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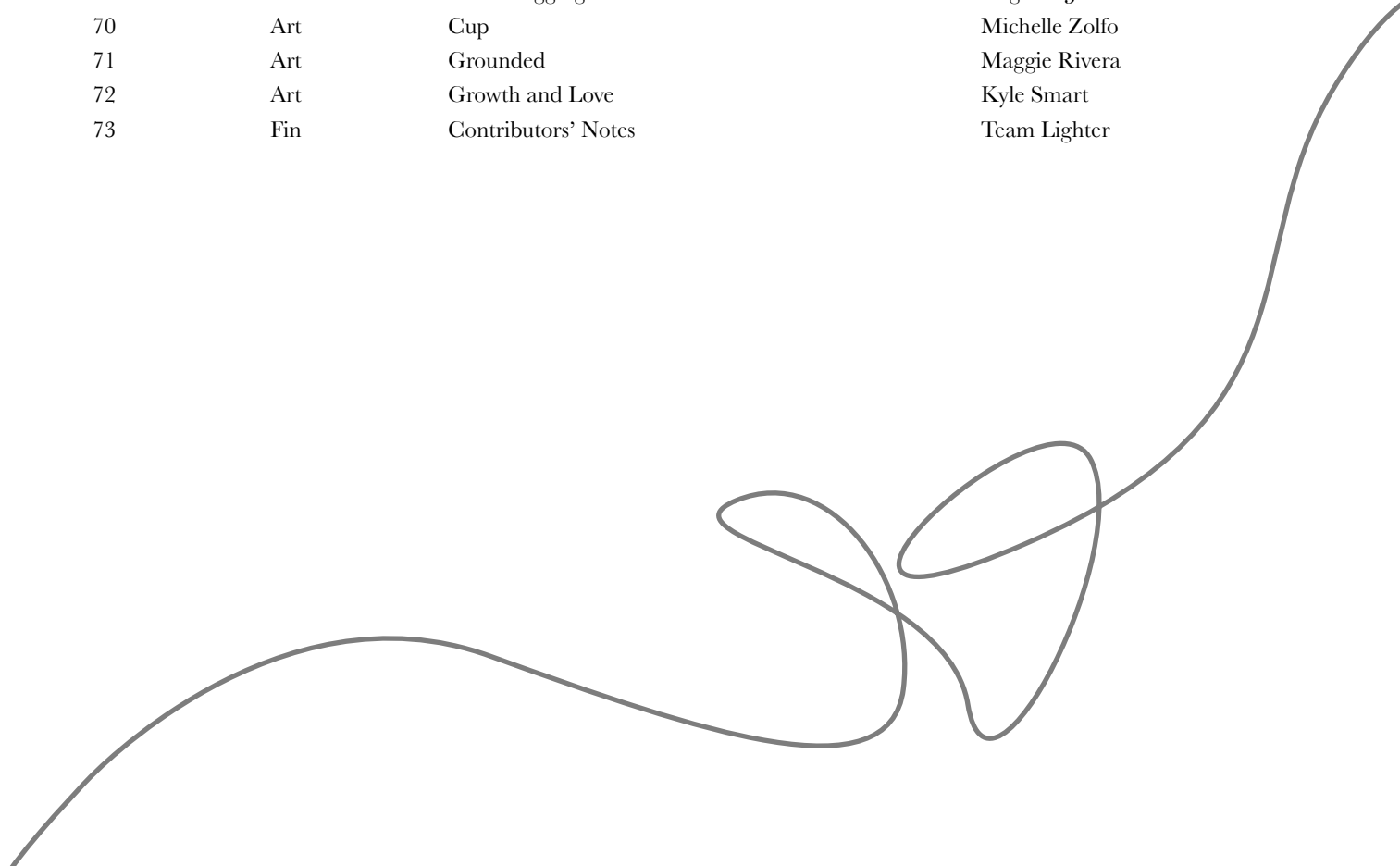
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An Interview with Christian Wiman

IAN ROSEEN AND STEPHANIE SEPIOL

Christian Wiman is the author of three collections of poetry and one book of prose, with another being released next spring. Much of his poetry and critical work has also appeared in such publications as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *The American Scholar*. Earlier this year, he was awarded a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship for his contribution and promise to the American literary landscape. Since 2003, he has worked in Chicago as editor for *Poetry* magazine. His most recent book of poetry, *Every Riven Thing*, has been widely acclaimed and deals with his diagnosis of a rare form of cancer as well as his return to his Christian faith. Wiman spoke on these topics and read from his work at Valparaiso's Wordfest series this fall. Before his reading, he sat down with two students, Ian Roseen and Stephanie Sepiol, for an interview.

Ian Roseen: You have been open in essays and particularly in the talk you're giving tonight on how your faith has come to influence your poetry writing. I was wondering if you could start us off by speaking a bit on that and what that means for you.

Christian Wiman: Yeah, the way I phrase it to myself is that I made a deliberate turn back toward faith, towards Christian-

ity, about seven years ago. It wasn't as if I had a conversion or anything. I felt more as if I assented to a faith that had long been latent within me. If I look back on what I wrote twenty-five years ago, I can see that religious questions are pressing out of the seams of everything I was trying to say. That's the context that I wouldn't let *be* the context, and so I wrote about this annihilating kind of absence, and I wrote about a kind of emptiness. And until I turned to what might fill that emptiness, I was stuck for a number of years. Doing that really changed my work. It changed my poems and let them reach areas of experience that I hadn't been able to my earlier work—humor, joy. And it completely changed my prose because it just led me to write an entire prose book about faith, which I'll publish in the spring.

Stephanie Sepiol: In your "Gazing Into the Abyss" essay in *The American Scholar*, you wrote that "poetry is how religious feeling survives in [you]." I loved that line so much; I'm a musician, and I've thought about how when I'm performing or singing or looking at music, that *that's* sort of when I think about faith the most. Could you speak a little more about that, especially which part came first for you? Were you drawn back to the religion and then the poetry came from that, or did you feel as though when you started writing poetry you were exploring those themes in a way that brought you back to religion?

CW: Well, I think when I say poetry is how religious faith survived in me, it was that the experience of writing poetry was an experience of transcendence. So, as long as I could have that, I didn't need to articulate what it was, and I certainly didn't need to bow down before it. It existed in my life. But then for a number of years it was taken away, and for three years I became completely unable to write a poem. That's when the kind of silences that poetry had enabled me to survive overtook me, by appearing periodically within them, and I couldn't stand it; that's what really enabled something to crack open in me. So it's a paradox: religion survived in me by virtue of poetry for a number of years, poetry went away, and then religion came back. God came into my life, and that *brought* the poetry back in a different way.

IR: We were talking earlier about the necessity of humor, and I wonder how you see that surfacing, if at all, in your work. What do you think its function is? Does it make work, even if it's very serious work, more full-bodied to have that included?

CW: You know, the thing that led me to break through in my work—well, there were two things—but *one* was *Don Quixote*. That book is hilarious. It's just one long comic masterpiece. I was depressed, and yet I found myself laughing while reading it. And yet it's really a tragedy because you don't realize until late in the game that Don Quixote knows that this is all an illusion, and he is sustaining this illusion of himself as this knight and this romantic character. So there's this element of tragedy in that he has not just survived but is overcome with his humor. The other was Samuel Beckett, and some of his plays like *Endgame* and *Waiting for Godot*, which if you don't know how to read you just look at them as these miserable tragedies. I mean, people just stuck in these *miserable* lives. But then they're full of jokes. If they're performed right, they're full of just outright jokes!

And Beckett was this hilarious character. So, I find that not only appealing but very necessary—some flair of humor to counter existential dread. Those two writers in particular were very helpful in showing me how it might be done.

IR: How does the writing process seem to work for you? Do you find that your poetry can surprise you and kind of come out of nowhere when you're not expecting it, or does it tend to be more deliberate?

CW: For me, I think of two things. Robert Frost once said, "No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader." So if the writer isn't surprised by the work in some way—I think this is true of poetry and prose—then the reader's not going to be. There's another quote that I've seen attributed to E. M. Forster or Ezra Pound: "How can I know what I think until I see what I've said?" Which reverses the terms in which that's usually put forth. A lot of people think of writers as having an idea, then sitting down to write it out. And I think that's usually exactly wrong. What you have is an impulse to write something, and maybe it's a string of words or maybe if you're a fiction writer you have a detail of a character or a voice comes to you or something. But I think it's very rare, even for an essayist—and I'm talking about art, not about a critical essay—to have a concrete idea and then sit down to write it out. I think you have something that leads you somewhere, and it triggers something and then it leads you in a completely different direction. My own experience with poetry used to be like breaking rocks for me. It was very deliberate, very painstaking and methodical, and not much inspiration that I could tell. But at some point, all of that learning got internalized and it changed. Now when I write a poem, usually it comes pretty easily or not at all. If it doesn't come pretty easily, I'll give it up. Prose is different; that's still a lot of work.

IR: Do you prefer to work—and I mean work even as far back

as what inspires you to write a piece in the first place—in isolation or in close contact with the world around you?

CW: Well, I'm married and have two small kids, so there's not a lot of isolation anymore. I've had to learn to write with a lot of things going on around me. But I think that's not exactly the question. I think I used to really retreat from the world to write, and I used to think to the extent where I would move to an island or something for a number of months and be away. I used to think of there being this real disjunct between art and life, and that you needed to separate from life in order to commit fully to your art. And I've come to think of that as a very false distinction. You need those two things to be raveled up in one another, or you'll end up writing some kind of art that's anemic and has nothing to do with life. So that's another thing I've had to learn the hard way over the years, that a lot of the things I would have characterized as interruptions and difficulties and impediments to writing have become necessities to me now. They've become integrated into my work, and I've written a lot more since I've had less time to write, paradoxically.

IR: With this relationship between life and writing, then, you've had some pretty significant milestones *within* your life, especially in the last ten or fifteen years. I'm wondering if you tend to categorize your life in phases, and if so, has your writing reflected these phases?

CW: I see rifts that've settled into the work, but it does seem very much of a whole, very much of a piece; a continuum. I do think there are writers who change their styles very radically, and I don't think I'm one of those. The poems have become different, in a way, but I don't think they've become radically different stylistically in a way that Robert Lowell does or Picasso does or Stravinsky does, all those different artists where you can really see the ruptures in the work. I try to avoid, actually, seeing my

life in that way, too, because I prefer to think of it as one time rather than a series of times. I think our lives are actually works. The best lives end up being works of art; similar to works of art. That is, if you look at them from the outside, they have a wholeness to them, they have a unity to them. And they also show you something. And it's not always a genius or a powerful person or a very accomplished life, or anything like that in which that happens. My grandmother is a great example for me. She was not a person who read any books; she didn't go to school. She was one of the most conscious people that I know, and it took me a long time to see after her death that she had lived in such a way that her life had the coherence and unity of a work of art, that the way it had existed in my life was akin to a work of art. And I could respond to it in that way. It had a unity. It was formed by God.

IR: Maybe you've already answered this in a way, but why do you write? What drives you to keep up with it? And also, why did you begin writing in the first place?

CW: Honestly, I write because I have these bees in my brain and they won't leave me alone. I've wanted them to go away at times, and wished they would go away. But they won't. So, I write for that reason, and I write because I'm obsessed with language. I don't write because I feel like I have something to say, or I have some great truth to reveal or anything like that. I'm not a fiction writer. I'm not drawn to character. I love to *read* fiction, but I don't have these characters appearing that I suddenly have to articulate. I'm obsessed with the kind of meaning that inheres within language, which is deeply human meaning and also, I think, divine meaning. But it's taken me a long time to realize that. For years I thought I was just screwing around with language, and then meaning happened almost without me even having to do anything about it. But those are the reasons, because I'm interested in language and I just have this—well, as

Yeats put it, he went into the hazel woods because a fire was in his head. Sometimes I get a fire in my head [*laughs*].

IR: How do you balance out your more practical work life as editor of *Poetry* magazine and your writing life, if you even see them as two separate entities?

CW: No, they're utterly separate for me. I think of my writing life as cordoned off from my editorial life. I define myself as a writer. I'm always surprised when people think of me as an editor. I don't carry that identity around with me very much, but I realize it's there; it's what I do every day. It would be wrong for me to say that it's not important to me, because it is very important to me. But they are very separate endeavors. Being an editor gets in the way of being a writer. It doesn't aid in any way. I've had to learn how to negotiate that. At the same time, if I were offered all of my time free, for most of my life I would have said that's what I want. "I would like to not have a job, and to have all my time at my own disposal." I've never been bored except when I've had a job. Now I'm not so sure. It's possible I would need the structure, because the structure has come to help me in some way. So it may have shifted.

IR: Regarding your job at *Poetry*, why do you *do* it, then? What is gained for you by this job that can't be gained by writing?

