

# Harbinger

2015



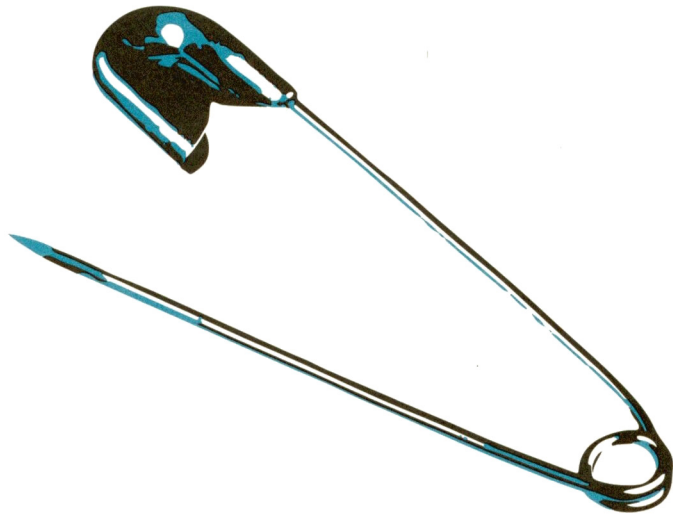
DO IT  
YOURSELF

# Harbinger

2015

n. har•bin•ger [här•bin•jər]

a person or thing that comes before to announce  
or to give indication of what will follow



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# FOREWORD

In recent years, “DIY” has become shorthand for not only do it yourself, but also the idea that something cute and kitschy on sale at Anthropologie or Urban Outfitters can be made more cheaply and personalized at home. While I love washi tape crafts, handmade paper flowers, and Sharpie decorated mugs as much as the next Pinterest enthusiast, Do It Yourself holds a deeper, more interesting meaning for me, particularly when I begin to think about the concept’s early origins and oddly enough how it relates to the content in *Harbinger 2015*.

Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of the punk band Bikini Kill, is at least in part responsible for the rise in the Do-It-Yourself ethos. Her application of this approach to creative expression, however, was decidedly different from how we think about DIY today. Having dealt with horrific instances of sexism, misogyny, and various forms of violence against women throughout her childhood, Hanna entered the punk scene in her late teens, determined to make a difference in the lives of young women and girls. To achieve this, she joined punk garage band Bikini Kill, and with that band, she led a revolution—girl-style. This led to the riot grrrl movement she co-founded in the early 1990s.

Like other sub genres of punk, the riot grrrl movement utilizes, among other ideals, a Do-It-Yourself ethos that encourages people to become self-sufficient, to pursue new hobbies and artistic mediums without the aid of a paid expert or institutional support, and to learn and create on their own. This DIY mindset is often most evident in independent music distribution, basement concerts, hand-printed T-shirts, dumpster diving and bartering for equipment and even sewing their own clothes.

Most notably for Kathleen Hanna, the DIY ethic led to the discovery of handmade “zines” common among punk bands. These small-circulation pamphlets filled with hand-drawn art, confessional poetry and nonfiction, and striking photography by band members and fans serve as an outlet for promotion, reflection, invention and meditation. For Bikini Kill, their skillfully laid-out zines vented their rage in an attempt to change the world around them, particularly for

young women. In the 1990s, zines hit their stride, finding a larger audience, and the ones Hanna created and distributed inspired girls all over the country to use their art and their words to share their stories and evoke social and political change.

In *Harbinger 2015*, the voices and stories of our authors come together to suggest a continuation of our generation's self-sufficiency—our willingness to make it happen for ourselves. While Millennials are stereotypically thought to be coddled and over-parented, we see in this year's work an embodiment of the do-it-yourself mentality, the idea that self-sufficiency is valuable and that our learned experiences are valid and deserve to be shared regardless of whether we're experts or not. The subjective nature of expertise comes under fire in Maya Alpert's mock how-to guide, "Write What You Know, Or Don't". Jess Coil and Heather Beger's co-authored play "Delayed" explores the value of women's connections through humor and hardship, while both Maggie Myers' and Shelly Romero's poetry collections draw on their cultural heritage and reflect on unique and more than independent aspects of their respective childhood homes.

In Coral Hoelscher's interview with Nick Potter, the cartoonist and author encourages working intuitively and supports "openings for newness," telling us that we all are doodlers at heart. Jamie Warren's "Karaoke Night" considers the courage it takes to let others in once a person becomes used to being self-reliant, and the community that can be cultivated around the spirit of acceptance. The DIY design style of *Harbinger 2015* is an indirect homage to the early 90's zines of the Riot Grrl movement and recalls the deconstructed aesthetic of the time. The effect of this combination of modern experiences with feminist issues and a DIY ethic that disdains traditional expertise is inspiring, and reminds us that doing it yourself can be the most rewarding work of all.

K.M.



# WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW, OR DON'T

By Maya Alpert

Places:

Write about places that are familiar to you, that you know without thinking, that have set the scene for enough hurt or happiness that you remember them.

I balled up my fists and silently cursed the teacher. How do people spend hours, lifetimes, studying mathematics? Long or short equations (“numerical poetry”), symbols, input and output? Why did those people, whoever they are, think that making kids learn such things with a computer program would be beneficial for the student, teachers, parents, society? Click on a red pie slice, watch a cartoon moose give instructions, be punished for typing the answer incorrectly (“You have put the arrows on both sides, thank you”). It doesn’t help that the computer lab is stiflingly hot: twelve computers, twelve monitors, five girls who showered and seven boys who did not. I turn around in my swivel chair, and stare out at the cool day.

Or don’t do this. Just because the color and pattern of the wallpaper in the waiting room of your childhood dentist’s office is burned into your brain (pastel green with sickly pink stripes) doesn’t mean you should have your character experience a great epiphany there.

My father’s law office was well lit and decorated with modern accessories. A square black chair with sharp-edged arms. A thin glass table with sterile chrome legs. Modern art showcased under a cool spotlight. I knew it was all a show, but the glare off the various furnishings hurt my eyes. If it was all meant to make clients uncomfortable and rush to judgment, then it worked.

So you’ve never seen a law office? You don’t have a father? No one has to know. Besides, this may keep you on your toes. Keep you from writing in or about one place, the place you’re comfortable living in.

Write stories set in your home state or town or neighborhood because you know it. Build your characters and problems from the landscape. Let them talk in local dialects, even if it’s subtle—especially if it’s subtle. Give them local flavor. Rip off descriptions of restaurants and grocery stores. Steal topography and geography and ideology.

**“OF COURSE, TREAD CAREFULLY,  
BUT USE PEOPLE’S QUIRKS,  
APPEARANCES, MEMORIES.”**

Every time they drive by, Julia and her family always talk about the new deli at Greene’s Grocery. The friendly people, the new plants by the sliding doors. The paninis aren’t like the ones in Little Italy, but they’re pretty good.

That’s the local Vons, you slut, and you know it. But change the name, anyway, and write about something tragic that happens to Julia and her family after they mention the deli again.

**Characters:**

Write about people you know: People you love or hate, if you have the pleasure of both extremes in your life. Of course, tread carefully, but use people’s quirks, appearances, memories. Write about a character who used to hate how her mom liked to have everyone’s shirts tucked in (sounds familiar, does it not?). Now she’s older, and she likes the look. She likes to think of her mom when she’s stuffing a clean white shirt into slim-fit trousers.

A tuft of the white fabric escapes from under the dark waistline. Sarah quickly tucks it back in, her hand hesitating only for a moment, wishing that she was home.

