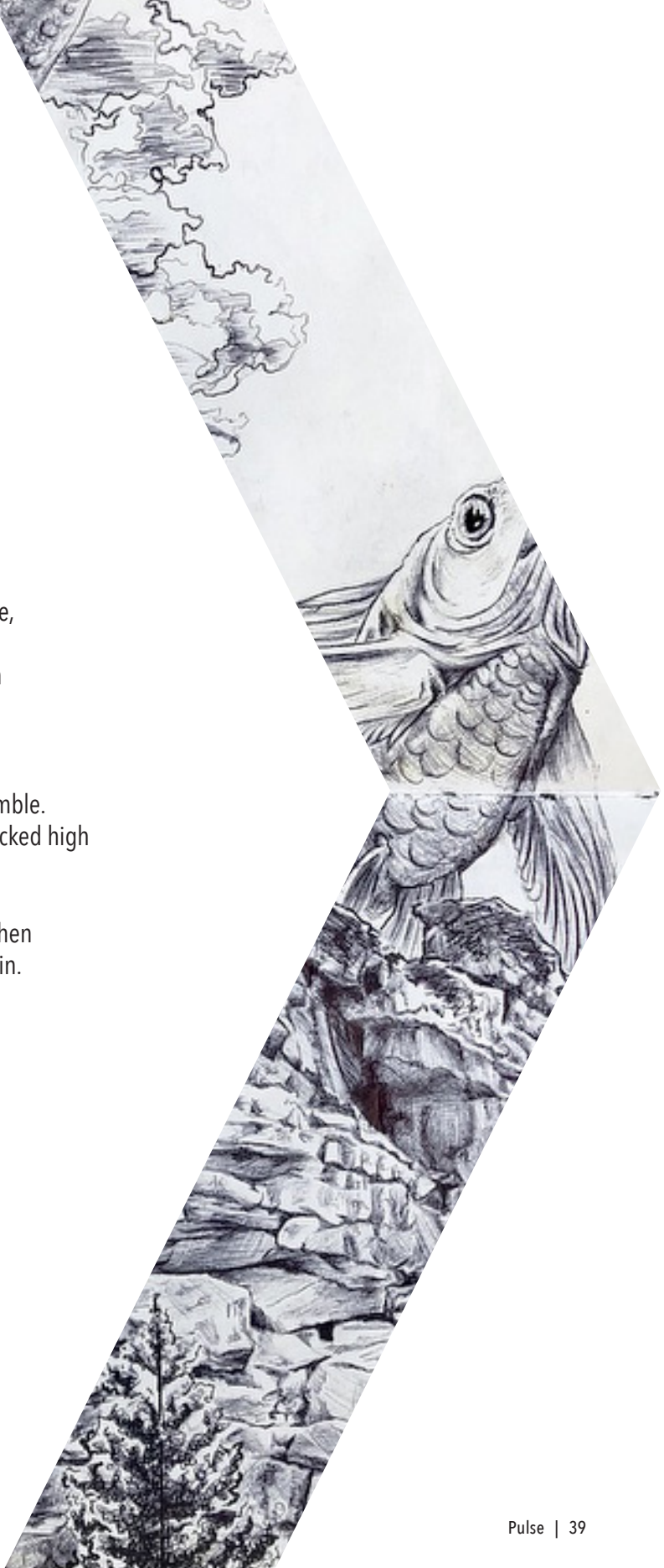
# THE PLACES YOU'LL GO

Mollie Swygart

The office was grey, and full of grey people too  
They had twelve gloomy smiles, paperwork overdue.  
In the ninth cubicle, with his coffee cup drained,  
Sat good Dr. Seuss, or at least what remained.

His books had stopped selling, money became a concern.  
He was forced to take a job at the data entry firm.

The paperwork on his desk was piled so high,  
That the sight would've made his poor Lorax cry.  
He went through the motions- File this. Fill out that.  
The job was quite bleak without a Cat-in-the-Hat.



The doctor could not, would not, here or there,  
Tolerate this place, so full of despair.  
He reached in his pocket for a small metal tin  
And from it, took a swig of bottom-shelf gin.

His suit was disheveled, his tie in a jumble  
Each time that he walked, he tried not to stumble.  
With his insides all fuzzy and with papers stacked high  
Seuss filed and sorted and entered til five.

And as he left the office, he thought about when  
He would come back tomorrow and do it again.

# ONCE BEFORE I DIE

Tom Farish

Some say the Cleveland Browns have bad luck.  
Twenty-nine quarterbacks since 1999  
I think that  
maybe they just suck.