CW: Two answers. One: you gotta have a job. I don't make much with my poems, certainly not enough to live on. So you have to have work, and I've found the kind of work that I like and am pretty good at. And I work with great people. So, my job is great, I have nothing to complain about at all. The more substantial answer is that being editor has given me a chance to do two things. One is to revive the reputations of writers who have been forgotten—so, either writers who are very recently dead, or who are very old and whose work has been neglected.

If we can give them a prize and give them a lot of play in the magazine, publish their poems and give them a lot of critical attention, it has a real effect on their careers. For instance, Eleanor Ross Taylor is a writer. She just died last year, I think, and a few years ago we gave her our big \$100,000 prize—the Lilly prize—we ran her poems in the magazine, and I wrote out a little critical thing. And it had an enormous impact on her work, suddenly everybody was talking about her again, when she had been completely forgotten. At the time she was actually in a home and her memory was going, but she did know she had gotten the prize. So it's very gratifying if you can do that, particularly with someone like that, who is a woman whose career was sacrificed to her husband's. Because Peter Taylor was a very famous novelist; he was one of *the* most famous novelists in the middle part of the twentieth century, and his wife was writing these poems on the side while she raised the kids. But he was the literary lion, you know, he was the one who was traveling around the country and everything. But by *my* light, she's the one who wrote the enduring work. Not everyone would agree with that, but by any measure her poems are fantastic, and she turns out to have this small but I think very durable body of work. And so we're able to call attention to that. The other is that you can take young poets who don't have a chance of being heard. I mean, this country's *huge* and there's so many poets, and you can find these young voices that are strange and desperate—because being a poet is very, very difficult, especially when you're young. And so you can find these people and give them an enormous amount of hope, give them exposure; you can lift them up in their careers at a crucial point. So those two things; I would do the job for those two things, really.

IR: Okay, I have kind of an open-ended closing question: something we tend to ask in these interviews with *The Lighter* is what advice you would have for writers, especially those of us who are just starting out and aren't sure how they want to use those

abilities or interests in the world. Even just drawing on your own life, here.

CW: One thing I found was incredibly helpful to me in college was to read books that I was not assigned. I got very tired of reading things that I always had to be talking about or responding to, and once I let myself just go into the library and begin getting all these books—I would get armfuls of poetry books and take them home and put them by my bed and read in the mornings and the nights, when I had time—and once I began doing that, it just freed me up so much. I could think of reading as my own. Because it gets very tedious if you always have to be formulating your opinions. Especially if you have to write papers about something; that can just leech the joy right out of you. I mean, it's great if you have friends that are reading them too, and you can share them. But I think having a reading life outside of class is crucial, and will help you sustain that when you get out of college. A lot of people are readers in college and then they just stop, because life really closes in. You get a job and you have no time; especially if you have kids, it's unbelievable how little time you have. College will seem like the most blissful time you ever had in your life. And it is, in a way. So the advice I would give is to make reading an independent act, something that you treasure and need for yourself. If I had to do it all over again, I just don't know what I would do differently. I got lucky getting an editorial job, very lucky. If I had some advice I might say try and acquire some skill that will enable you to survive, and that isn't too difficult. You know, I don't know if you want to be a *surgeon*; that's gonna take all your time. But some skill that you can do and that you like, that will enable you to live your life. And I think if you're also lucky, as I've been, you manage to meet somebody who has the same interests and passions, or at least understands them, so that you're not alone. Because it can get horribly lonely. Unless you're just incredibly lucky, you're facing a decade of writing with no response. That's typically

what people face, and you need some help getting through that, whether it's a partner, a husband, a wife, friends that you keep in touch with, professors that you keep in touch with. For years, my professor in college, I can't believe he did it now but he wrote letters with me, exchanged letters with me almost weekly about what I was reading and what he was reading, and first my poems and then once I got a little older his poems. So if you can find some sort of correspondence that will sustain you, I'd recommend that strongly.



Bottles | Michael Casas

“Arrive thou vernal equinox”

GREGORY MAHER

I met her fallow in the Spring
 when sunlight nibbled trees,
to bring
 their buds to fuller
blooming - - sky
 and wind, thee
wise, unending, sand
 and sun, thou
sprawl'd, unflinching - - follow
 then oh heart, flecked
with sepal, sap and honey
 throb on, throb song
of Winter's cold, fey sun and stone
 that brightens now
to snowdrop yawn



Untitled | Andrea Zuniga



Rebirth | Evan Arceneaux

Message to a Spider

MADELINE BARTSCH



Ah, spider, my cunning, devious friend,
Your brilliancy has brought about my end.
You made your trap, and helplessly I fell
Prey to your intricately woven spell.
A simple snare: create a prize
To tantalize and treat the eyes,
Simple in structure, yet spun so fine,
Arachne's hands would tangle in the twine.

To the innocent eye, your trap appears enticing,
A person could forget her wits; its beauty's so inviting.
It screams of optimism, happiness, something new and better
You smile in your web ("At last! I have her!")
But something, some uncertainty unknown, makes her hesitate
Is this too rushed? Too sudden? Should she stop to think, or wait?
To stop internal struggles, and make your victims weak,
The Devil gave you a con man's voice; you speak!

"Come and sit for a spell, my dear,"
Your oily voice whispers in her ear,
"I wouldn't hurt a fly,"
Oh, clever spider, how you lie!
Your softly spoken nothings caress her wounds of old
Sweetly smoothing over scars from occurrences untold
And then her mind begins to delicately fray,
You set hopes high before you snatch her life away.

She ventures ever closer into the web you spun,
Till suddenly she finds she's bound, the web can't get undone.
She thrashes and she struggles, but it's a fruitless quest
You suck her dry, take life away, and discard all the rest.
Your victims are many, and all like her, now vacant and removed
The shells of former selves, the path they took was doomed.
And here I find myself, entombed, no hope of being free
You robbed me of my life, my smile, and all that makes me, me.



View Down Mostecká from St. Nicholas' Church, Prague | Chris Larson



Easter in Florence | Chris Larson

A Mental Masturbation from Phi 101

LYSA FISK

I want my mind back:
under my control
in order to direct which thoughts
I ponder.

*(arbitrary distinction:
morally irrelevant criteria
for determining moral worth/moral obligation.)*

I want my mind
to consider something more
than its sense of the melody of his body
ordering our dance—
held in my body
now at this desk, fluorescent and
front row in Phi-101 class.

I will my mind to think!
on Professor Descartes rationally
in order to earn an A in philosophy.

Now, the mind damns the dead Professor
Descartes for the damned impertinence
each lesson dares to suggest (!)
as the brain struggles to grasp

[amber ache in the arms that embrace him
(human beings have souls)
pressure pounding in the breast that breathes him
(nothing else does)
accelerating violence in the groin that rides him...
(arbitrary or morally relevant?)]

this lesson in theoretical human circumstance.

Despite the surviving thought of Professor Descartes,
this body is never not thinking
of itself experiencing
his body, a word in my head unlocking my love
that we make of the night
through the dawn's early resting!

I want my mind tested
by the flesh
of his mouth
and his tongue
and the immediate hum
of his living syllables erect in my taste buds,
my Love:

“I am;
therefore I (love) think.
I (love) think; therefore
I am.”



Untitled 1 | Ruoxi Wang



My Hair is Soft and Pleasuring to Touch | Angelica Jackson

The Pang

STEPHANIE SEPIOL

Guilt is a precious feeling, assurance
that you have done something
you shouldn't have. Excitement,
a rush of hot acid rain that freezes
to bowling balls in the churning pit
of your stomach. Stifling, maniacal

freedom that you cannot
escape and do not want to—
for the moment you do, gone
is the humanity that said "do not,"
the humanity that said "regret

that which you do not regret,"
simultaneously fiendish and delicious
destruction, stimulating contradiction.
You admit you are guilty, yet only
of guilt—not of the real, palpable
consequential wrong which led you
to the road so often traveled.

What constricting admission, to intimate
the pang of feverish chills that squirm
over your skin and drip a salty brine
from your burning forehead.
Dishonesty has called your bluff.



Untitled | Andrea Zuniga

In the Corps de Ballet

HANNAH BAUER



Don't Fall Under | Charity Scollon

1st Position

Why do so many little girls want to be ballerinas? Do they really want an angry old lady yelling at them for hours or poking holes in their tights with an icepick or making them turn across the studio with a quarter squeezed between their butt cheeks, do they want to force their muscles to tear, to draw their bruised and blistered toes from their wooden cages? No, little girls want to be ballerinas because ballerinas are beautiful. Slight, slender, and floating, they hardly seem to move or walk. So beautiful. Their feminine form has been whittled away from them with diets and banded breasts, but then re-established with tutus and hair-buns. Ballerinas dance across the floor absolutely, perfectly together because that is what ballerinas are: perfect. Beautiful and perfect.

2nd Position

Beauty and perfection seemed further away each time I donned my leotards and tights. I looked in the mirror at the other girls whose bras did not show where their leotards had open backs and they didn't wear shorts to try to disguise their hips. The latex clothing pulled tightly over their straight frames as they pushed this body part closer to that body part or that body part closer to this body part—appendages of the torso never meant to touch. I stretched morning and night, trying to move like the other girls, but the only part of me made to dance ballet was my feet. My feet curve with strong arches providing

an elegant curve when I am en pointe. Without them, I probably would have quit dance after a couple of years. But they were so redeeming. What do you like most about yourself? Legs, eyes, waist, some say. I say feet, because the rest of me was not right for ballet, not beautiful enough. Sometimes, if I lost myself in the music, I could feel their standards slipping and my self-confidence rising. But the measure would end; pinched to a stop, beats short, for the teacher to fix me and futilely attempt to turn me into a ballerina.

3rd Position

What does a ballerina look like? "Ballerina ideal weights." "Heaviest professional ballerina." "Ballet body type." Google does not give me any reassuring news. 85-130 pounds one site says. Broad shoulders, narrow hips, small bust, says another. Russian ballerinas under 100, under 90, under 80. Under, under, under. "We are driving our bodies quite close to their limits at times," the dancers say. Limits, limiting my food, my life, my interests. It doesn't matter if you love it, you can't do it. You weren't built for it. My body is the limit, my hips never bearing the weight of a tutu. They all have something to say. Technique is the most important thing, some have learned to say; but you can only compensate for so much, I know. I know my limits.

4th Position

Limit yourself to one topic. One chocolate kiss. One kiss.

Limit yourself to one profession. One life. One lifestyle. Center yourself, push to be the best YOU that YOU can be. But wait, you must have the necessary skills. And what about your training and background? Your history, religion, and beliefs must all fit the standards. And you also must have an essential helping of luck. A mime puts himself in a box others don't see, while I'm put in a box I wish I didn't see. What do you want to be when you grow up? A ballerina, I used to say. A sasquatch we taught my little sister to say, but then she grew a little and started to say cheerleader. Now she says a teacher or a musician, maybe both. What do I want to be when I grow up? I want to be in love, I want to do all the things that I love, not just the ones that fit within one societal structure. Why can't I be a writer, and a photographer, and a designer, and a blogger, and an editor? I want to be those and a bride, a mother, a singer, a dancer... a ballerina. The box is shattering.

5th Position

But it only takes one fall to shatter the dream of any dancer. One good fall and that dream is gone. I heard the bones on the top of my foot crack when I landed on them, the full force of my body pounding my foot into the potmarked wooden floor. I tried to pretend it wasn't too bad, ignoring the pain as I stood to continue dancing—I may have even laughed at the fall—but one measure and I was down again. The sweet satin of my new shoes had slipped, just slightly, and sent me straight down to the bottom of that old dance studio—oh so originally named, "The Studio." Because it was the only one. The only place to send your little ones to dance. And Mrs. Patty was the only dance instructor. The only dance instructor to use pickaxes in class or to threaten to send little girls to the zoo if they didn't stop hanging on the barre. The only dance instructor to watch me try to start dancing again on my broken foot, but crumple when the pain was too much. I saved my tears for the safe car ride home, where I didn't have to be strong. Auditions were coming up. Now I

would never get the only solo.

Fin

The semi-circle around the soloist, the line of grapeviners at the back of the stage, the girls wearing the generic white tutus, that is the corps-de-ballet. The stock ballerinas, and luckily, I was one of them. And Mrs. Patty's attention was not only for soloists, her yells rang through the dressing room, "That's not enough makeup girls! They need to see your features in the audience! Your eye-shadow should be the bluest blue and your lips should be the reddest red." Even my face wasn't proper for being a ballerina. My lips not red enough, my eyelids not blue enough, my smile slipping as I concentrate on remembering the steps. My childbearing hips find a place in front of the brightly lit mirrors. As I sit, my too-big breasts struggle against the tight white satin bodice. The choreography repeats in my head on a loop, over, and over. Knowing the moves isn't enough to be a soloist. I know that. But dancing in the corps de ballet may be just enough to fill this dream, for now. The others—the writing, the wedding, the babies—may come in time. The synchrony of the corps reminds me that I am not the perfect ballerina. And I don't know if that makes me beautiful or not, but I am trying. That may not always be good enough; but for now, I take the stage anyway, because—like all little girls—I want to be a ballerina.