Don’t just write about your parents or friends or enemies. Take what you will from those around you, but be sure to invent new people, people only you know.

His penchant for Peeps was unfortunate, as the drill sergeant prohibited what was known on the base as “homo snacks.” The list of such items included baby carrots, tofu, and all kinds of holiday marshmallows.

So your cousin likes Peeps. She’s not a Marine, though. That’s all you.

You know certain types of people. You know your family, your friends. Write about pieces of them and pieces of you. They enrich your stories. You also remember strangers, ones who were nice or scary or wore a memorable sweater. You remember the time someone

yelled at your grandfather for double parking at Island's. You remember the grocery store (Vons, am I right?) and the employee who opened Popsicle boxes for you and your sisters, gave you each one of your choosing.

He looked like an arctic explorer, except for the combed hair and red apron, reaching into the depths of the freezer and fishing for the right treat. He would emerge seconds later, and we could almost see the frost gathered on his eyelashes, in his hair.

“One blue, one orange, one rainbow.”

Your little sister always got the rainbow.

#### Events:

Sometimes this is just a combination of places and characters—maybe even most of the time. Write the stuff that took place. The things that matter. Mix your places and your people to create a memorable or horrible or otherworldly picture. Write about the times you wish you could remember better and, of course, the times that you wish would just fall out of your brain.

Everyone was staring at her. The petite elderly lady, small and a bit crumpled but still pulling off a black, beaded dress. She wanted to look good for her grandson, her son. She held a plastic cup of champagne in her delicate hand. But that's not why they were all staring. It was not uncommon for women, especially those of an older generation, to sport wigs to bar mitzvahs or to temple on Yom Kippur. Everyone gets a little more orthodox when there's judgment involved. But it wasn't that she was wearing the wig. It was the way it sat crooked on her head, and the color of it, too, which was dull and rodent-like. For the family, the cockeyed wig was all too representative of the woman's slipping mind.

**“PUT YOUR CHARACTERS INTO SCENARIOS THAT MAKE THEM SQUIRM.”**

Write about things that hurt, as Hemingway sort of said. Put your characters into scenarios that make them squirm. Maybe they make

you squirm, too. Write about events that caused you pain or joy. Brought someone closer to someone else. Write about the things that matter in people's lives.

Or don't. You can write about subjects that you have never experienced. Occurrences you will never know.

He looped the rope around the Bondy-Womp's thick, bulging neck. A putrid stench leaked from its cavernous maw. Lopez was relieved to see Grady shoot up the lifter.

"Hey, asshole! Help me secure the suspect, will ya?"

Grady cursed under his breath and swaggered to Lopez's side. They wouldn't be home for six months, and it was going to be a long ride.

Write what you know, or don't. Just make sure it counts, and that people shed a tear or laugh or look away from your words in disgust because they recognize themselves somewhere in there. And please: Make it better than all of the above.



## OLD WOUNDS

By Emily Cross

Poppy had a knot of scar tissue on his back like someone had stuck a hand in the middle of him and pushed up, contorting the skin into a ridge. I touched it once when I was very young, four or so, pursuing the tactile curiosity of a child. The same curiosity led me to kick at my classmate Brandy's leg brace the first day of kindergarten. In both cases, it got me into trouble.

All Poppy did was stiffen, turn around and lift an eyebrow at me before walking off, but I felt the full force of his chastisement in that simple look. I realized I needed to turn to other sources of information.

The next day, I ambushed my mother in the middle of cooking dinner.

"Mom, what happened to Poppy's back?"

"His scar? He got that fighting in the war, honey."

I looked down at my knees with their pale web of white scar tissue where I scraped them up pretty regularly. Even the pink, puffy scars on my little sister's knees were small in comparison. Poppy's bump was bigger than my whole hand.

"That's a scar?"

"Yes."

"How did he get it in the war?"

"He'll tell you the story when you're ready, but don't ask him before then. He doesn't like to talk about it. Okay?"

Poppy told stories all the time. The idea that he had one he didn't want to share was crazy.

"He'll tell me someday?"

"Yes," Mom said. "Do not bother him about it, Emily."

I've never been patient, but Poppy's stiffening and dismissal was enough to dissuade me from touching his scar again. Mom's warnings merely confirmed my instincts. I became almost scared of the scar because I was worried I could hurt him as if the wound was still fresh. Hugs were a gun-shy operation of placing my arms just so. However, my fascination remained. On the rare occasion I saw Poppy shirtless, I would glance peeks at it out of the corner of my eye, but never did I stare.

Over fifty years after the war, Poppy still had days when he couldn't escape the snowy, European woods of 1945. It was such a day when I was six that I heard the story of how he got his scars. He fell into what my mom called a blue period every February, replaying the events over and over. Of course, I thought he had realized I was at long last old enough to hear his hardest stories.

Poppy took me outside to play in the falling snow until Memow left for work. He ushered me back inside to start his story within minutes of her leaving, and I thought it was because he knew she would tell him I wasn't old enough to hear it. I later learned it was because she

**“POPPY’S TALENT AS A  
STORYTELLER RESTED ON HIS  
OBSERVATION OF HIS AUDIENCE.”**

hated to hear the story.

The royal blue mid-century armchair by the front door was Poppy's

prime storytelling perch. The patch of carpet in front of it was my prime listening locale. Everything I learned about telling a good story, I learned at his feet. This day was no different.

“My platoon was moving through some woods, flushing out the Germans,” he started.

I settled in, eyes trained on Poppy's hands, the most expressive part of him as he told stories. They kept moving even as Poppy's eyes glazed over in a way I'd never seen before. Poppy's talent as a storyteller rested on his observation of his audience. I was used to catching him watching me for reactions, but he didn't look at me at all this time.

“We were drawing fire, but the Germans didn't really have their heart in it. The snow was thick and none of us wanted to be out there. But I saw a chance to push through, so I gathered my men. What I didn't know was that the Germans had called in air support.”

Poppy got down on the floor with me, and I scrambled out of his way. On all fours, he still looked gone, like I wasn't there and neither was the carpet beneath his knees.

“I gave the signal to charge, like this.” He leaned forward with one arm pointing out, looking like one of the pointer dogs he raised to

hunt quail. “A tree-top mortar shell went off above us and the shrapnel went in my back.” Poppy hit at his scar with his hand flattened like it was a piece of the shrapnel.

He got up off the floor and drooped back into his chair before continuing.

“When those tree-top mortar shells hit, they start at the top and end up taking the whole tree with them. Shreds the whole top off with it.” He shook his head and sat quiet for another moment.

“When I came to, I was face down in a snowdrift, hollering for a medic to check out my injured men. My next instinct was to check my watch. How crazy is that?” He looked at me for the first time since starting the story, laughing. I smiled.

“Your memow bought me that watch before I went over. It was a real nice one. Not like they make now. So I checked my watch. I’ve never forgotten; it said 2:16. I came to, wiped the snow and mud off because I was caked in it, and it said 2:16.” Poppy mimed checking his watch, scraping off long-gone mud with his large, soft-worn hands.

“I don’t know why that’s the first thing I did.”

We were quiet again until Poppy shook his head.

“The next thing I wanted was my gun. When I felt around for it, it wasn’t there. A medic had stuck it barrel first into the ground by me and stuck a flag on it while I was out. They did that to mark where an injured soldier was, and I wondered who had been injured.