There's beauty in the simple.  
I see them stand there like orange flowers,  
daisies on the field.  
From somewhere far comes a whistle.

Voices in the crowd say 'they just look soft.'  
Mixed in with the boos and jeers  
are cries of  
'maybe next year!' I can only scoff.

Add another tick in the loss column,  
one in an endless list of uniqueness.  
It seems that  
this happens every autumn.

Their growth looks uninspired.  
The gardener who planted them  
seems lost.  
Perhaps he should be fired.

The young seeds from last year  
seemed so strong and full of life.  
Now they're  
struggling. From my face falls a tear.

Like a little kid on a riding lawn mower,  
success and failure feel random with you.  
Straight or  
crooked, perhaps we should blame the owner.

"Just once before I die!"  
has been the tragic call from fans.  
Should they manage  
to win it all, many a man will cry.

This Land, my home it's forever been.  
Please, for the love of God,  
make this garden  
beautiful and just find a way to win.

# EXCERPT FROM "SUNRISE: LOOKING INTO THE LIGHT"

Braeden Wallace

2

1

3

4

4

Orange, red, yellow, and pink. Mist, clouds, fog, and dew. Silence, serenity, peace, and awe. Such is the scene at sunrise. As birds chirp quietly and wind softly licks the grass, the sky above fades from the sleepy ink-black of night into the soft peach glow of dawn. Minutes pass and the sun is slowly born in the morning sky like a chick drowsily shedding its shell. Fog-blanketed rivers and misty forest canopies turn to gold, as the sprawling horizon is revealed stretching its arms infinitely in the distance. In the valleys once cloaked in shade, roosters crow into the waking sky as city streets begin to hum with travelers and the low voices of early-risers. A new day has come, and the watercolor blend of warmth lasts on its canvas for only a few precious moments before the baby blue of the daytime sky extends to the heavens and the sun touches every inch of creation. Good morning.

1

2

The timid grey-blue glow of dawn gave way to citrus skies as the sun loomed behind the foothills. The city still lay sleeping in the morning haze, and I began to snap some pictures. A sunrise over the city is something that I had not experienced before, as most of the sunrises I watched in the past were as far away from people as possible. The tall grass in front of me bowed in the soft breeze as the orange sky burned in the distance.

After about ten minutes, the fog resting upriver on the Muskingum glided towards its junction with the Ohio, enveloping the city and water in a misty curtain. The flame of new light spread throughout the low-laying clouds, making them blush. In this moment, I realized how at peace I was with my aloneness. No notifications showed on my phone. Not a sound was made. Not a soul walked by. Nothing stood between me and the spectacular display of sunshine on the horizon ahead.

3

4

As the radiant fog continued to rise from the water, I opened my Bible to one of my favorite passages, Psalm 19. The first verse is frequently utilized to express the beauty of God's handiwork, but as I read through the rest of the passage, I saw so much more about why God told me to wake up early that morning. As I began to read the passage out loud, I realized the purpose and power of the perfect scene in front of me in my relationship with the Lord. This morning was about more than just a matter of observation, but of a realization that God speaks through everything.



# FOR THE THOUSANDTH TIME

Robby Allen

Gary and I went over the hill to go get a couple Christmas trees.  
We went after it got dark because we weren't going to pay for something if we didn't have to.  
We might have had a little bit to drink. (because who steals christmas trees sober?)  
We found the two we wanted and cut them down no problem.  
Gary went back to get the truck and I sat down and waited on him for an awful long time.  
I saw a light come from deeper in the field so I turned my flashlight off.  
I sat real still and waited on whoever owned this field and these trees to shine their light on me.  
I waited and hoped Gary wouldn't come back now.  
I heard rustling over pretty close to me.  
I figured that they were close enough to see me.  
I just decided to own up to it and shone my light toward the noise so I could pay the man whose trees I'm stealing.  
I saw some fella with two trees on his back who was not expecting to see me.  
His eyes almost popped out of his head and he dropped those trees in his arms quicker than anything.  
He took off faster than I had ever seen anything on two legs run.  
I had to call after him, but I was laughing too hard, "You ain't caught, friend!  
we're doing the same damn thing!"

# MY DEAREST VIVIANNA

Alyssa Prince

My dearest Vivianna,

I'm writing to regale you with the most ghastly of stories I overheard during this past holiday. Mr. Finch and Mr. Harburdy, the friends of my father I have mentioned before, came to spend the festive week with us, as I know Father is trying to make subtle insinuations about mine and Holly's availability. In usual competition, when the festive day finally arrived, the two men decided to compete by passing on some of their favorite ghost stories. Right after supper, we gathered around the fireplace in the lounge. Only my grandmother decided not to join in the socializing, retiring to bed as her old bones demanded. Perhaps she should become a living ghost for next year's stories.