Headless Nude | Natalie Zuber



Dark Side | Maggie Rivera

Controversy

HANNAH KAITSCHUK



Walking fast, head down
All eyes on me
Silently judging
There is no escape

Even the sidewalk
Has something to say
Screaming obscenities
In bright mocking colors

If you only knew me
Talked to me
Came out from behind your childish chalk
Maybe then you'd understand

My choice.

Not Far Down to Paradise

IAN ROSEEN

There are occasional things, shuffled deep into the customs of everyday, that have begun to take the energy out of David Felson lately.

This morning, as is often the case, he cannot make it out the door to work without being faced with one of these things. Alone in the kitchen, he peers slack-jawed into the pantry at his cereal options, of which there are two. An unopened box of Honey Nut Cheerios sits before him, lined-up primly with a never-ending box of Grape-Nuts. His wife, Wendy, buys the cereal, goes out every Thursday morning before work with a carefully thought-out list. She is on a diet herself, but her habits sort of trickle down onto David and their daughter Lorelei; even Daphne, their Brittany spaniel, is now off the IAMS and has begun consuming an obscure, independent brand of dog food that the vet's office sells in small white bags. The Cheerios are a concession, an acceptable option for the members of the family who might not want to eat the Grape-Nuts. David has no interest in eating the Grape-Nuts (there's always so much *more* to a bowl than he expects, and it seems he can feel his stomach expanding with all that grain, the way he recalls hearing pigeons' stomachs did back in the days when rice was thrown outside at weddings), and yet he chooses the Grape-Nuts anyway. *Postpone gratification*, is the thought process here. *Save it for later, compartmentalize*.

These things—they're silly; things he can't even hope to justify, but nonetheless they tend to leave him with a breathless, agitated feeling somewhere in his chest cavity. A pair of slumped

shoulders. A longing—often satisfied—to close his eyes for a moment and regain a sense of the livelihood he feels has gone out of him.

He pours himself a bowl and leans against the island, eating it cold before the milk has a chance to warm over and turn the cereal to mush. A hiss of the screen door, and Wendy comes panting in behind him, tanned and glistening from her morning run. She attempts to keep her breathing very even as she leans against the water faucet and watches the liquid flow through the Brita filter and into her glass.

"How's your morning?" David asks. He walks over and looks out the window at the gin-like clarity of the swimming pool, which they haven't used at all yet this summer.

"Nine miles," Wendy answers, filling up another glass, swallowing that, too.

"Mmm." He notices, all at once, that she never asks him how *his* morning has been, and wonders if there is a sort of unacknowledged snobbery on her part here; she gets up early to be proactive, whereas he takes the extra half hour of sleep, has a slow breakfast, and therefore probably does not have anything worth asking about. She is sparing him the embarrassment.

"Your daughter," she says now between gulps, "has a date tonight."

He turns to face her. "Lorelei?"

He is shocked, pleased, instantly suspicious. An interested party, finally, but why now, a month after she's graduated from

a high school where she spent four years pretending to be above all that, when really (he knew) the boys her age simply ignored her? He realizes there is a certain vibrancy, a certain type of *heedlessness* that Lorelei has always lacked, with her sparrow brown hair tied up in a six-year-old's ribbon, her long, floral-patterned skirts hovering all the way down to a pair of diligently scrubbed white Keds. But why should her deficiencies only now be forgivable to someone too embarrassed to date her a semester ago?

If Wendy has considered these same questions, she seems to have arrived at a reasonable conclusion, for she leans cross-armed over the counter, replenished and crinkling the corners of her eyes. "She's so happy, David. She acts like it's nothing, but when she told me about this boy last night she kept sort of losing her train of thought. And you know how normally she's so right there *with* you in a conversation. But it seemed for once like there might be somewhere else she'd rather be."

"Who is this boy?"

"Peter something. Pete? He works at that coffee shop, Café Anton."

"I don't know where that is."

"Well, I run right by it on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

She plucks two meager grapes from the bowl beneath the cabinets, and they stand there for a moment, eating their respective breakfasts. The veins in Wendy's other arm pop out like thick cords as she grips the counter, flexing. Practicing what? Hand exercises? David is dismayed to observe what all of this effort is doing to her body, and he feels a brief flash of depletion for the second time today.

"Anyway!" she says, slapping the counter. "I have to get to work. And *you* have to get to work." She moves toward the staircase, kisses his cheek, pats his side. You can no longer see the cords in his own arms, but at least, he is reassured to think, when Wendy reaches out to touch him she finds a familiar shape there.

"Have a good day," he tells her. "And hey,"—before she is

gone—"if you're happy about this Peter kid, so am I."

He smiles and she nods, but he knows it's enough. "You have a good day, too," she says, and pumps her bony legs up the stairs to the bathroom, winding her headphone cord round and round her palm.

All day, David has been looking out of car and office windows at the bright, blistering effects the heat is having on the landscape. When he gets home, his plan is to head straight for the backyard, to roll up his pant legs and dip his feet in the pool for the first time this summer. Lifting the latch on the gate, however, he is surprised to glance up the gentle slope to the house and find Wendy, who usually doesn't get home until 7:20, already on the sandstone patio, nudging fleshy chicken limbs around in a pan full of golden marinade.

"Have a seat," she calls, squinting her eyes, and when he settles into one of the chaise lounges she offers him a beer from a sweaty bucket filled halfheartedly with glass bottles. Wendy doesn't drink beer at all anymore, and her lack of interest shows; she has handed him a Summer Shandy, which for David always lends a feeling of vacancy to the aftertaste. He trades it in for a pale ale, so smoothly that he is sure if she noticed she would have thought it was all part of the kinetics of his sitting down process.

They enjoyed their beer a great deal when they were first getting to know each other in the summer of '89. The two of them, lazing around Wendy's brown suburban apartment in Tinley Park with the window fans going. Like scattered playing cards, the refuse of her life as a high school guidance counselor seemed to spill over into her life as a newly independent woman, her papers and manila folders strewn across the desk, the dresser, the keyboard. While David—innocent young Hoosier flung down from the lofty heights of his new office building in Chicago—would stand in the doorway, grinning, admiring the way she could clack out a report on her computer while slugging back

a beer, the lithe softness of her arms pumping up and down beneath that black Nike tanktop she always changed into when she got home. They ate meals out of greasy white takeout boxes, developed an unexpected fondness for the hip-hop of N.W.A., and took off every weekend for the beach, packing nothing but two towels, a radio, and a blow-up ball that more often than not was used for propping up their feet while they baked in the sun.

And wasn't that representative of the way everything was in those days? Sticky and cramped, but wonderful, in a way. Both on the verge of starting their lives, or thinking they'd started, while remaining, for a little while longer, in a sort of dream state, a gleaming culmination of their teenage expectations before real adulthood. Oh, it existed once, that time, floating around somewhere in their history together, a period of life that he believes their daughter will bypass one way or another.

"Has she left yet?" he asks.

"She's brushing her teeth."

Standard Lorelei move, that is. Ever since she was about nine, she hasn't gone anywhere of note without brushing her teeth first; even when she cloisters herself off in her room with some art project while David and Wendy entertain company, she will brush, because *you never know*, she says. This preceded the business with the Keds-scrubbing, but just by a year, or possibly less. Sometimes it seems she was born pulling this stuff.

"She gets that from you," Faye told him several weeks ago, the two of them picking at a bran muffin as they walked back to her house from the Metra station in La Grange.

"*Me?*" he said. "I brush my teeth in the morning and before going to sleep."

"Yes, but notice how you never go barefoot unless you're in the shower or in bed. It could be you and me, reading on the patio on the hottest day of the year, and still you'll be in your socks."

"What does that have to do with anything? Wendy's the one who had her teeth whitened."

They were climbing the shallow steps to the doorway by this point, and Faye shrugged, her black hair glinting on and off in the sunlight which found its way through the geraniums she had hanging in baskets from the awning. "Stealthy obsessive behavior, David," she said. "It's the Felson strain."

Well. Faye doesn't know Wendy, has never met her apart from the times Wendy has passed through Faye's vegan deli with him to retrieve their takeout. She has no idea how fixated Wendy can be on her workout routine, the supreme itemization of her grocery lists by aisle number, how between the two of them David is the easygoing one. Still, he responded that day by pulling Faye to his side and kissing that spot on her neck near her earlobe, the action of which helped him to steady what he felt was coming apart.

"For god's sake," he says now, watching Wendy set her wine glass on the end table. "She'll just be leaving and her date'll already be over. What time is it?"

"Seven-thirty," Lorelei says, sliding the screen door open. "And I'm leaving now."

She's done something to her hair, chopped it up unevenly so that it swings lower on the left side. Not a style David would have chosen, but he supposes it looks, oh, artistic. Something she obviously put a lot of thought into. Like the pair of tan chinos she's wearing, spackled with white paint, and her Oxford shirt with the sleeves rolled up.

"You look good, Lor!" he says, baffled. "Where're you headed?"

"Applebee's," she replies under her breath, making an attempt for the back gate.

"Applebee's? You hate Applebee's." (He believes "I could just as easily heat this up in the microwave, and for a quarter of the price" were her exact words five years ago.)

But she grins at him and says, "Yes, but it's what Pete chose," and all at once she is someone he does not know.

"Beware when she starts making concessions for this boy,"

Faye told him this afternoon. "Then you've lost her."

"Have fun, sweetheart," Wendy tells her, also grinning. "You look *adorable*."

A brief flash of dismay crosses Lorelei's face, but she continues smiling. "Well, I'm off!" she says. "Shouldn't be too late."

David watches starchy white of her shirt cut through the green grass as she waltzes down the slope, past the pool, and she's gone, leaving him alone with Wendy on the patio. They sit looking at each other for a moment before Wendy lifts her wine glass and says, "The chicken should be done marinating, I think. Do you mind throwing it on the grill?"

"Very well." He heaves himself up from the comfort of his chaise and walks over, blinking away the blur of the white Christmas lights in the bushes.

He notices something then that he hadn't noticed before. "Wendy," he says, squinting in the direction of the pool, beneath the diving board. "Did you have the beach ball in the pool today?"

But they haven't owned a beach ball since before they moved here, back when they lived in the apartment. It must have blown over the fence, from the neighbor's yard.

And Wendy, intuiting this, or perhaps not hearing, leans back in her chair, tilts her head upward, and closes her eyes.

A month in, and David still has not met this Peter person, though he already has been won over by the boy's effects. He sees very little of Lorelei around the house anymore, which is progress enough. But aside from that, there is a newly acquired easiness to the way she conducts herself when he does catch her breezing in and out of doors. Last week, David observed her bounding down the stairs with Daphne, side-by-side, on her way out, and that familiar trace of dreariness around her eyes was absent, he noticed, when she actually knelt down to kiss Daphne goodbye on the bridge of her nose. She has begun throwing her hair back in ponytails, stopped remembering to roll up the

windows on the car after pulling into the driveway.

"She's also stopped keeping up with her artwork," Wendy tells him one morning. "I'm concerned."

He tells her she's being silly. "She's got her portfolio, doesn't she? Probably hundreds of more pieces, besides."

"Yes, but to be rushing off at every spare *moment* for this one person—"

"Look, it got her into where she wants to go, right? I mean, The University of the Arts, for crying out loud, and in a month and a half she's gonna be working her ass off in Philadelphia, with no time to enjoy herself like this. Anyhow, what's that old line, about the impossible balance between life and art? How one can't exist without the other? Henry James, wasn't it...?"

He has no idea what he's saying, mashing together snippets of academic speech he heard along the periphery at Northwestern years ago, none of it anything that was directed to him, but nevertheless things he thought he would put to use one day. *Why the switch?* he wonders now, when Wendy had been the enthusiastic one about all this Peter business initially. A pain develops behind his eye while watching Wendy adjust her jogging visor, the way she keeps pursing her lips and sending sidelong glances out the window when she talks.

"You're right," she says. "Lori's an adult, after all; this is good for her." She lifts her eyes to him then with a distressed furrow in her brow, inhaling a gasp of air, and he waits for something more. But a moment passes and she tells him, "Don't forget to make reservations for our dinner with the Applebaums tonight; I'm running into town."

Later that afternoon, David leans against the headboard of Faye's bed and massages his eyebrows. He is content to be here watching her step into a discarded pair of basketball shorts, the weekend once again stretching lazily before him. There are moments that are like breaths of fresh air to him, serving almost to bookend those other moments of depletion he's been experiencing at home. Even so, his breath is nearly cut short when

Faye tosses her voice over her shoulder and asks, “What kind of artwork does your daughter do, typically? I mean, does she have a preferred medium? You’ve never told me.”