“Another of our medics, a guy by the name of Sufflo, came around, and I told him to give me my gun. I wanted to shoot the Germans that had their arms up as they marched past us. We’d managed to push the frontline and they were retreating, but that wasn’t good enough. I wanted to kill them, and I told Sufflo to give my gun back. He didn’t. Instead, he made me take the sulfa tablets they gave us in our kits, and that’s when I realized I was the injured soldier. Sufflo kept telling me I was going to be fine and pumped me full of morphine, but I knew by the look in his eye I was a goner. He had to move on after that, and the morphine knocked me out.”

Poppy winced as he shifted in his seat, stretching out his back.

“I ended up in a church in France that was turned into a hospital. The nurses are the ones I felt really bad for. They were all nice gals, but they had to work in this dirty place. They tried their best to keep up their looks, but it was impossible. The guys would still flirt with them. I smelled real bad because the shrapnel went through my back and tore up my intestines. I didn’t want the nurses to even look at me. My surgeon there was a good guy, real busy. He’d come over and say, ‘Sarge, I’m going to do everything I can, but you probably won’t walk again’ and I’d tell him, ‘Doc, either I walk or I die.’”

“So you ended up walking?” I asked, unsure what to say about the way the story was going.

“Yeah. The doc would come to me with this or that surgery to try. Right before they sent me on to the next hospital, he came to me with one final surgery. He told me this one would almost certainly kill me, but if I woke up, I would be able to walk. I told him to do it, and I woke up. When I got back to the States, they put me in O’Reilly, down in Springfield where Evangel is now. Your memow came from Leavenworth and took care of me there.” Poppy turned his full gaze to me now, pointing.

“The key to anything, Emily, is not accepting what you’re told. All those doctors told me I wouldn’t walk again, and I just didn’t accept it. I got up every morning and walked all over the hospital. I had to go slow sometimes, but I did it.”

I could imagine Poppy refusing to stay in bed, to stay motionless, because the man I knew in his seventies was the same way. Any waiting room turned into an exercise room with him, doing weird backwards push-ups and squats on chairs. When he ran out of exercises, he paced. Even when he was eighty-nine and had survived a stroke and a heart attack, he went for “jogs” every day, shuffling forward slower than walking pace.

As his story ended, Poppy led me back to his bedroom and opened the top drawer of his dresser. I knew he kept his coolest stuff in that drawer because it was the one I couldn’t reach.

“Take a look at this,” he said, handing me a watch.

It was a normal watch with a square face and black leather band. The time on it was frozen at 2:16.

“Never worked again,” he told me.

Poppy glanced at the watch he wore on his wrist now to check the time. “Your memow is going to be ready for us to deliver her lunch soon.”

I followed Poppy’s line of sight but fixated on his wrist. It was crooked compared to the other, with a giant knob where his ulna stuck out. I loved to rub the knob when I played with Poppy’s soft hands, but he never stiffened over it the way he had his back.

“Did you hurt your wrist in the war too, Poppy?”

He laughed and took the watch. “No, Sweet Pea, that one was because I wouldn’t let the doc set my bones right after your Grandma Debbie’s horse stomped me.”

“I want to hear that story,” I said at ease knowing this story couldn’t hurt him.

## NATIVE TO A FAR AWAY LAND

By Maggie Myers

I am New Mexican.  
I know that you don't need a passport to get in  
and that it is one of the 50 states.

I am New Mexican.  
I know what to say when asked, "Red or green?"  
I understand the art of guacamole making.

The ground is hard, like the city sidewalks I grew up on,  
yet the rock gives life to wondrous things.  
Old Magic stains the mountains.

The best stars are seen from trash dumps.  
The best food is eaten in small places.  
The souls of the people are felt in pueblo adobes.

I am New Mexican.  
I have turquoise stones for eyes,  
and a sopapilla stomach.

I am New Mexican.  
My hair is dusted from the dried-up Rio Grande.  
My heart is copper, worked by worn hands.

When boarding the Road Runner train, my name is Margarita.  
My soul stretches into the words that welcome me home:  
Santa Fe, Cannon Road, Taos, Bandelier, the Ghost Ranch.

I have played in the ocean,  
run in the grass for hours,  
learned to write in southern places,  
  
but I will always be a New Mexican kid.  
The magic can never be drained out of me.  
I'm stained down to the core in Georgia O'Keeffe colors.

## RAILROAD

By Maggie Myers

The railroad always brought me home,  
its steel tracks a path through growing trees and changing fields,  
reliable, worn, rusted.

I always get a feeling of flight when I see the tracks.  
I'm almost there if I keep going,  
past the cotton fields, the cauliflower rows and purple hull peas,  
past the tree so large the town could huddle under it,  
past the old motel full of dope addicts and the town's few Hispanics.

The railroad brings me home  
to a place I can finally stop and breathe  
fresh air and the smell of farm animals.

As the sun sets on the reddish brown tracks,  
I see my spirit dance like an adventurer  
without a care in the world.  
She smiles before flying off ahead,  
"Marked Tree, 12 miles."

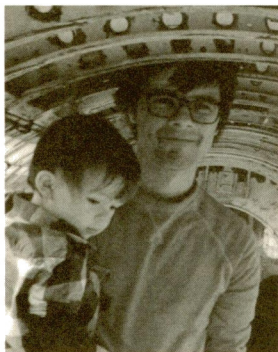
The railroad always brought me home,  
and each mile was a reminder of what was waiting:  
fresh biscuits, hot chicken, and dumplings.

I can hear the glass bowl clinking with a metal spoon,  
the chopping of bones and clean-cut dough.  
The railroad always brought me home,  
always where I needed to go,  
as I moved on to start my own life

far away from the tracks  
where will I wind up.

## INTERVIEW WITH NICK POTTER

By Coral Hoelscher



**Coral Hoelscher:** What are you currently working on?

**Nick Potter:** I recently had a book accepted for publication, so I have been doing a lot of work preparing it for print. It's a story collection containing prose and comics, so I've been editing the prose and cleaning up and reformatting the comics, and also working on a cover image. A lot

of post-production stuff. Regarding projects still open and bleeding on the operating table, I've been working on a kind of weird hybrid novel project called *Irregular Limbs*, which I can best describe as the movie *Groundhog Day* if David Lynch filmed it. But, of course, not a film. And then I'm also going back and re-working a middle-grade novel I wrote a couple of years ago about a bearded boy named Stanley Motorcycle.

**CH:** All your projects sound so interesting and imaginative. I look forward to seeing them in print. When you gave a talk at Stephens in the fall of 2014, you said that “all writers are doodlers.” Would you elaborate on that statement?

**NP:** I think it's the cartoonist Lynda Barry who says we all start out as doodlers but grow out of it as we get older. And I think that's basically true—we get older and become self-conscious, and we tell ourselves we can't draw anymore and stop drawing. So, in that sense, I'm with Barry in believing there's a latent doodler in everyone. And as a writer, I can't help but promote that among other writers. There is something exciting about unleashing that latent impulse to draw in a group who are already making a concerted effort at imagining. And, truth be told, I often prefer untrained drawings and doodles to some of the more professional illustrations I see. There's something charming about them

I can't resist, so I'm always encouraging anyone who'll listen to draw me pictures.

**CH:** I remember your work being a little absurdist. What themes do you generally pursue in your writing and cartooning?

**NP:** This is a hard one for me, as I generally like to work more intuitively, and I think this is true for both my writing and drawing. Which is to say, I don't really set out to write stories about something or even to draw a specific image, so themes become visible only after I've finished, or at least well after I'm deep into a project. That said, looking back on my work, I seem to be nursing obsessions with death and dismemberment, marriage, human-animal relationships, art-making, and Biblical Christianity.