Anyways, Mr. Finch and Mr. Harburdy decided to hold a competition for the most frightening story and after a round each, they asked which I had a preference for. Of course I could not answer, not with Father's eyes staring me down, waiting for a decision like picking a story would give my approval over a suitor, not that I had much choice in the matter. I shall, however, share with you my favorite story, twisting some of the details so they might not realize even if my letter is discovered before I can make it out to the post.

It was a dark night on the eve of last Christmas. The wind was howling through the town, swirling great columns of snow that blocked the view from street to street. On the edge of the town lay the Milshorn manor, cast far beyond the tendrils of the snow columns. Not a single soul could see into it from even the street right beyond the private gate. On the inside though, one could not even make it from the carriage house to the main home without being swallowed by the mountains of growing snow.

Within the home, the fire burned only in the main parlor, each occupant too afraid of running out of wood. At the start of the storm, Mr. Milshorn had thought it smart to transfer the wood from the outside into the kitchen, perhaps the only reason they were still alive in the blistering cold.

In the corner of the room sat an old grandfather clock, actually it had belonged to Mrs. Milshorn's grandfather, who had passed away the year prior and willed the newlywed couple his prized clock.

Midnight rang and the clock began to toll. Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding. Ding. Then nothing. The hour had not yet finished. Silence overcame the house as every clock came to a sudden halt. Not even a tick could be heard from as little as Mr. Milshorn's pocket-watch. The only noise in the entire home was the unsteady breathing of the Milshorns and the crackle of the fire. In a rush, a gust of wind came down from the fireplace, wiping out all traces of the fire. Not even a smolder of smoke remained.

Standing in front of the cowering couple, feet lodged in the ash of the former fire, was a man only recognizable from his paintings of the last century. Why, it was none other than Argus Kramer, Mrs. Milshorn's grandfather, though he was impossibly pale and perhaps fifty years younger than he had been from the last time they had laid actual eyes on him. He stared at the speechless couple for a moment, looking between. In a booming voice, he at last addressed them, "Pray tell, what is the meaning of this?"

Mrs. Milshorn could barely stand to lay her eyes upon the man, but Mr. Milshorn rose to his feet at once. "While I respect your death, Grandfather, what gives you the right to return to our home? This is a place for the living to dwell and be happy, not for those to wander who have been lost."

The opaque sheen of Argus' skin reddened as he returned comments, "Lost, you say? I have been summoned here, just about. My granddaughter is not happy. When given the choice between her two suitors, she went with your younger years so she might find happiness for a longer time while you're on this earth with her. However, I have been to the other side and I can see your future. While you may be younger, your age will surely be your undoing. As we speak, your heart has already stopped for there is not one ghost in this room, but two."

Mr. Milshorn immediately bristled at the notion. "Speak clearly. You have lost all your sense upon your death, old man. I am surely alive and well as I stand before you today. Can't you say the same of me, my love?" He looked to his wife, but she was still frozen in her speechlessness.

Argus shook his head, smiling ruefully. "You shall not find any response. She is still within the world of the living, beyond your reach now. When the clock resumes, you shall have until the end of the toll to say goodbye. I recommend you suggest that she find love again in the other man or surely she shall be forsaken. I will see you at the end of your final crossing." He stepped back into the fireplace, fading into the bricks.

The fire roared back to life and already Mr. Milshorn could feel the change in his body. Ding. His limbs grew colder. Ding. He gasped for air. Ding.

Mrs. Milshorn looked at him oddly. "Are you alright?" Ding.

He collapsed back onto the couch, his body going rigid. Ding.

"My love?" Ding.

His obvious message was most amusing, but I could see the other man grow angry at the conclusion of the story. I must admit, I was more entertained by their reactions than I was the story, though I do say it brought a chill to my body. Oh, Vivianna, might I stay with your family next holiday season and curtail some of this romantic drama entirely?

My fondest thoughts,

*Lucille Clemmons*





# A WRITER'S MIND

Cole Longcor

Two lands, free from the prison of time.  
One for the world,  
The other is mine.  
The story, undying,  
Living beyond me.  
The world I imagine, create, dream.  
Takes on its own life, leaving me relief.  
The second world, the short lived era of when the ink is wet!  
My Process, My Mind, My World...  
Free from time, yet I am not.  
The hands of the clock grab me, they pull me back to the terrestrial plane.  
Back to the so called reality.  
Back to a world of law and time,  
Until the next time the ink is not yet dry!



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