How to explain this, he thinks. “No,” he says. “Or well, yes: but it’s a bunch of different mediums. Multimedia, I guess you’d call it? What she’ll do is she’ll take some pre-existing image—say, a perfume ad in a magazine, or a record album cover—and she’ll impose her own sense of, I don’t know, *order* on it. Painting purple shadows under the eyes, for instance, or framing it with those little strips of paper found in fortune cookies.” He shifts his weight on the pillows, leans back and stares up at the ceiling. “One time, she stole a campaign sign from somebody’s front yard—‘Vote for McHenry,’ or something like that—and cut up all these *happy* images of children and old folks from a park district catalog we had laying around somewhere from when she was a kid, arranged them along the bottom, swooped this monochromatic rainbow of blue and gray over the top... It was one of the most disturbing things I’ve ever seen, though I know it doesn’t sound that way.” There is a click in his throat. He frowns. “She defaces things, really. Somehow it works for her.”

Faye stares at him from across the room, her hair thrown over her shoulders with an odd trace of urgency. She is wearing a white t-shirt from an Aruba vacation she took almost twenty years before he met her, and he pauses to imagine her on a tropical island, diving into the waters of some grotto. He admires her for holding onto the shirt.

He laughs, something just now occurring to him. “Do you have any idea how much people are paying for Smiths albums nowadays? I must’ve had a fortune stashed away in my basement, but she’s gone and made a piece of art out of all of them.”

“Well, just give her a few years to become famous, and watch their value skyrocket.”

“Maybe...”

Suddenly she is crawling across the bed to him, peach-

colored freckles knocking against his face. “Skip dinner with the Applebaums tonight? We’ll find you some socks, mosey on down to deli, see what I can rustle up.”

All this folksy, cowgirl-kind-of talk—very put-on, but coming from Faye less-so, almost having him convinced enough to make believe along with her: “Sure, darlin’, why the hell not?”

But he’s been looking forward to this dinner with the Applebaums all week. When he lies down in bed beside Wendy several hours later, his thoughts seem to bubble upward in the dark, as if infused with the fine carbonation of the champagne Harry ordered for the table. They’ve known the Applebaums since a Lamaze class they took when Wendy was pregnant, though somehow along the way the friendship has been whittled down to a twice-a-year notation in her planner. David agreed to the dinner a month ago, but in the days leading up to it he was surprised to find himself almost *desperate* for the things he remembers about them—that snarky, nonplussed attitude Harry maintains about his work in the county offices, adorable Bonnie in her tight navy blouses, dribbling wine down the corners of her mouth because she can never keep from laughing.

“Hey,” he whispers now. “That was fun tonight, huh? The gang, back together?”

“It was. I always forget how loud Harry can be.”

He doesn’t know if Wendy means this as criticism or approval, although he recalls that she grew quite loud herself after a few glasses. The four of them, making a lively sort of ruckus in the middle of that restaurant like a group of high schoolers at a cafeteria table.

“I can’t believe how old their Adrian looked in that picture,” she says. “Bonnie told me he smokes now.”

What difference does that make? David wants to ask, but he becomes aware suddenly that Wendy is still sitting up. The way her voice bounces around the room, he can tell without opening his eyes that she isn’t looking at him, but rather across the room at their dresser, or at least staring in that direction. She is *thinking*

about their own child, how they ran into her and, for the first time, Peter, while unlocking the front door after dinner. Lorelei had a slightly smushed look around her face that David had never seen on her before, but he focused more on Peter—a tall, clean-cut kid with sun-bleached hair and boat shoes the size of small canoes, when David had been expecting someone paler, darker, more asymmetrical. “Hi, Mr. Felson!” he said, wide-eyed and grinning, like he’d just stumbled into some incredible fortune. “Nice to meet you!” Eleven p.m. and they were heading out to catch Peter’s drummer friend playing in some band. “Well, have fun!” David called as they clambered down the porch steps, while Wendy stared at her shoes and waited for him to wrench the door open.

Oh, there was a bit of danger radiating beneath all that; he can see it now. But still he wishes Wendy could forget it and go back to how he saw her not an hour ago, leaning confidently into his shoulder across from the Applebaums, cracking scathing jokes about things he didn’t even realize she found funny, like the time Lorelei enlisted her other dateless girlfriends to head-up an anti-homecoming party at the local Giordano’s pizzeria her freshman year.

It was the same look of combined amusement and dismay that she had twelve years ago, traveling back from their meeting with the school psychologist who had informed them that according to some tests he’d done (*what* tests? David remembers asking), Lorelei’s I.Q. placed her in the “gifted” range. Immediately he and Wendy had envisioned a little girl alienated early on, alone in her brilliance, which would peter out to something less spectacular, less notable by the time high school geometry rolled around. They were not pleased about it at all, in fact, but at a red light they craned their necks around to gaze at their daughter in the backseat, clicking her shoes together and counting the creases in her knuckles, and there was a warm feeling of admiration anyway—for Lorelei, yes, but also for each other.

Didn’t Wendy regain some of that tonight? Illogically, he

seems to think of her as having worn to the restaurant that black tank top of the early apartment days, her knee—warm and full—curled up to her chest as she picked apart her lobster.

But that must be Faye he’s thinking of: how she had driven him to his train this afternoon, barefoot, and how he had not breathed so much as sighed, deeper than he had in a long time, as if coming home to a place he thought he hadn’t missed.

And suddenly his eyes snap open. For he realizes, all at once, that Lorelei’s losing sight of her artwork accounts for very little of what Wendy is worried about.

That she is mourning, after all, something else that Lorelei stands to lose one day.

He almost says something—almost allows a heavyhearted amend to spill over into the dark, but then he hears Wendy breathing deeply behind him, in such a distant way that he figures she must have drifted off long ago without his realizing it.

“The Smiths,” he says. “Weren’t we just talking about The Smiths last week?”

Another Friday where David feels as though he has spent the last several hours floating outside of himself—up and down elevators and staircases, in and out of train stations—and here he is, awake, dogged, pacing the carpet in front of Faye’s kitchen and trailing bits of dirt in his path. “Explain to me the resurgence of The Smiths with kids today. Or not just the kids, but people my age as well, attempting to rediscover something they left behind. ‘Morrissey,’ they think, I’m sure of it; ‘I identified with Morrissey back in those days because he was so *melancholy*, and I was melancholy.’ Same with the kids now, I bet. Everyone wants to be melancholy, to get back to a period in their life when it was acceptable to be wistful and pining all the time for something more satisfying. Well, no one’s rediscovering anything, because it’s new *now*, is the thing. But I’ll tell you what you don’t hear anymore: Christopher Cross. That song ‘Sailing’? Talk about wistful. Well, maybe he was before your time.”

“I know who Christopher Cross is,” Faye replies, eyelids lowered. “He was my time, too, more or less.”

“Yes, well...”

“How much younger than you do you think I am?”

Eight years. Eight years is all. He knows that, has to remind himself sometimes.

“That’s not the point!” he cries. “The point is I was stopped at the light today, when this song comes drifting through my window from the car next to me, and it was like a long-dormant part of myself woke up and started laughing. ‘Here you forgot all about this, didn’t you?’ it seemed to say. ‘Bet you didn’t know you had it locked away all these years for safe-keeping.’ An image of myself came with it, and I was very young, driving my parents’ car down the highway for some reason, the summer after I got my license.”

He pauses a moment, leaning against the doorjamb. “So 1980, I guess that’d be, when I was sixteen...”

Faye blinks from her perch on the kitchen counter, taking in every word, and he begins pacing again.

“There was no air-conditioning in that car,” he says. “And *vinyl*. My god, it must have been awful. That wasn’t the feeling I remember, though. The feeling was one of—I don’t know—lightness. Like a piece of debris left on the highway, broken off from its original source, but propelled along by the wind just the same. I only wish I could remember the purpose of my journey.”

There is a pause during which Faye cranes her neck out, waiting for more. “Well, wow,” she says finally. “Christopher Cross, of all people: Ambassador to Forgotten Youth. He had a round face, didn’t he? Kinda pudgy?”

David drops his head, laughs at his feet. “Right.” Then, “*Right*. So I look over to see who’s listening to him, and it’s some fifty-year-old man in a VW convertible. All soft and white, with this sort of half-bald hairstyle. Looked like a geriatric *version* of Christopher Cross, as a matter of fact, with his music tuned to damn XM satellite radio: Slow Jams of the 80s or some shit.

‘Just who are *you*, exactly?’ I thought out loud. Near about ruined the memory for me.”

Faye laughs, saunters over to his side, very close. “So what’s your point?”

“All I’m saying is it’s interesting—isn’t it?—how you never know what’s going to resurface later on while you’re in the middle of living it the first time. Who would’ve guessed that The Smiths would still be appreciated by these moody, artist-types. Like record albums in general, really, and other things—*Frasier* reruns or the scent of your wife’s coconut tanning oil, say. But that song ‘Sailing.’ That never really came back, even though it seemed so standard at the time. And even today—it wasn’t the same song, was it? Not the one I left behind, at any rate.”

He stops breathing. It’s been a whole week since he last spoke with Faye; never have they gone so long. Her brother and his family were visiting—the first, concrete glimpse David had of Faye’s life apart from him—and from last Saturday to this morning she was M.I.A., or, rather, David was, as she’d given him explicit directions not to contact her in any way until they’d gone back to Detroit. David should be asking her all about this, should quit talking, but he has been noticing lately that these breathless, intolerable moments he gets are not always due to circumstances beyond his control, that sometimes he plows straight through in spite of them.

He goes on. “It seems I’m living a sort of middle life, one that leaves me neither here nor there. I come home and it’s like pacing around the set of one of those television sitcoms—not *bad*, but still very plastic, everything turned to face a certain way, Lorelei and Wendy and I, shifting around each other... I wonder if I even love my wife. I wonder what being here with you means for me, my life.”

His voice gives out awkwardly, but at an opportune time: Faye looks him straight in the eye, crooks up the corners of her mouth, tiny pickaxes embedded in each cheek. She is wise, perceptive, and knows this. “That’s called mid-life crisis, David. You

don’t love me. You love Wendy, but at the age you’re at you’ve been required to do some assessing to figure out what your next step is going to be. Only you haven’t exactly done that yet, have you? *That’s* why you’re here with me, and I’m okay with it. That’s maybe even why I’m here with you.”

Almost, almost.

But still, he says, “No.” He says, “I don’t love Wendy, but you’re right when you say I don’t love you either. I’ve decided that there really is no one. Nobody that I love.”

Having articulated this, David feels as if he has been very melodramatic, gunning for some kind of pity, when really this is not—he thinks—what he meant to express at all. He sees the widening of Faye’s eyes and winces at the display of sympathy that is bound to come next. He stated a fact, an item proven to himself over many cool, unrattled days thinking about it. *Please*, he thinks, willing Faye simply to legitimize that fact. *Please turn it into nothing more.*

And she speaks, her voice low and tired: “Oh... Go to hell, why don’t you?”

“What?” he says. Faye, so understanding, so open, drifting away from him now, towards the couch. Faye!

“I think you should go,” she tells him, and a moment later he grabs his briefcase and makes his way to the door, obediently, like a little boy desperate to keep in step.

“I don’t understand,” he says. “Look, I’m sorry if—”

But she shakes her head, which somehow is enough to shut him up. He opens the door, steps outside, and looks back at her, feeling suddenly in a position to extend the sympathy he’d hoped to resist.

“So this is what I’m involved with, huh?” Faye wonders. He follows her eyes and finds that she is gazing not at him, but straight through the coffee table in front of her. “A grown man who doesn’t really love anyone.”

She looks pale, sick to her stomach, and it is all he can do to close the door.

The picture frames on the living room bookshelves have a look of being stuck in place when he returns home that evening. As he pads down the hallway, the carpet crunches beneath his feet. He removes his shoes and drops them on the floor outside the closet. He can tell nobody is home by the contradictory way every sound he makes seems quieter, muffled almost, as if trapped beneath the sofa cushions, the extra slack of the Venetian blinds stacked three inches thick on the window sills.

They never had window blinds when David moved into the Tinley Park apartment with Wendy. Four years after they got married, even, they always got by with colored pieces of translucent gauze, makeshift curtains, or nothing at all. Then Wendy became pregnant with Lorelei, and three weeks before she was due they caved and picked out some white plastic blinds with fake wood grain etched in.

“You mean to say you’ve gone all this time without proper window covering?” Harry asked David when he heard. “What—so you’ve just been living like a couple of college kids?”

“I guess we just never saw the necessity up till now,” David answered. This all taking place, of course, in a Lamaze class, the two husbands yammering on and on while between their knees their rosy, bloated wives wheezed lonesomely through their breathing exercises.

“Well, that’s good. Smart; smart for the baby. Good to keep it safe.”

But hadn’t David forgotten to hang the blinds until after Lorelei came home? After all that talk, he’d gotten sidetracked in the bustle and didn’t get around to it for another two weeks.