**CH:** Would you describe a real-life situation that inspired you.

**NP:** I can't say how this has translated into my work exactly, but over the past year I've found three dead squirrels in my yard and one dead bird, each in various states of decomposition. So, I find the animal bodies, usually while mowing the lawn or doing other yard work, and I dispose of them. And for whatever reason, the act of turning them with a shovel, feeling the weight of their bodies and seeing their tiny bones through the holes in their skin, the blood left on the ground, it's always in the back of my mind. I say this





only because I've never consciously drawn from any specific real-life situation in my work, but small things like these dead animals in my yard, the things I can't seem to forget, I feel like they quietly influence the way I write and the things I draw. I think working intuitively means drawing from life at a more subconscious level for me, though I'm trying to write some nonfiction right now, so I'm preparing to upend that working method.

**CH:** As a graduating English major, life after college is constantly on my mind. People are full of advice about life as a post-English major. What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

**NP:** Honestly, I can't remember the good advice I've been given, though I know I've received quite a bit, but I do hold to a couple of principles quoted by people I've never met:

"To be nobody but yourself in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting."—e.e. cummings

& "Err in the direction of kindness."—George Saunders

**CH:** During your talk for the Writers on the Edge Series, you said that "language has improved properties when combined with art." I love that idea. Will you say a little more about the practice of blending words and pictures?

**NP:** It sounds a little clunky in my quote, but what I was getting at is that language resonates differently when juxtaposed with images, and I love that interaction. Especially when there is some friction between what the image communicates versus what language does. I think a classic go-to example for this would be René Magritte’s painting, “The Treachery of Images.” Language on its own is a fairly complicated, abstract idea, which is part of what I love about it, and so any way I can complicate it further, with art for instance, that’s exciting to me. That’s an improvement. That’s an opening for newness.

**CH:** I know students at Stephens were very interested in your work. Where can students find more information about you?

**NP:** The best place for keeping up to date is probably my tumblr: [nickfrancispotter.tumblr.com](http://nickfrancispotter.tumblr.com).



Nick Francis Potter is a visual artist and writer from Salt Lake City, Utah. He holds a MFA in fiction from Brown University and is currently a PhD candidate in creative writing at the University of Missouri. His comics and prose have been published in *Ninth Letter*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Chattahoochee Review*, and *The Rumpus*, among others.



## PHOTOGENIC

By Fiona Kerr

“Dr. Kinsley will see you now, Mr. Brown,” the secretary said.

Mr. Brown, an average-looking man who wore khakis and plaid shirts even on his days off, straightened up and with unsteady hands adjusted his too-tight collar.

“Time to answer this question once and for all,” he murmured to himself as the door to the doctor’s office slammed behind him, causing him to jump.

“Mr. Brown, I presume?” Dr. Kinsley queried, looking up from a clipboard he had rested on his lap as he shifted in his mahogany chair.

Mr. Brown nodded dumbly.

“Please, have a seat.” Dr. Kinsley was a slight man who looked to be in his mid-to-late forties, with wispy gray hair and a neatly trimmed beard.

“So, what brings you here today, Mr. Brown?” asked Dr. Kinsley.

Mr. Brown swallowed, steeling his courage. “I have a photogenic memory.”

“Do you mean a photographic memory?”

“No, a photogenic memory,” Mr. Brown insisted, rubbing his hands across the top of his legs as if trying to scrub them clean of invisible dirt.

“I see. Would you care to explain this concept further, Mr. Brown?” Dr. Kinsley probed as he proceeded to scribble something illegible on his clipboard.

“So, it’s like this,” Mr. Brown began. “Last Tuesday morning as I was crossing Elm Street, I saw a guy get hit by a bus.” He paused to let that tidbit of information sink in. Dr. Kinsley continued to watch him with a calm gaze. “Now, most people would be horrified, right? And I was, too, at least at first.” The words came easily to Mr. Brown; he had told this same story to many people. “The thing is, later that afternoon, when I was telling one of my co-workers about what happened, I realized the whole image in my mind had changed. Where I first saw gruesome blood stains and heard the man’s mangled screams, I now envisioned something completely different. Picture this.” Mr. Brown stood and began to

gesture emphatically with his hands as if he were a master painter trying to recreate the scene.

“As the poor soul is hit by the bus, everything goes into slow motion. The crackling of his bones becomes a percussive symphony, his screams the operatic chorus. The specks of blood that arc slowly through the sky refract glimmers of sunlight. A gleaming white bird swoops through the debris and acrobatically plucks a piece of tender flesh out of mid-air. All of this beauty in the matter of a few seconds; it’s enough to render anyone speechless.”

Dr. Kinsley had stopped writing and was now watching Mr. Brown with a rapt, slightly pensive expression. Mr. Brown stared off into the distance for a few more seconds before he lost his dreamy gaze and cleared his throat, shifting awkwardly in his chair.

“So you see my difficulty, Dr. Kinsley. Every time I tell people how things appear in my head, they look at me like I’m crazy. It’s really starting to affect my social life.” Mr. Brown sat back down and resumed worrying his legs with his hands.

“I see . . .” Dr. Kinsley looked down at his now numerous notes. “Photogenic memory? It happens every time you remember an event?”

“Uh huh.”

“And it’s really bothering you, is it?”

Mr. Brown thought for a minute. “Not really. Sometimes it’s kind of nice; it’s like I always get to see the silver lining in things. Like when I watch the news, it’s always death and murder, and for most people that might be stressful. For me, it’s like watching a cinematic masterpiece.” Dr. Kinsley opened his mouth to speak, but Mr. Brown quickly interjected, “But then other times it makes me feel guilty. Like, after my mother died, I had this lingering sadness I couldn’t place. Yet every time I thought back to her actual death, all I could imagine was an angel chorus singing as her silvery form levitated into a blinding light. How her hospital gown billowed around her, slowly disintegrating into a pale smoke along with the rest of her body.

It's just a little unsettling imagining all that when the people around you are crying their eyes out, you know?"

**"TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH  
MR. BROWN, I THINK WE'RE  
ALL A LITTLE BIT CRAZY."**

Dr. Kinsley checked his watch. "My word, look at the time. Well, I think considering your distress over this matter, you should make another appointment to come see me, Mr. Brown." The psychologist rose from his chair and began to escort Mr. Brown calmly to the door.

"Now, is there anything else you would like to ask me about before you leave?"

Mr. Brown lowered his voice and muttered in Dr. Kinsley's ear, "Dr. Kinsley, do you think I'm crazy?"

Dr. Kinsley smiled knowingly and beckoned to Mr. Brown, whispering in his ear in return, "To tell you the truth Mr. Brown, I think we're all a little bit crazy."

## WHY I LOVE THE HATED

By Jessica Long

I've always been a listener. A shadow in the corner of the classroom. A window on the side of the school bus. It was easy and natural being light. People didn't see me and shamelessly walked through me. I embraced being light because it was my refuge from the illogical hate that suffocated more visible students.

When my friends didn't go for recess or play Monopoly and needed instead a good listener, they would find me in my invisible world. They would sit with me on one spontaneous occasion or another, and it would turn into a habit, and a habit became a friendship. I loved the bizarre stories they told. They changed my narrow, gray view of the world.

When I was ten, I spent the night with Marylee for the first time. Before that night, I had seen her only with my eyes: a short, thin girl with white-blonde hair. Like most of us, she wore garage sale T-shirts and faded blue jeans. She was innocent and sweet, and her laugh enthralled me.