Funny, his memory in relation to Wendy’s. Here, even now, she remembers to leave him a note: *Took Daph to groomer’s. Will get carry-out on way back— Chinese? Call w/ yr preference.* Pinned to the refrigerator with that Goose Island magnet they’d acquired two decades ago, scrawled out in that right-leaning way she has.

He takes the note from the fridge and holds it in his hands.

There's a breeze outside, sending its ripples over the pool and through the twinkle lights in the arborvitae. But silent still, like an oversized diorama, set into motion by an invisible hand turning the lever.

The suction of the front door cuts through the quiet and David turns, slapping the note down on the counter behind him.

"Lorelei," he says, adjusting to this revitalized image in the doorway. Hair tied up in a silk ribbon, skirt weighing her down, and the Keds, white as ever.

"Hi, Dad," she says, shifting a wide bag from the art supply store to her other hand as she removes her shoes. "Is mom home yet?"

"Why, she— No, she's not. But she should be soon. With Chinese for dinner. You want her to pick up those spring rolls you like?"

"No," Lorelei laughs. "I don't need anything."

"So you've already eaten?"

"Well, no, I was out getting supplies."

"You have plans later, then? With Pete? You have to eat something."

"I'm not hungry! I had some granola in the car. And Pete, well, he—" She snaps her eyes to the kitchen counter, flicks them back again. "We broke up, is the thing."

"When was this?"

"Today. Well, yesterday, really. That's when he brought it up. Said that if I was going to leave him behind for Philadelphia he didn't see the point in waiting around for me to come home on breaks and what-not when there's other girls around town he could be going out with." She stops, reading the look on David's face, or perhaps allowing him to read the look on her own.

"Which sounds... *harsh* at first, but I agree. I do."

Standing there clicking her thumbnails together, Lorelei has a muted sheen of that child she'd been for so long; but now there is also something very old about her, a rim of deep pink throbbing around the eyes. She is someone (he recognizes the kind of

person) who has passed through an episode, a period of time, and come out the other side.

"I'm gonna get to work, Dad," she says. "Maybe start packing for next week." A moment, then, "Goodnight."

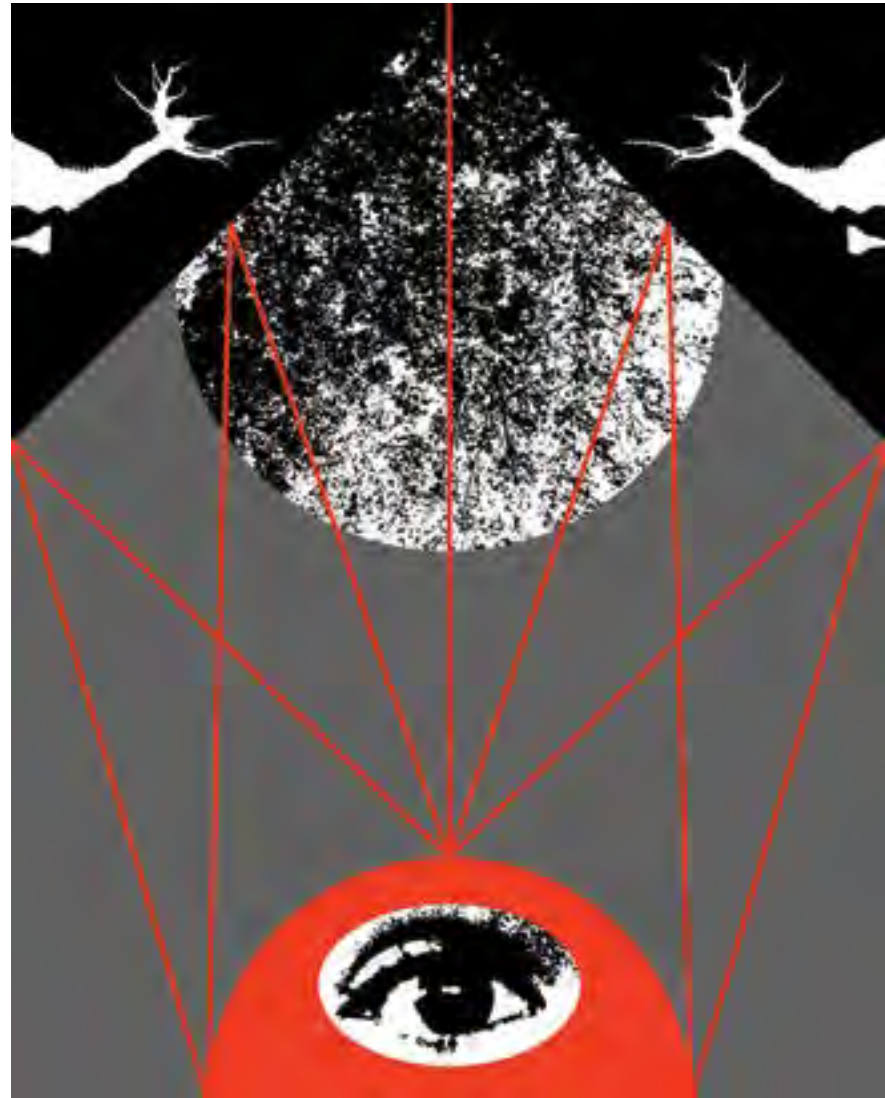
And before he has a chance to respond, she has ducked away, fled upstairs. There is a hollow vibration in the space she left behind, and David takes a step backwards, setting his hand on Wendy's note, noticing how wrinkled, how disposable it is with use. Wondering what the chances are that his teenage destination has been someplace resembling here, all along.

* * * * *

Nothing to worry about. In five, ten years or so, Lorelei will have met somebody she loves again, somebody who can make her happy for a long time, while David will have married Faye, finding himself able to love her, as he knew he could love anyone, until their time is up. David frequently marvels—or he will—at how confidently Lorelei navigates her life, making as much her own sense of it as she does with her art pieces. Yet he still seems to think of her time with this first boy, Peter, as a sort of golden period. It is the image of her along the side of the highway that he keeps returning to: she beams at him through that silly haircut, eyes crinkling the way her mother's did, and her white Oxford shirt flickers in the wind as she waves, striding forward like a solitary pilgrim. *But why should she be on the highway?* he wonders. *When did that occur?* Time and again he calls out as he speeds past her— *Hurry! Come catch up!* And he continues to call, wishing there might be a familiar passenger to call with him, until she is so small a figure that she appears to be standing still.



Abstract | Corwin Leverich



Abstract One | Marcus Mues



Untitled | Andrea Zuniga

Grace

AUBREE ZDANOVEC

Eighty percent oxygen provokes
the brain to brew tremors
and black outs in the dimly lit hall.
The head aches less than the sharp
stabbing pain produced in her side,
forcing a fetal position
as she cries like a child.

Her heart beats over one hundred, resting.
Dizzy and dazed, her lungs are damaged
by blood building walls within the veins
that venture to the main muscle,
now struggling to survive.

Fear of death dangles before our eyes
beneath the fluorescent glow
falling from the ceiling.
The baby blue gown cradles
her gaunt body—eyes grim,
hair glistening grease due to days
of bed rest. Remedies remained
in needles nestled in her hand,
arm and wrist; flesh punctured
by pricks now numb to pain.

Trying to trap the tears in my eyes,
I walked there and back,
wondering when her blood
would wear like my patience.
Two weeks I talked to God,
begging for grace.



Take Care of Your Soul | Stefan Roseen



1600 | Angelica Jackson



Vatican | Hannah Bauer

Lucy

MADELINE BARTSCH

When I think of Mano’s house, I always think of the glass cabinet.

As a child, I was mystified by it, probably because Mano’s house was so devoid of objects a child would actually enjoy. Her hornet-infested backyard was no place for young girls and her ancient television seemed to only receive static-filled cable, leaving me with few options besides the case. It was located in her living room in Oklahoma City and every morning when I woke up, I would sit in front of it, digging my toes into the plush white carpet. The case was nothing special, made of a warm, nondescript wood and latched with corroded brass hinges. What always impressed my younger self were the colors reflected inside the glass panels.

My grandmother collected Swarovski crystal figurines for longer than I’ve been alive, and dozens of them resided there. To this day, I can remember the glistening, goofy beaver, the statuesque dancer and her partner, the two penguins settled on their icy mirror base. When I’d pad my way over to where the case proudly stretched, rainbows leapt out of the crystal facets. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

Once, when I was seven, Mano joined me at my favorite perch where I sat, enchanted, in front of the case. She gave me one of her infectious, winning smiles.

“Which is your favorite, Maddie-girl?” she asked me, her soft, wrinkled hand on my shoulder. I always loved listening to Mano

talk. Her southern twang was so soothing.

I pointed to the mother hen and rooster, surrounded by ten crystal chicks no bigger than my thumbnail.

Mano squeezed my shoulder for a minute and settled into a nearby armchair.

“That is a love-el-y piece, darlin’,” she drawled. “I like that one, too. When I’ve passed away, I do believe I’ll give one of these to each of my grandchildren. Would you like that?”

At first, I nodded happily at the thought of the sparkling crystal. Then, the meaning of her words sunk in.

I was a child. Death was a subject that I had recently learned (and panicked) about, but I had never considered the fact that Mano would leave while I was still alive. The enormity of the concept left me feeling so small, so cold, sitting cross-legged on the floor with Mano smiling at me from above.

I think she realized the implication of her words, then. Her face softened for a second, and she stood as quickly as she could (which wasn’t very quickly). I scrambled to mine and she enveloped me in a hug. Her soft lavender perfume lingered as she pulled away.

“How about some breakfast, baby-girl? I bought waffles for y’all.”

The moment forgotten, I happily followed her to the kitchen.

* * *

Lucy Frank Sharbrough Downing Thomas was not remembered for her splendid cooking (my mom still rolls her eyes at the memory of Monday Night Casserole and salmon patties). She was never a stereotypical housewife—she was a former U.S. Marshall who once brandished a 45 on her son, mistaking him for a burglar when he snuck in after curfew—and as a single mother of three, she never had the time. What made Lucy so special was that she *remembered*. It didn’t matter what the details were or who you were in relation to her; she remembered.

“How’s your cousin’s sister-in-law?” she would ask a fellow churchgoer. “Is her cold better yet?”

She remembered everything and cared for everyone. Lucy had ten grandchildren between her three kids. She never missed a birthday, a Christmas, or a concert, and treated each as if it were a precious gift. If she couldn’t be there, which was often the case, given her distance between Oklahoma and Illinois, she would always call. She had infinite levels of both patience and enthusiasm, which, when combined, made her the perfect grandmother. She had a magical ability to maintain the passion in her exclamations of “that’s just wuh-der-ful, baby-girl!” whether she was discussing my cousin’s high school graduation or my fourth-grade band concert. I’ll never forget how she would stay on the phone for almost an hour listening to the small handful of notes I knew on the clarinet in a sea of repeating lines. She always had something new to say.

“Baby-girl, I am so proud of you!”

“Oh, darlin’, I really *loved* that one!”

“I love you so much, I could just *squeeeeeeeze* you till your eyeballs popped out!”

* * *

“Now, Rebecca, please explain to me where you’re going off to?” Mano asked my Mom.

I sighed, chewing on my pinky nail, trying to focus on the TV. The ancient set had gotten an upgrade; Mano received more channels here at the Assisted Living Center. It would have made up for us forcing her to downsize to a three-room, two bathroom apartment in a nursing home, if she understood how to use the remote, which she didn’t most of the time.

“Mommy, we’re going to go to Christina’s baby shower,” my mom explained. I hated the false cheer in her voice, always in ample supply when we flew out to visit. “We’re going to have brunch there, and then Maddie and Collin and I will come back to pack up our things, ok?”

“Well, that’s fine, then. But who is Christina, again?”

“Christina’s your granddaughter, Mommy, Barbie’s oldest daughter?”

“Oh. All right then.”

My mother using “Mommy” when she addressed Mano was a new change. So was the tiredness in her eyes.

“Ok, Mom, I’m going to pull the car around,” she said. She grabbed her keys and headed towards the door.

“All right, that’s fine, but Rebecca, could you *please* tell me where you’re going?”

I bit my lip and turned back to the television.

When my mother left to go start the car, Mano shuffled unsteadily into the room and stood there, staring at me. Our eyes locked, and before she could mask her uncertainty with her polite façade, I saw it all.

I was instantly struck by how *small* she looked. She had always been a tiny woman, but since she had entered University Village, it seemed as if she had shriveled. She would have died on the spot if she could have seen the way her hair looked. Even in her later years, she was a proper Southern Belle, and she insisted on getting her hair manicured and maintained once a month. Now it grew wildly almost to her shoulders. The worst part for me, however, was that look of soft, childlike confusion on her face, her vacuous eyes. *Who is she? How do I know her?*

I bit my lip and quickly searched for somewhere else to place my eyes. They fell on the figurines entombed within the glass cabinet. Even the figurines appeared to have lost their sharp edges. Mano had always kept them in pristine condition, polished until they shone every morning. There was too much dust on them to reflect anything now. My eyes settled on a particularly lackluster fairy who reached out towards the door of the case in agony, begging for me to let her out.