Her mom, Stacy, left to go to the store, and we were home alone. Marylee told me to go with her to pick out nail polish from her mom's room. There wasn't anything on the walls in the room, just a couple of framed pictures on her dresser. There was an over-sized bed with a dramatic frame. Bottles of nail polish were scattered across the top of the dresser, but Marylee opened a top drawer and snickered.

"Do you know what this is, Jess?"

I looked down at a pink oblong mechanical wand.

"You wanna touch it?"

I shook my head.

Marylee motioned me toward a stack of DVD's on the floor underneath the bed. She handed me a movie with a naked, curvy woman on it. I felt embarrassed but didn't know why. I wasn't the one who was naked. I handed it back to Marylee.

"It's porn," she said nonchalantly. The excitement had faded from her face. I hadn't thought it was funny like she had. I wasn't supposed to tell, and I didn't.

Wayne, my double cousin, was my age. His dad was related to both of my grandparents but had killed himself when Wayne was a baby.

Wayne loved his mom. He didn't see it as a choice. His older sister was in jail a lot, and, though we were a big family, no one wanted much to do with him. My mom knew his mom was no good. She couldn't blame Wayne for that, but she didn't have money or room for him. Later she convinced another cousin to take him in.

One day after school, we walked to the grocery store to buy a dollar cake mix and then to Wayne's apartment to bake it. The apartment smelled like sweat and cigarettes. Every surface was covered with junk, the dishes were unwashed, and clothes and shoes were heaped everywhere.

We went into the living room to watch *Madeline*. I was completely hypnotized by the movie, but Wayne kept looking over at his mom, who was sleeping on the couch.

"Jessie, come here," he whispered as he walked quietly over to her. He rubbed a spoon on his sleeve and then held it under her nose. He focused on the spoon for a long time. Finally he threw it down and shook her furiously.

"What the hell, Wayne?!" she yelled, coming to life.

"Should I get something for dinner?" he asked.

"No. There's plenty in the fridge. Now leave me alone." She rolled over and went back to sleep.

I followed Wayne to his room. He lay on his bed and stared at his NSYNC and Britney Spears posters.

"She's such a bitch, ain't she?" he said.

Sitting on his bed beside him, I shrugged. What did I know?

He wiped away a tear. "Don't tell anyone, all right?"

I nodded.

But I didn't have to tell anyone. It was a small town, and no one was discreet. My mom knew about the drugs before I did. That's why I wasn't supposed to go to Wayne's apartment. Everyone knew but me. Even Social Services. I guess they just didn't care, which was worse than not listening.

These friends grew up to be solids in high school. They could have been light like me, but instead they made themselves heavy with tattoos and

**“THOUGH I LOVED THEM,  
THEY WERE HATED.  
HATED FOR BEING SOLIDS.”**

piercings. Though I loved them, they were hated. Hated for being solids. Hated for having lips and tongues to talk and kiss with. Hated for figures that could be coveted. Hated for eyes and fingers that could judge, hate, and love. Hated because they weren't ashamed to be human.

Sometimes I wanted to have legs and lips. I wanted eyes and fingers to accuse. To judge. To condemn. But to be a solid with limbs and a face was to be vulnerable. To pick a side was to pick an enemy. It was best to be neutral and light.

Many times I would turn into a solid as soon as I entered a home. It didn't have to be my home, it just needed to be a home. I needed to come into a world that didn't allow hostiles. Where fighting was limited to words. Home, where everyone got to feel safe from the wild.

Within the walls of my allies' bedrooms, the bomb shelters, I could say my thoughts out loud. It was mutually understood that bedrooms were places of confidentiality. Secrets could disperse into the air, and there was no fear of retribution.

When I watched the solids trampling down the halls of my high school or meeting up in their little tribes at the Sonic drive-in where I worked, I knew my eyes weren't as clever as my ears. Sometimes there was no connection between the person I saw and the person I heard. There were wild places, and there were sanctuaries. One could not be the same person in both.

Horrible things happened to all of them, each of them afraid of something and bitter about it. They reached out and attacked each other, knowing everything and nothing. They all turned into the same thing, all the same but different.

People didn't fear me, but that didn't make me powerless. There is a lot one cannot obtain if others fear them. Trust is one. A majority of my peers measured power by how much they could control. If they

could make the English teacher cry, they had control of her happiness. If they could make Donnie wear his gym shorts every day to avoid changing in the locker room, they had control of his valor. Yet I could get the most revealing insight into a person only by having no control.

Hanna dressed me up at my house. It was an amusing project for her, and her pleasure gave me satisfaction. I let her do whatever she liked. I wore sunglasses inside simply because they looked cool. She painted my face with pink gloss and dusty eye shadow. I had on checkered bikini top with my mom's 1980's high-waisted jeans. Hanna liked the costume she put me in. It made me look solid like her.

I lay back on the couch, relaxing more than just my muscles against the firm cushions. I was relieving my soul while Hanna released her secrets. Her liberty liberated me. Her confession wasn't for me to judge. I didn't take her secrets and divide them into two categories: right and wrong.

I listened to understand how Hanna was. I listened and understood how I was. Her confession gave me insight into our relationship. I learned from her disclosure why hurt people hurt each other, and that hurt people don't look hurt. Most won't talk about their pain unless they have a sanctuary.

When people tell the story of their molestation for the first time, they don't need the listener to have lips. Hanna didn't want me to say anything while she told her story. She didn't want my eyes looking at her either. All I had to do was understand and carry her secret in silence. To take that little weight from that choking box.

The one thing I know for certain is that my purpose is to listen and understand even what's not said. I offer to help in any way I can. What most people want is very simple; it's just to be understood. It's simple because it's a part of being human.

## ODE TO A DOG

By Minuette Layer

### Ode to Cinder (My Dog and the Love of My Life)

Silken, lush tufts of fur glimmer in the light.  
With a groan she stretches out her limbs,  
slowly,

gingerly,

as though wading through mud.

Her paws dance through the air.

She is an archaic creature,  
an arthritic ballerina.

She has claimed this spot as her own.

Rolling across the carpet.

Matting it down.

Rolling back.

Repeating.

Between the TV and the radiator,

that sun-drenched nook

belongs to Cinder.

Much like my heart.

### Ode to Taffy (My Other Dog)

I need you  
like I need salt  
in a paper cut.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

By Autumn Brown

The world and everything in it is a picture waiting to be taken. Every blade of grass, every foot across the pavement, and every flame of fire is an image waiting to be captured in the photographer's lens. Photography is not just the documentation of beauty and wonder, it's a form of preservation. A picture means a moment preserved forever—frozen and unchangeable by time. My photography feature focuses on people celebrating their individuality and creativity through movement, apparel, and emotion. The wild displays of shining personalities compelled me to capture each of these moments that will live on after these people return to their lives and the day is forgotten.



*Drum Motion*, Columbia, Missouri, March 2014



*She Is the Queen*, Columbia, Missouri, March 2014



*Cowman*, Columbia, Missouri, March 2014



*Peeking Around*, Columbia, Missouri, March 2014



*Hula King*, Columbia, Missouri, March 2014



# DELAYED

By Heather Beger & Jess Coil

Scene takes place on an airplane. Four seats in a line, with an aisle in the middle. Holly sits in a window seat SL. Dorothy enters with a purse. She checks her ticket and sits in the aisle seat SR. Holly looks up from a magazine and notices Dorothy.

HOLLY  
Dotty? Dotty Worcester, is that you?

DOROTHY  
(under breath)  
Fuck.