* * *

The worst part of Lucy's illness was her awareness of it. She knew she was slipping further and further away from cognition and steadfastly tried to avoid it. The last time we visited her Oklahoma City house, we were struck, first, by the stacks upon stacks of bills, solicitation letters, and loose-leaf paper scattered throughout every available surface. Secondly, I was struck by what she wrote on them. Lucy had always been a great secretary and note-taking was always her primary offensive against absentmindedness. When she felt her memory slip, she started dictating important names and dates. Each stack of paper was filled with her microscopic notes in both shorthand and teeny cursive letters. She made lists of her children's names, her grandchildren's names, all their birthdays, important holidays... it was endless.

Whenever we visited her at the Assisted Living Center, she came wielding a Steno Notebook and a Bic pen. She would frantically jot down any note that she felt needed recording, desperate to jog her memory or retain *any* portion of the conversation, but her sword and shield had failed her. She fought tenaciously and ferociously against it, but Alzheimer's always wins.

Each time Mom got off the phone with Mano on a "good day," she would insist that Mano knew who my brother, Collin, and I were. In my heart, I knew she didn't. I saw it in the vacancy in her eyes when she looked at me or at my brother,

desperately searching for something, *anything* in my face she could recognize without my mom, her anchor, by her side.

The last time Mano ever *really* remembered me was over a year ago. It was one of her last "good days" where she could place me. She was alert and eager to hear about my brother and I. My mother, eyeing our clarinets on the other end of the room, asked if I would play for Mano.

Since Mano's illness began to progress, I selfishly began to draw away from her. I knew that in a way she needed to hear my voice, but I couldn't stand to hear her talk circles around herself in the voice of a lost little girl. The heartless disease had consumed all memories of me, and I knew that most of the time, *my* Mano wasn't there. I will always be grateful for my final decision to play, because it was my last time.

I closed my eyes and played the piece that I would be performing at a competition the next week and thought only of her and of how I played for her as a child. I opened my eyes. It took me a good thirty seconds to realize that Mano was weeping.

We both knew that she wasn't crying because of the music. She was mourning all that she was losing, because she knew that before she passed, she would lose all of us. Slowly but surely, each of her grandchildren were slipping through the cracks. So much would happen that she would never live to see: my graduation, my wedding, *my* kids...it crushed us both.

Mano was weeping, and I wept with her.

"Baby-girl," she sobbed. "I am just...so proud of you..."

* * *

Lucy Thomas died on October 30, 2011 from complications related to a bout of pneumonia. The woman I always knew as "Mano" probably passed the year before, because after that time where I played the clarinet for her, I didn't hear Mano when I spoke on the phone with her.

She passed away two days before my first band concert of

the year. I had worked for four grueling years to be the first chair player of the school Wind Ensemble, and my reward was a lengthy solo during one of the pieces. Thankfully, I was able to perform before we left for the funeral the next morning. I was terrified. I felt like I wasn't ready.

What if I screw up? What if I squeak, if I miss my entrance, if I mess up the notes? What if...

Suddenly, I remembered the lavender perfume; I saw the rainbows glistening in the morning sun. And I knew that even though she wasn't here to call me, she wasn't here to see me play, for the first time in three years, I knew Mano was watching me. Just like that, I was ready.

I took a breath and began to play.

Baby-girl, I am so proud of you...

In loving memory of my grandmother, Lucy Thomas. She lives and loves through us.



A Walk in Solitude | Angelica Jackson

a poem a day

LYSA FISK



a poem is no apple
though its speckled flesh speaks
of the sun's handiwork
in its bold surface hues,

and when sliced clean
through, its blossom-scented
seeds orbit the sinewy core
in the image of a star.

and a bruised poet is no healer
—while she rots
in the barrel and goes to seed
in lost souls— though

her verse makes good
medicine long after
her vital juices have dried
and her words have been daily
digested

in a poem a day
such as she ate one each day:
bite by bite or baked
in a pi.

Ham & Cheese

GREGORY MAHER

I might have called my grandma
for the last time today
she sounded weak, as expected
a tense whisper broken, croaked
orders from a long-buried walkie-talkie

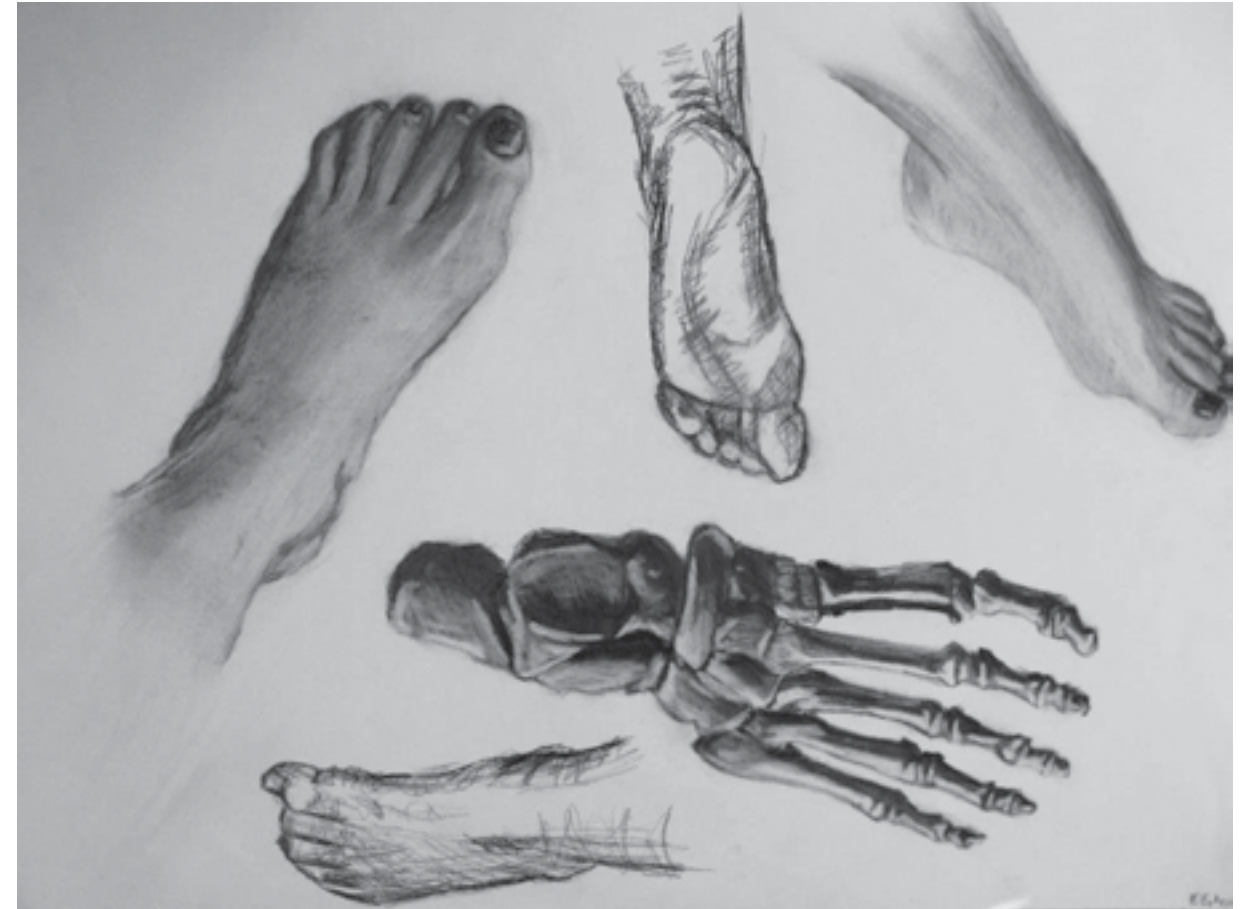
Do you remember, Dad, those
summer days in her house,
your house, the house where
we climbed old evergreens
got sap and needles stuck into
the grooves of our palms
leaned down close, so close
to the rich soil, smelling
the green, tomato green
and creeping squash vines . . .

I remember we always asked
for ham & cheese sandwiches
just plain store ham
american cheese
and buttered white bread
but somehow the memory is so good
so full and enticing
that I imagine her life like that, like
a grilled ham & cheese sandwich

-grandma, there were parts that were
so good, parts
that melted in our mouth
like butter and toast
the apple and pear trees, I remember
rich cheese, and the old clothes-line
those strings that stretch from mouth
to budding sandwich

but now . . . now
you're down to the crust-
and as my father and I
pack away your stained
books, your portraits,
and virgin Mary,
I can't help but think-

all you have
is a little burnt crust
and crumbs - - these
but fading morsels
of memories, long past,
long buried and grown
tall with the shoots
of those vivid green
tomato plants



Foot Study | Elyse Estes



Athens | Hannah Bauer



Cityscape | Corwin Leverich




Cliché Vert | Anna Hayden-Roy



la razón de mi canto

STEPHANIE SEPIOL



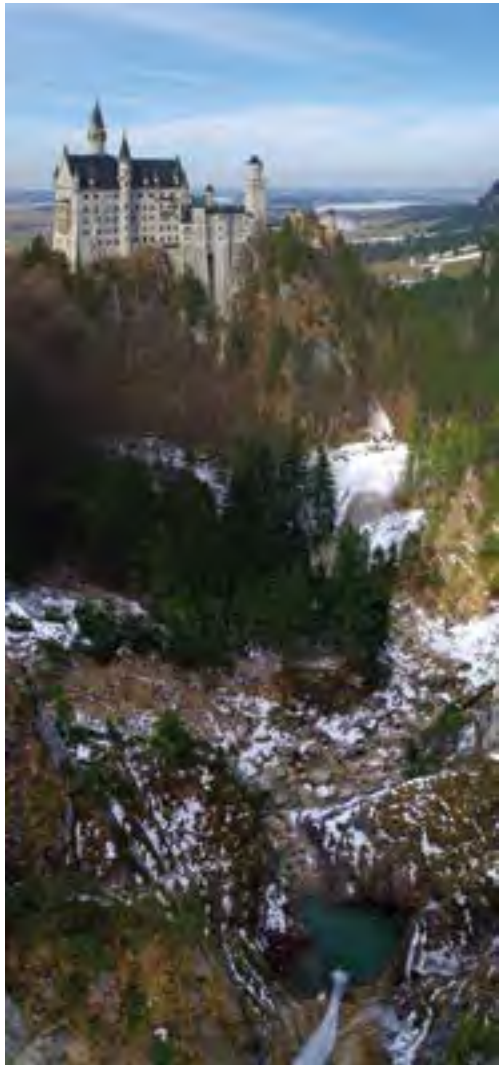
Someday I will be old,
and maybe it will be you
that grows there with me,
patting my arm for balance

as my wicker basket bones
creak and crackle
like the stairs beneath my feet,

and you will place your veined
hands over mine on the piano
as we play a familiar hymn
in E flat major,

three black keys, the rest
white, spackled, pale
like my skin,

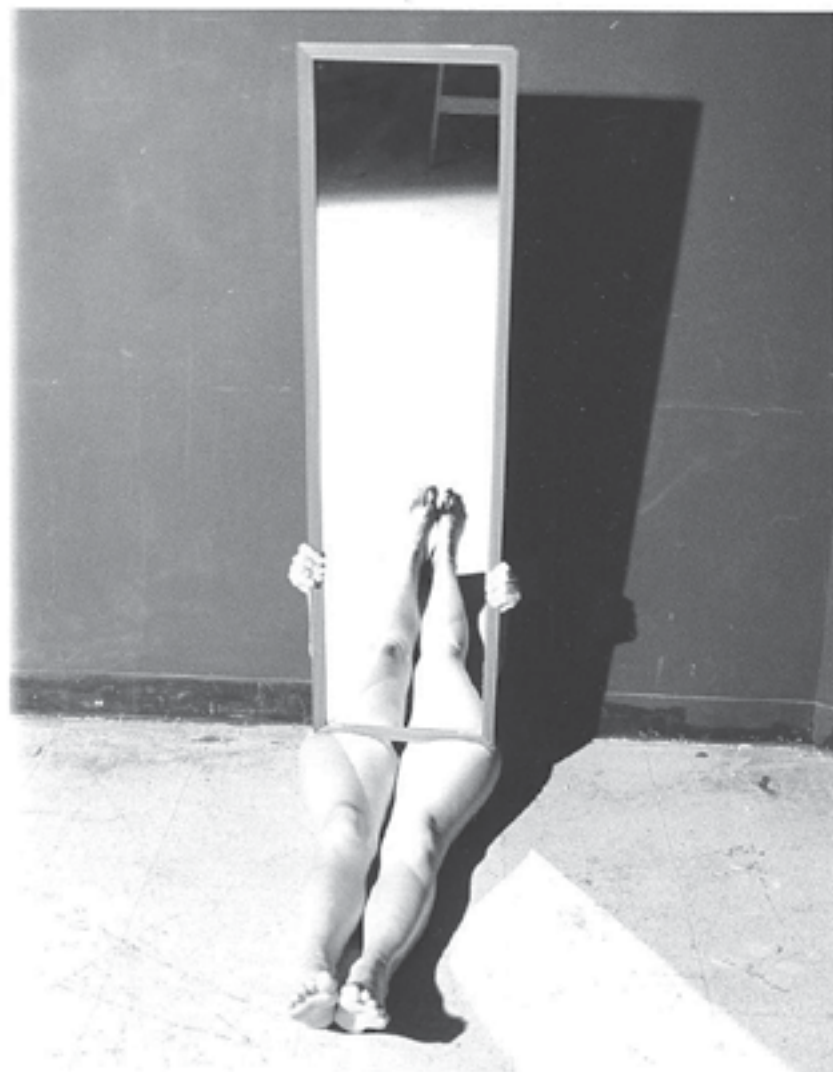
and the vines on our fingers
will intertwine, ridged nails
clack and push against each other,
thin skin splayed, bare, open.



Neuschwanstein | Hannah Bauer



The Spine | Angelica Jackson



Legs | Natalie Zuber

An Interview with Marci Rae Johnson and Tania Runyan

JULIANA KAPETANOV AND IAN ROSEEN

The authors that kicked off the Wordfest series this semester were poets (and friends) Marci Rae Johnson and Tania Runyan. Since 2010, Marci Rae Johnson has taught in the English Department at Valparaiso University. She also edits poetry for WordFarm Press and The Cresset. Her poems have appeared in *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *The Louisville Review*, and *32 Poems*, among others. Her first collection of poetry won the Powder Horn Prize and will be published by Sage Hill Press. Tania Runyan is the author of *A Thousand Vessels*, *Simple Weight*, and *Delicious Air*, which was awarded Book of the Year by the Conference on Christianity and Literature in 2007. Her poems have appeared in numerous publications such as *Poetry*, *Image*, and *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, as well as the anthology *In a Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare*. Tania was awarded an NEA Literature Fellowship in 2011. She tutors high school students and edits for *Every Day Poems* and *Relief*. Two students, Juliana Kapetanov and Ian Roseen, interviewed the authors before their reading in the Brauer Museum of Art.

Juliana Kapetanov: I'm currently taking a creative writing seminar, and we were asked to write a short piece on why we write. What inspired you to start writing?

Marci Rae Johnson: I think what inspired me to first start writing was that I wasn't very good at communicating any other way [laughs]. I was a very quiet, shy kid, and I had trouble talking to people. I think it was really a way for me to get out what I wanted to say in a way that I could. But I feel like I kept writing because every time I tried to stop, I couldn't stop, and I kept coming back to it. I actually have tried to stop before, for various reasons, but I can't. How about you [Tania]?

Tania Runyan: I started writing when a babysitter was just trying to think of something for me to do, and she had two animal posters on her bedroom wall—one was a koala and one was a raccoon or something—and she just said "Let's each write a story about one of these animals," and so, I wrote a story about the koala and some other animals, and I was instantly hooked. That exhilaration of creating something, I had never experienced before, and I kept on writing since then. I spent a lot of time alone as a kid, so it was a way to kind of keep myself company...creating characters. I would write stories and read them into a tape recorder and play them back to myself—which actually sounds kind of pathetic [laughs], but it was entertainment for myself in many ways, and continues to be.

Ian Roseen: I was wondering if you could elaborate a little bit

on the history of your friendship, but also how your friendship, as writers, affects your writing individually. If it does, does it have a strong effect on your writing that it might not otherwise have (if you didn't have such a close friend who is involved in the same thing)?

TR: Aw, that's sweet.

MJ: Can I tell the story of how we met?

TR: Yes, yeah. It's legendary. It's become legendary.

MJ: We met because I'm also an editor, a poetry editor, of a small press called WordFarm, and I was at a conference—The Festival of Faith and Writing—up in Grand Rapids. And, so, I was sitting at the booth selling WordFarm books, talking to people, and she comes up to the booth with her manuscript and hands it to me [*laughs*]. Okay and this is one of my biggest pet peeves. I hate it when people give me a manuscript at a conference. I just hate it because, honestly, usually what you get is not something very good.

TR: It's kind of presumptuous, too. I'd never met you...

MJ: [*Laughs*]. It is, yeah...

TR: ...or spoken with you and I just kind of walked up... [*laughs*].

MJ: Apparently, I rolled my eyes at her [*laughs*]. So, she walks off and, at some point, I open it up and look at it, and I'm like, "Oh my gosh. These are really good." So, I think we had a meeting, and we just ended up talking about all kinds of things...our kids, and our lives, and we became friends immediately. What was the other part of the question?

TR: How our friendship affects our writing.

MJ: I think it does help me to help other writers who are an audience for my work. So, Tania, along with some other poet friends, we have a private Facebook group where we will periodically post poems that we're writing. The thought that I know that there are these people out there who are going to read what I'm writing inspires me to write more sometimes.

TR: Like Marci says, it helps to know that there is someone there who understands me because you know we both come from this place of writing from our faith backgrounds, but in ways that are maybe...I don't know, that not everyone understands. We kind of get each other—along with these other friends that we have—and what it is that we're trying to do, where we're coming from, and just knowing that there's people like that *there*. Whether Marci and I read each other's work actively or not, just knowing that she's there as a supportive presence is huge...probably in the long run more important than even getting specific feedback on poems, but just having a friend and the support, someone who understands what it's like.

IR: You mentioned that you both write a lot from your faith backgrounds, and I was wondering if you could elaborate more on that because I know you [Marci] have a master's degree in theological studies, and one of your [Tania's] volumes of poetry won the Book of the Year from the Conference on Christianity and Literature.

TR: Well, I don't have a master's in theological studies, that's for sure [*laughs*]. I enjoy writing about my faith because it keeps both my writing and my faith real. When I do them at the same time, I feel like I'm writing about what's most important to me, and in doing so, I'm examining myself and my faith, and how I write about God because I want the poems I write to be

authentic, I want my faith to be authentic. I feel like the relationship between the two has strengthened both my faith and my writing. I do write about the Bible almost exclusively now—it's an obsession. I have a book that's based on the women in the Bible, I have a book that's based on the Beatitudes, I have a book based on Paul and his writings, and now I'm writing a book on Revelation. So, it's a constant source of inspiration—I just want to write about the gritty reality of my life, and faith is my life and everything kind of falls under that. And I learn a lot in the process, like when I say I'm going to write a book of poetry based on Revelation, I am studying and learning the Book of Revelation, and I probably wouldn't otherwise, if I didn't make that writing goal.

MJ: A lot of my poems deal with faith, too. Almost when I don't necessarily want them to, it seems to crop up. I think a big reason for that is that I've always felt like I've had this vexed sort of faith that's full of a lot of doubt and questioning, and so, writing is a way of trying to understand how I'm interacting with my faith and trying to explore my doubts and my questions. I think this kind of vexed faith that I have informs every aspect of my life, so it comes out a lot in my poetry, whether I want it to or not.

IR: I noticed on the advertisements for tonight's reading, there's a quote from one of your poems "William Blake Contemplates Enlightenment." Is Blake an influence on your work?

MJ: I'm very influenced by other texts and other writers so almost everything I'm writing (not quite as much in my first book, but especially in my newer poems) is in some way a response to another text. There are a lot of things on the internet that I'm going to read tonight that have inspired poems, but yeah, William Blake. When I wrote that poem, I had just finished my MFA, and I had spent quite a bit of time studying Blake, so I

think it came just out of being immersed in another writer's work. I feel like whenever I'm immersed in another author, it's going to come out in my work somehow.

IR: So Tania, you've published two volumes of poetry and a chapbook now? I was wondering if you sense distinct phases or themes from volume to volume, and if so, which one do you feel that you identify most with right now?

TR: Well, the book *A Thousand Vessels*, which is based on women in the Bible—when I wrote most of those poems I was a new mom or pregnant, and I connected with the women in a lot of ways through those experiences and through a lot of the themes that come with that. With the book that I recently completed based on Paul and his writings, I feel like those poems grapple a lot more seriously or strongly with faith and doubt because I feel like Paul has very challenging words for how seriously you take your faith. And I feel like maybe it's something about my age. It's like, okay, I'm forty now. I'm kind of at this phase—Am I going to believe this stuff or not? How serious am I going to be? Let's grapple with some of these issues like how we're called to believe. So, I feel like those themes are coming through in my work a little bit more, along with my daily life experiences. I feel like I'm dealing more directly with some of my faith and doubt.

JK: You mentioned your book *A Thousand Vessels*. You have poems about the women in the Bible, but there are also poems about your personal experiences. What prompted you to place these more intimate poems alongside the poems about biblical figures?

TR: Well, one practical reason was that they fit. I think that because my writing about faith is so strongly connected to who I am as a person, I didn't see a big distinction between Mary and Eve talking about motherhood experiences or Sarah talking

about sacrifice and my thinking about these same things. To me it was a very natural connection to have those poems together. Someone asked me the other day, “The poems that you write about the women in the Bible, from their point of view—is it really their point of view, or is it from yours?” That was a question that I had a hard time answering. I realized, gosh, maybe those poems are also from my point of view, and I’m just thinking through the experiences of these women as a way to reimagine or figure out my own faith, my own doubt.

MJ: Well, that’s one the reasons why I liked—that was the book she handed to me at the conference.

TR: The eye-rolling book. We should have just called it *The Eye Roller* [laughs].

MJ: [Laughs]. We did spend like four years coming up with the title.

TR: *A Thousand Eye Rolls*.

MJ: One of the reasons why I loved that book was because it was from a particular point of view; it wasn’t an objective voice trying to come through these biblical women. You were bringing in all these other things from life, from your personal experience, and that’s what makes the poem interesting. A poem about Esther exactly like she is in the Bible is not interesting because you can just go read the Bible if you want that. A poem about you and how you’re interacting and other things from the world coming in—now that’s interesting to readers, I think.

IR: Marci, you mentioned that you’re Poetry Editor for Word-Farm Press, but you’re also the Poetry Editor for *The Cresset* here at Valparaiso University, and you’re a professor of Creative Writing here, too. I was just wondering if you could speak on

that, and talk about which, if any, is more conducive to your life as an author and how these different positions that you hold enhance your writing experience or take away from it.

MJ: I feel like they all enhance it. I can’t think that any of them are more important than the others. I feel like they all enhance my writing because they’re giving me things to do that still have to do with writing. I’m reading other people’s poems and editing them and getting a feel for what other people are doing, or I’m teaching. Whenever I teach something, I learn more about it. If I teach a class session on the line, then I go home and look at my poems and go “Oh, gosh. I could be doing more with the line.” Even though I can teach about it, and I thought “Oh, I know everything about this,” then I teach it and I realize I don’t [laughs]. I learn more from what I’m teaching. I also feel that being at a place like Valpo, where what I do as a writer is respected, and even encouraged, is really great for my work. I’m encouraged to publish poems; I’m encouraged to go to conferences, and people really like it when I do that here [laughs]. So, that’s a wonderful thing to have that kind of support. It’s not always easy being a writer in a world where people are kind of mystified by it, don’t understand why you do it, and then you find a community like this where people are like “Oh, we get it. We’re going to support you in this.” I think that’s a really important thing for writers.

IR: And why do you both continue to do it?

TR: I think all humans have the creative impulse, right? If we’re created in God’s image, and he’s the creator, we have that creative impulse built-in. I think that creative impulse has just been squelched in many ways. People are discouraged from creating, or they’re just so stressed out and exhausted from life that the default is to be passive.

MJ: I think what you were saying, Tania, about creating some-

thing, there’s something very satisfying when you get that final product. It’s hard to articulate exactly why it’s so satisfying, but when you’ve worked on a poem, and you’ve reworked it and revised it, and you have what you feel is finished creative work, there’s just something ultimately satisfying about that. And I think because I love books so much, I love writing, I love reading other poetry, I feel like it’s just kind of like an exciting, childhood dream to be able to participate in that world of books because I created them myself, and I think that’s because I love books so much.

JK: This is a question for both of you—what advice do you have for writers?

MJ: I like reading books about writing, and every single author says this one piece of advice and, for some of them, it’s the only advice they have: “Don’t stop doing it.” It’s the only way to be a successful writer: to never give up. The people who are not successful, it’s because they give up at some point. You get a lot of rejection, so a lot of people are eventually like “That’s enough. I’m done.” The one way to be successful at it is to just keep doing it. And also, it makes sense in a way that the more you practice it, the better you get. By not giving up, by continuing to practice, you’re getting better and better. I’ve always thought this was the best advice and pretty much every successful writer I’ve heard of says that. They all go through periods—even the most prolific novelists—where they felt everything was being rejected, and they didn’t want to write anymore, but they kept doing it anyway, and eventually, they had success.