HOLLY  
Well, what a funny cowinky-dink. Are you flying out to the reunion too?

DOROTHY  
Holly Barton. What brings you to L.A.?

HOLLY  
Well, I--

Holly climbs over the seat next to her, crosses the aisle, and then climbs over Dorothy to get to the window seat next to her. Dorothy tries to pull her legs out of the way, but Holly's already made it an awkward mess.

HOLLY  
I've been workin' for that sweet fellow Snoop Dogg. I'm his personal assistant.

DOROTHY  
(baffled)  
Oh?

HOLLY  
(excited almost-whisper)  
You didn't hear this from me, but the next trending thing is gonna be "hashtag Snoop Dragon."

DOROTHY  
Snoop . . . Dragon?

HOLLY  
(walks fingers up Dorothy's arms)  
He's going through a scaly phase.

DOROTHY

How does one begin working for  
Snoop Dragon?

HOLLY

Oh Dotty, it's the funniest little  
tale.

DOROTHY

Dorothy.

HOLLY

Pardon?

DOROTHY

I go by Dorothy now.

HOLLY

That's a shame. Dotty's the cutest  
little name.

DOROTHY

Ever since I started my career in  
L.A., I decided Dorothy sounded  
more professional.

HOLLY

I remember, ten years ago that is,  
I would wake up just beamin'. I  
would stride on up to school, just  
rearin' to get to first hour  
calculus and sit next to my best  
friend, Dotty! It was always Holly  
and Dotty, the Math Whizzes.

DOROTHY

It wasn't my favorite class, but I  
wasn't too bad at it.

HOLLY

I'll say. I wouldn't have graduated  
if I hadn't sat next to you.

Dorothy looks at Holly quizzically. Holly giggles.

HOLLY

Well, what do you do in L.A., Ms.  
Career?

DOROTHY

I'm the associative director for  
the department of accounting and  
international marketing for United  
Artists.

HOLLY

Aww, that's neat.

DOROTHY

Um, when do you think we'll take off? Maybe you wanna get back to your seat--someone might come.

HOLLY

Oh don't be silly, they can have my seat. A little switcharoo never hurt no one. So do you think ol' Pete will be there? Think he'll be fat?

DOROTHY

Well, it's likely with the rising obesity rates in America that quite a few classmates will be heftier since high school.

HOLLY

Did you know Katie McDonnell went to rehab? For cocaine? I had her pegged as a methy myself, but to each their own.  
(giggles)

DOROTHY

Oh my god! Is she okay?

HOLLY

Oh yeah, they cleared it up right away. But once she got out, she had to go back three days later for sex addiction.  
(laughs)

Dorothy shifts in seat. She leans out to look to the back and front of the aisle.

HOLLY

Dotty--

DOROTHY

Dor--

HOLLY

Dorothy, Dorothy, of course. I can't tell you how much fun I had going to high school with you. Why didn't we keep in touch? Had I known we were livin' in the same

(MORE)

HOLLY (cont'd)  
city, I'd have had you over for dinner. I've got this great group of gals that come over on Tuesdays to play cards. Snoop even stops in now and again.

DOROTHY  
I'm really busy. Some nights I have to order in and just sleep on the couch in my office.

HOLLY  
That is no way to live, darlin'. It is such a blessing that you're taking this break for the reunion.

DOROTHY  
I actually don't think I'll have time for the reunion.

HOLLY  
Are you kiddin' me? What could be more important than catchin' up with your classmates?

DOROTHY  
I'm seeing my family this weekend.

HOLLY  
We're your family, too. Surely you can make time for both.

DOROTHY  
(looking around)  
I really think the plane should have taken off by now.

HOLLY  
Oh, they're probably just screenin' everyone for that Ebola.

Holly fake coughs on Dorothy. Dorothy recoils.

HOLLY  
Just kiddin'! Everyone is just so uptight about all these diseases flyin' around. It's such a drag worryin' over the bird flu and then the swine flu. Next you know, there's gonna be the feline flu. Then I'll really be in trouble.  
(laughs and elbows Dorothy)  
(MORE)

But really, it's so exhausting, ya know? Why can't everyone just crack a smile once in a while?

Holly looks at Dorothy, waiting. Dorothy timidly smiles.

HOLLY

There you go. It's easy as that.

DOROTHY

Diseases aren't that easy for me to joke about.

HOLLY

Oh, sure they are. Here, I've got a good one for ya. Knock knock.

Dorothy looks around.

HOLLY

Knock knock.

DOROTHY

Who's there?

HOLLY

Cancer.

DOROTHY

Cancer  
(begins to cry)  
who?

HOLLY

Well, you've completely ruined the punchline.

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, I just--

HOLLY

Oh, shit.

Dorothy quietly cries and pulls tissues out of purse.

HOLLY

I'm just dumber than a twice baked potato. You've got the cancer. And you're goin' home to say your goodbyes, but it'd just be too hard to say goodbye to all your favorite people at the reunion. And THAT'S why you're not comin'. Ha.

Holly is satisfied that she's "solved the mystery." Dorothy sobs harder.

DOROTHY

Holly, I never had the heart to tell you, but you're dumber than a third coat of paint.

Holly is taken aback.

HOLLY

Dorothy!

DOROTHY

It's not me. It's my father. It was my father.

HOLLY

Oh.

DOROTHY

I was in so much denial. I didn't even come home for the funeral. I told my mother I had to wait for my next paycheck. But it was a lie. I had the miles built up. Of course I did! I flew out that day for a business trip. It was always business.

HOLLY

Well, these things can take time.

DOROTHY

I hadn't talked to him for months. He told me my job was taking over my life, that I should think about settling down. But I was so angry I just stopped talking to him.

HOLLY

You're living your dream though.

DOROTHY

But I'm not. That's the worst part. My job doesn't make me happy. And he knew that. I wouldn't admit it. I was so stubborn. I'm going home now to deal with the finances. My mom's clueless. This plane might as well fly me directly into the fiery pits of hell.

HOLLY

I'll ride in with you after all those years of cheating off your tests.

DOROTHY

Oh, I knew you were. I just never said anything because I didn't want you to get in trouble. You were a lot better to sit next to than all the meth heads and tractor boys.

Dorothy dabs away last tears.

What's the punchline?

HOLLY

Cancer's a bitch.

## THAT GIRL

By Jamie Warren

there's that girl  
that girl over there  
she showed me a picture of george w. bush she'd torn from a newspaper  
and made a face at me  
like an inside joke  
before ripping it up into a hundred pieces  
and scattering them inside her desk  
among the pencil shavings and broken erasers and i dont know  
probably boogers  
i've since become disillusioned with that girl  
i know for a fact she was not above picking her nose  
no matter how elegantly her hair fell over her shoulders  
or how fantastic she was at fixing a bow and arrow from sticks in her yard  
or how confidently she stood in a tunic fashioned out of a sheet and  
her mother's belts  
as she shot her makeshift arrows at a tree  
or how sweetly she laughed when it bounced off  
not like bells or fairy dust but like the sun  
baking clay until it cracks



## CATCH-ALL CASTOFFS

By Kitiara McGuire

Alice found the first earring tangled in Jackie's hair. As she woke, she rolled over and reached out to wake her girlfriend. As her fingers roamed through Jackie's dark silken curls, a tiny silver hoop earring pricked the tip of her finger. She flinched, but Jackie continued snoring, unaware of the snag. Alice carefully combed her fingers back through, working the earring out of the tangled mass. It was cheap and slightly tarnished from over wear. She set it on the nightstand on her way to the shower and didn't think any more of it that morning.

When she returned to the bedroom later that afternoon, she noticed the earring still lying on the nightstand. She went to put it away with its match in the jewelry case, but found no similar earring. She placed it in the catch-all dish she and Jackie had made on their last anniversary, just weeks ago: a blue painted clay model of two mermaids, wrapped in an embrace above a bowl of blue waves.

The next day, Alice woke to a small, sharp pain pressing into her back, Jackie's chest pushing it in. She nudged her girlfriend slightly, causing Jackie to scoot backwards and chuckle at the little pearl earring she found between them.

"Lose something?" Jackie asked, before dropping the earring down the front of Alice's shirt and slipping out of bed.

Alice groaned good-naturedly before retrieving the earring from her shirt. A pearl earring? She'd never worn pearls. Jackie hadn't either, to her knowledge. They certainly weren't in style for a struggling artist/café manager and a piss-poor barista. Alice traced the silver filigree around the earring's post.

"Jacks?" she called to the bathroom. The water stopped, and Jackie's head slipped around the door, her face free of jewelry and makeup.

"Yeah, babe?"

Alice smiled, then shook her head.

"It's nothing."

Jackie looked puzzled for a moment, then shrugged before returning to her morning routine. The mermaids on her thighs stared

Alice down as Jackie walked away.

**“SHE GRIMACED SLIGHTLY, HER MIND SETTling ON ALL THE PIERCED, TATTOOED EXES JACKIE LIKED TO TELL WILD STORIES ABOUT.”**

During her shift at the cafe that morning,

between non-fat lattes and iced mochas, Alice thought about where the earrings might've come from. Alice didn't have any unusual piercings or any tattoos. For that matter, she'd never even dyed her hair before Jackie convinced her to try ombre ends last year. She picked up the next cup, a grande almond mocha. Most of Jackie's friends had a lot of piercings, though—guys and girls. Jackie once told her a story about a guy she'd dated who had piercings on every body part.

She pumped four shots of mocha, two almond, and set up for two shots of espresso. She grimaced slightly, her mind settling on all the pierced, tattooed exes Jackie liked to tell wild stories about. She poured half a pitcher of milk and moved it into the steam wand, pulling the milk to and fro as it frothed. Even if Alice wasn't crazy about all of the exes, Jacks was a great storyteller. It was what had really captured Alice from the beginning. She would need to ask her about the earrings. Maybe she'd have a story for them, too. The pitcher she'd been holding slipped from her hand, and hot milk spread across the counters. Alice dodged the spread and cursed before grabbing a hand towel to wipe it up. Her brow furrowed.

Alice came home to the smell of bleach.

“Jacks?”

Jackie stepped out of the bathroom, her wet orange curls splayed across her shoulders. Orange?

“Hey, hot stuff. How was work?” Jackie asked, moving to kiss her hello.

“It was all right. You've got the night shift? You . . . changed your hair.” Alice dodged the welcome, moving to set her bag down on the bed.

“Oh, yeah. Yeah, you know, I just needed something different. You like it?”

Alice shrugged.

“So, that’s a no?” Jackie moved forward, placing a hand against Alice’s back. Alice noticed the latest earring nestled in the catch-all bowl. “Hey, is everything okay?”

“It’s fine. I just wish you’d, I don’t know, talked to me about it?”

Jackie pulled away. “What’s there to talk about? It’s my hair, isn’t it?”

“Well, yes, but I should have some say. Well, not a say, exactly. I guess it’d just be nice if you asked me about things.” Alice dug through her bag aimlessly, avoiding Jackie’s gaze.

“Is this still about the tattoo?”

“What? No. No, of course not.”

“That was months ago, Al.”

“I know.” Alice stood up straight again, avoiding Jackie’s gaze. She picked up the bloom-shaped earring on her way out of the room. “It’s not about the tattoo.”

And it wasn’t. As she walked through the back streets of their neighborhood, turning the earring over in her fingers, pressing the ridges of the hard plastic petals into the pad of her thumb, Alice mused that the tattoo was something else altogether. Something more important than hair color or even earrings. Sure, Jackie already had a lot of tattoos, but, this one was different.

It shouldn’t matter, she thought to herself. It shouldn’t matter that Jackie got a new tattoo, it shouldn’t bother her, even if it was Jacks’ ex-boyfriend’s face. It was “purely aesthetic.” She knew it had to be him. That guy had more piercings in his face than anyone else in living memory. He had gauges, dermals, industrials, barbells. It shouldn’t have been a big deal to her, though. It was just a tattoo. It wasn’t as if it could’ve been her face, her virgin pores, her smooth and unmarred cheeks. And it wasn’t really as if she had the kind of face that someone would want tattooed onto her body forever.

Alice’s breathing began to feel shaky, and she stopped to lean against a tree. Her chest felt tight. She coughed, and it helped, but the evening was getting chilly and she needed to head home.

“Why mermaids?” Jacks had asked as they’d sat together in the potting studio, their chairs pulled up next to each other at the wheel. They’d been trying to work out the mechanics of their two-year anniversary project: something practical, but different. Something neither of them could’ve bought, even if they’d wanted to or had the money. And something the owner, a friend of Jacks’, wouldn’t be too ashamed of letting them take home. It was on the house, after all.

“You love mermaids.” Alice smiled shyly, and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear.

Jackie laughed. “You, um . . . ”

“I what?”

“C’mere.” Jackie pulled Alice’s face to her, raising her clay-free hand to remove the spot of wet clay Alice had deposited. She held it up, briefly, then her hand darted forward and swiped it across Alice’s nose. Alice gasped, her smile wide. Her eyes flashed. Before she could retaliate, Jackie was kissing her. As she pulled away, she rubbed her nose against Alice’s. Alice laughed at the smear of clay.

“I love *you*.” Jackie grinned. “But the mermaids are cool, too.”

At work the day after her walk, as she wiped down tables and prepared for the first morning rush, Alice tried to keep her distance from Jackie. She’d found another earring at dawn. The weight of the golden owl and its tiny mock topaz eyes felt heavy in the pocket of her black slacks. Jackie sat near the window, interviewing a potential new employee for the night shift. Alice never worked nights, but as a manager, Jackie picked them up regularly. Every once in a while, Jackie or her interviewee would release a peal of laughter, and Alice couldn’t help but glance over. Jackie touched one woman’s hand. Jackie’s arm brushed a potential new guy. Jackie’s hand grazed a bubbly blonde’s wrist. Jackie shared a sip of one guy’s drink. Jackie reached up and examined, admired, caressed a woman’s earring.

Alice’s stomach churned.

Their first night out together, Alice had peered over the lenses of Jackie's oversized glasses, (well, to be fair, she'd pulled the frames down Jackie's face with two fingers and exhaled Pabst) and asked, "So what you're saying is, according to all the stories, all sea sirens are either asexual . . . or lesbians?"

Jackie had laughed and placed her own hand against Alice's cheek. "Well, not quite, but it's definitely a good theory, if sirens existed."

Alice replied, "Well, of course they exist. I'm looking at one now."

Jackie had blushed at that half-senseless, drunken pick-up line. She'd blushed, and Alice had fallen in love. She'd already found Jackie's bawdy jokes, her easy laughter, and her gentle acceptance endearing. Alice really fell for her blush, though, and she'd let her hands trail down from the frames of Jackie's glasses to feel the warmth of her cheeks. Jackie kissed her then. It wasn't their most romantic affair; a bit stumbling, somewhat inebriated, sloppy to say the least. They didn't go beyond kissing that night. When Jackie took Alice home, the two only curled around each other and slept. Alice didn't dream that night.