TR: I would say, take your work more seriously and yourself less seriously. It seems like the pattern I see in writers is that they want that quick publication, or they’re so personally devastated by rejection that it becomes more about them and how they feel in that moment, and less about their actual work. I don’t know if people understand the extent of how many rejections that

even really good writers have. Stop worrying about the publication and work on the stinking writing itself. Everyone wants to be famous—it’s a natural, human thing. It’s just that we’re so starstruck, and we want to get that fame and affirmation, but you’ve got to work on the craft itself and make that your priority. And then, if, as Marci advised, you never give up, then yes, the publication will come.

MJ: Then you can become as famous as us [laughs].

TR: Then you can become as famous as we are because we’ve never given up [laughs]. And, of course, read a lot, too. I hear people say, “Oh, I like writing, but I don’t really like reading.” What is up with that? What do you mean you like writing, but you don’t like reading? You want people to read your stuff, but *you* don’t want to read? Encourage other writers, buy their books, make their lives better by supporting their writing. Then, keep working on yours and eventually, things will come around.



Peekaboo | Angelica Jackson



Reaching for Life | David Sula



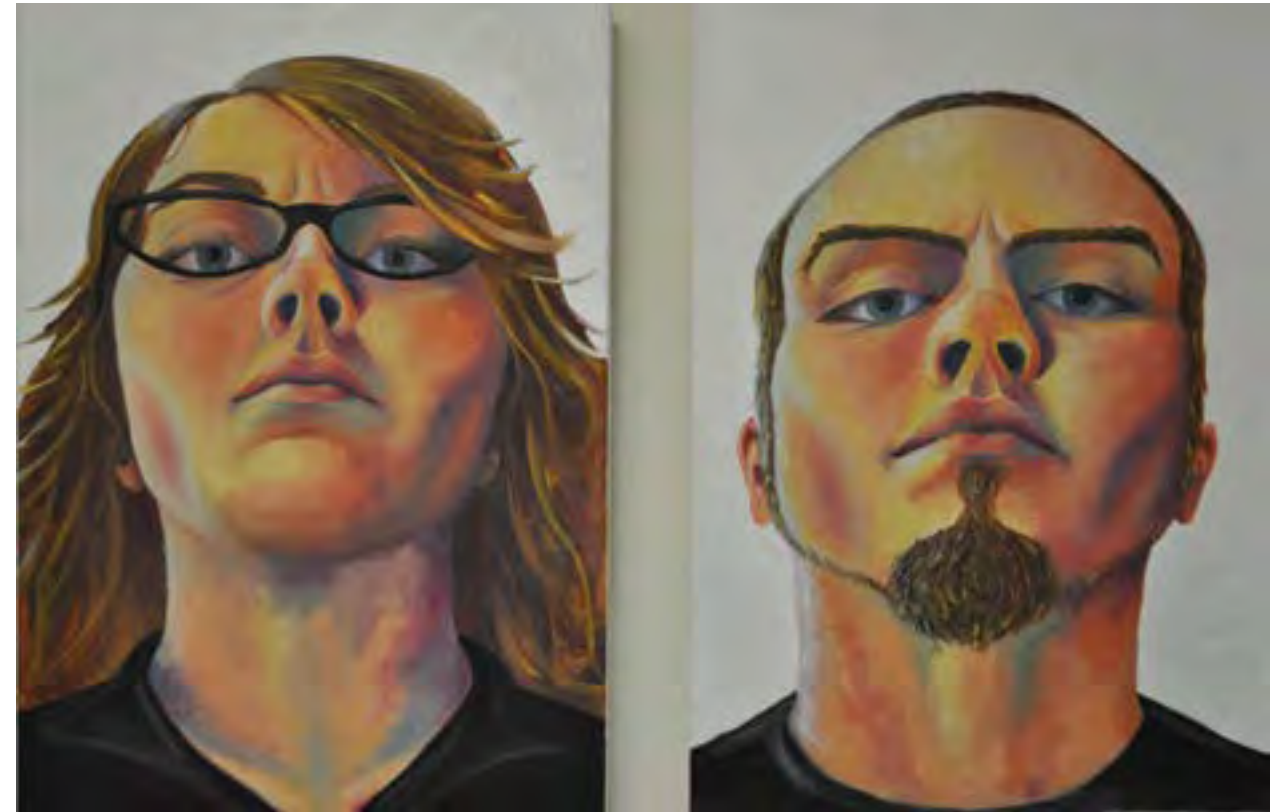
A Portrait of Myself | Natalie Zuber



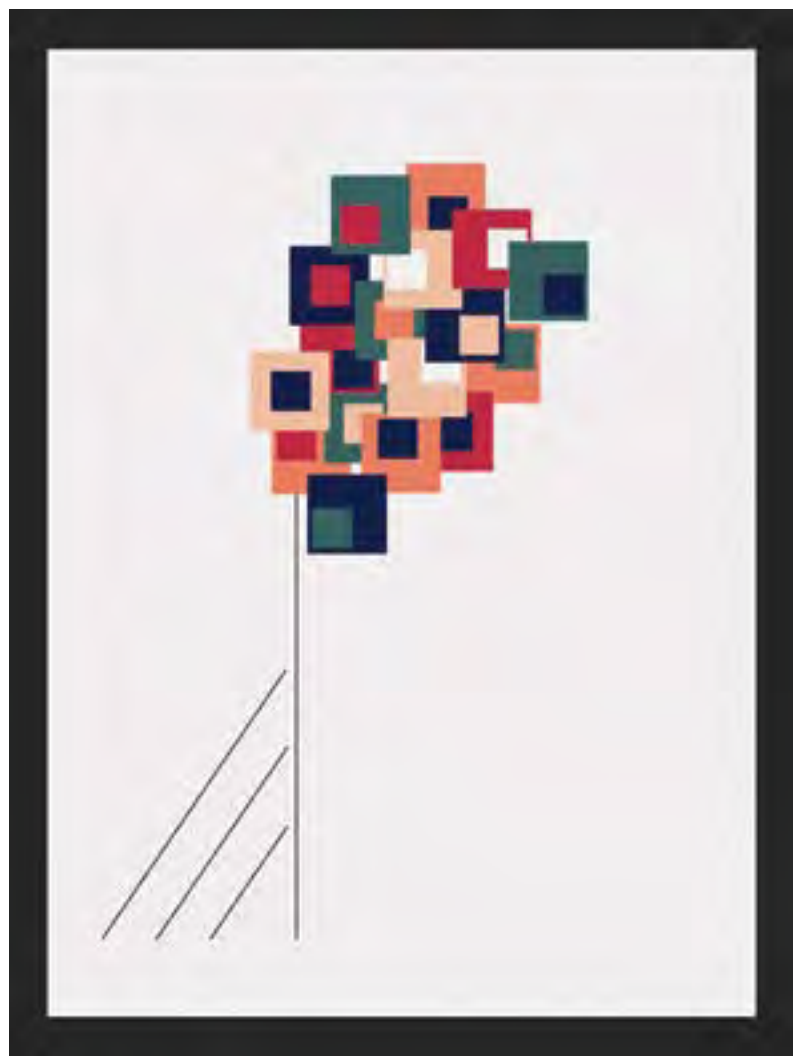
Meanmugging | Angelica Jackson



Cup | Michelle Zolfo



Grounded | Maggie Rivera



Growth and Love | Kyle Smart

Contributor Notes

[Evan Arceneaux] is an English and Church Music double major. Although he is an amateur photographer, he is honored to have had one of his photos chosen for the Lighter. He hails from the eclectic city of New Orleans, Louisiana—a place where crawfish boils and hurricane parties are commonplace. As winter fast approaches, he deeply misses the warm, humid climate of his hometown; however, he eagerly awaits the sight of snow and the opportunity for his first sledding experience.

[Madeline Bartsch] hates to be called Madeline, and those who refer to her as such receive looks so filled with venom that... they end up mildly confused. Maddie is her chosen moniker. She is honored to see that the selection committee enjoyed her work, even though she is a lowly freshman. Love to her grandmother, the vivacious main character of her short story, "Lucy," who was one of her first--and her biggest--fans. She also greatly enjoys using third person.

[Hannah Bauer] is a senior Creative Writing and Digital Media Arts double major. She does everything from poetry and nonfiction to photo, video, and design. So many pursuits may make her marketable, but it definitely makes her indecisive. She hails from Colorado, has five brothers, one sister, and two loving

parents; as well as four sister-in-laws, 3 nephews, and 3 nieces. Her favorite quote about life comes from her father who always reminds her what is important: "It's people not places."

[Michael Casas] I'm a nursing student trying to get through college.

[Lysa Fisk], a Jumping Through Hoops major/Destructive Scribbling minor from Des Moines, IA is on a crusade to publish a book called *Rejected by the Lighter*, despite *The Lighter's* valiant efforts to obstruct her by publishing her work.

[Angelica Jackson] was inspired to submit photos to The Lighter by recent VU graduate, Adam Jackson. Armed with a heavy iPhone and ever-growing blurry vision, she snapped as many photos as she could and was able to capture some very unique images that she hopes you will enjoy as much as she does. These photos are dedicated with much love to Bill, Adam, Kyle, Rachel and the newest recruits to the Jackson crew: Olivia and Michael.

[Hannah Kaitschuk] is a sophomore who is currently going through a slight life crisis. Check back with her on her major;

right now it's up in the air. She loves coffee, perhaps too much, and every dog she has ever met. She also finds it very strange to talk about herself in the third person, and expects the men in white coats to come drag her off at any minute.

[Gregory Maher] “Our battered suitcases were piled on the sidewalk again . . . broken-down heroes of the western night . . . we pointed our rattle snout south . . . and Denver receded back of us like the city of salt . . . (where go? what do? what for? ---sleep) . . . [but] we had longer ways to go . . .”

[Marcus Mues] is a senior studying Geography. He loves a good map, and the clean lines and illustrations are what he likes to see in artwork as well. “Abstract One” is his first design, and utilizes these details that are generally found in computer generated maps. He recently gained an interest in digital media, and it has opened up many opportunities in both the geographic and artistic realms. He is thrilled that his work was selected for the Lighter, and hopes to create more in the future.

[Maggie Rivera] Hello reader. I am glad that you have taken the time out of your day to read and observe these wonderful artists (both written and visual). Now I fully understand that you may simply be flipping these pages errantly because this book was on a random table in the library, you needed some reading material to accompany a morning constitution, or perhaps you ARE genuinely interested in our school's talent but, either way, I thank you. Enjoy and be well.

[Ian Roseen] appreciates once again being able to look for meaning in really bad music from the 1980s in his fiction that appears here. Next up on his writing agenda is something probably involving flagstones and fisherman sweaters, two things lacking in his real life. Just like planners (still) and coffee, aside from that one moment of indiscretion last year. But whaddaya

gonna do. Can't do nothin'. Live Love Lighter, as we say.

[Charity Scollon] I am a sophomore elementary education major. I draw, or more like doodle and color. This drawing was about two friends I had contemplating on ending their lives. My drawings may not seem like much to others, but I don't expect everyone to understand it. Usually they are about specific people. I love the sun. I still watch Disney movies and love sweets. And most importantly, chocolate and peanut butter is probably the best combination ever.

[Stephanie Sepiol] is a senior digital media and creative writing major who loves singing and boys who sing, especially if they duet on The Decemberists with her. Though she has been in The Lighter before, this is the first time she has remembered to write this. If you care to learn more, she can be found in the VUCA lobby. . . often.

[Kyle Smart] Robots fight for the spotlight. Batman never dies. The feeling of a vinyl record is as good as the smell of fresh paints. I won't remember anything if I don't write it on my arm with a sharpie. Stippling is the best and worst way to draw with fine tip pens. I love the Peanuts; Charlie Brown is my idol, but I think Robert Downey Jr. is my spirit animal. Paintbrush sticks and lipstick taste oddly alike. I always think I am right, because I am. Have a wonderful evening, even if it is morning. This is my Contributor Note.

[David Sula] I am a creative writing major who enjoys photography and film as hobbies. "Reaching for Life" was photographed on a lava flow last spring in Hawaii while studying volcanoes.

[Aubree Zdanovec] Every person struggles with his or her religion and often questions why certain events happen in their

life. For me, this piece is a reflection of events that brought me closer to God in the fact that I witnessed faith being lived out in the most vulnerable of states, and I feel blessed to witness the miracle of the impossible: life not lost. No one ever knows what life has in store for them, and one's true colors shine in the darkest of days. I am just thankful for all who have participated in my life and all who still stand by my side for better or worse.

[Michelle Zolfo] All I can say is namaste.

[Andrea Zuniga] is a junior art major who is new to the Lighter. She is extremely grateful to be a part of it and hopes to share her art in future issues. She would like to thank her art professors and family for their endless inspiration and support.

The Lighter is currently accepting submissions
for the Spring 2013 edition at the.lighter@valpo.edu