"How did the interviews go?" Alice asked, sitting down on the couch next to Jackie. Jackie had her journal flipped open, her pen out and her eyes closed. They fluttered open as Alice sat beside her.

"Oh, they went all right, I guess. Why do you ask?" She lay her pen in the spine of the journal, before closing it and setting it in her lap.

"Just wondering if you found anyone for the night shift. You know, so we can both be home more."

"Yeah, maybe." Jackie turned to face her. "Are you all right?"

"Sure." Alice smiled, her heart falling as she stood.

"Well, okay." Jackie flipped her journal open. "Let me know when you're ready to talk about it."

Alice lay on her stomach across the mattress, turning over a delicate jade stud. Whom had it come from? A girl, this one, no doubt. A girl who wore long hippie skirts in tie-dyed teal shades, whose hair was

kept loosely braided and who had dermal piercings in her hips and collar. And, of course, she was gorgeous. Nearly as gorgeous as the man Alice imagined the last silver hoop had belonged to. Either way, more

**“THE NIGHT BEFORE THE FIRST EARRING, ALICE’S EARS WERE RINGING. SOMETHING AWFUL WAS COMING.”**

attractive than Alice. Smarter too, with more interesting lives, ideas and convictions. Jackie had mentioned, once, that Alice was too easily influenced. Her opinions were never strong.

Alice wasn't unattractive, or ignorant. She was pretty enough. Not willowy like Jackie's last girlfriend and not as curvy as Jackie. Somewhere in the middle. Balanced enough to not have a lot of body issues. Well, nothing extreme, anyway. There was nothing at all extreme about her. She was conservative in her passion, reserved and private. So maybe this was part of why Jackie had been so interested in her. She was quiet and thoughtful. The opposite of most of Jackie's previous partners. So maybe that's why Alice never got comfortable. Maybe she wasn't the one.

The last few weeks, Alice's nights had been long and restless. She'd begun having dreams, the kind of paralyzing dreams where your anxieties are bubbling up inside you, eating away at your chest, manifesting before your eyes, and you can't move, you can't breathe. In her dreams, Jackie's tattoos rose up from her body. It wasn't so bad, at first. Alice didn't recognize the first one: a tiny black cat crawled out from Jackie's hair, and if she'd been awake, Alice might've yelled out in surprise. But she wasn't afraid. Asleep, it was all she could do to look it in the eyes. Then the cat started talking. It came from Jackie's first ex. Their kitten together.

The next night, the bat on her left shoulder, drawn by another ex-lover, swooped around the room. Beetles, vines, skulls, shells, everything poured from her body over the weeks since their anniversary, all with a story to tell. Alice didn't catch all the details. By

the fourth night, she found it hard to wake up.

The night before the first earring, Alice's ears were ringing. Something awful was coming. She heard all about trysts and secrets and covered-up lies. Maybe they had truth to them, but she'd never dare ask. Tonight though, she wasn't going to be able to shut out the dreams. She tried to close her eyes but they were already closed; she tried to call out but it was like drowning. Drowning. The room became very still, very quiet, then two mermaids with jagged teeth like sabers crawled from the backside of Jacks' thighs. They were dragging along a porous man. His face was full of—barnacles? Coral?

Earrings. His face was full of earrings.

She never remembered her dreams.

**“SHE TRIED TO CALL OUT BUT  
IT WAS LIKE DROWNING.”**

Alice saw traces of Jackie on everyone around her. The other baristas, the delivery guy, the cheerleaders from the local university, the football stars too. The poet at open mic night, the art professor, the yoga instructor. She saw it in the way Jackie wrote their names on their cups, saw it in her smile as she handed back their change. She noticed their earrings, searching for someone missing one or wearing a mismatched pair. She mentally removed their studs, barbells, plugs. In her mind she stored them in the jar where she kept the rest, under the bed, when the mermaid dish grew too full.

She watched Jackie train the two new hires. Jackie's hand on the new guy's back, pushing into him as he reached for the top shelf. Leaning over the new girl, guiding her hands through the cash drawer. The guy had dreadlocks and an easy smile; the girl wore polka-dot headbands and violet lipstick. He had gauges and six other holes; she had three earrings in each lobe. Alice willed them both to keep ahold of their jewelry. She focused all her energy into ignoring their shared smiles.

"I found another earring," Alice mentioned, turning the dangling triangle round in her hand. It looked like a pair she'd had in high school, but she'd checked her jewelry box. The pair was long gone. "In the bed, this morning." She wanted to say "our bed," but couldn't trust the phrase.

"If you want to say something, just say it." Jackie sighed, weary.

"I don't have anything to say."

"Will you just . . ." Jackie stopped herself, breathing in, her hands clenching, and unclenching. "Just tell me now. Whatever it is, we'll get through it."

"Nothing, it's just weird, is all. That's all." Alice clenched the earring in her fist, bending the post.

They were diamond, pearl, silver, gold, animals, feathers, stars, flowers, studs and hoops. There were sometimes plugs and sometimes spikes. Some were gaudy, others dainty. They spread under the bed and filled in the gaps between the sheets and the bedposts, the bedframe and the mattress. They rattled under the weight of sleep and sex, rattled through Alice's sleeping head. They were torn from ears in bursts of passion: biting, kissing, stroking. They fell from disuse and disappeared without notice, but Alice noticed. They overflowed from the sheets; they filled every open space. They filled up the house like death.

Jackie lay at one end of the couch with her legs crossed and her journal open on her thighs. Alice sat in front of the fireplace across from the couch with her jar of findings. She poured the earrings onto the coffee table then began to set them back in the jar, counting them off as they hit the glass bottom. *Plink. Plink. Plink.*

Jackie asked, "Do you have to do that here? Now?"

"Oh shoot. Now I've lost count." She'd turned the jar over again, allowing the ten or so to spill back out. "I figure if they're going to be around, we may as well keep track of the number."

*Plink. Plink.*

She thought of the jar as a souvenir. The Adultery Trophy.

The Adulthood.

"I really wish you wouldn't." Jackie sat her journal down on the table and stood up. "I'm going to shower."

Alice waited until she heard the water start up, then flipped open the journal. A page of French poetry stared back at her. *Amour, double, triste*. She shut the book. She didn't speak French.

*Plink. Plink. Plink.*

And so it went, the secret they kept between them, the secret no one claimed. Once, maybe twice, Alice sat in the living room late at night, her legs stuck to the pleather couch, and considered sleeping there, but she didn't. She went upstairs, crawled in with Jackie, and then away from her.

That night she had a nightmare. They kept coming back, the mermaids on Jackie's thighs. Their faces were full of holes. They laughed, and her throat became raw, sore. She coughed. They laughed. She coughed. They laughed.

Alice woke up with a sore throat and next to her pillow, earrings. Jackie sat her down in the bedroom, on the end of the bed, and opened up her journal. Her eyes roamed over the patterns and the line work, all the sketch lines that made up Alice's own face. A tattoo, a chest piece. Her own face.

"Why?"

"Why? What do you mean, why, isn't it obvious?" Jackie snapped the book shut.

"I'm not stupid."

"I want you to be part of my story."

"Your story?" Alice felt her jaw clench, unclench.

"Yeah. That's the point, of all these, right?" She gestured to herself, her tattoos.

"What about our story?"

Jackie sighed, and pointed to the jar on the nightstand. "What about

our story? All right, well, what about the story behind those first?"

"Those are yours." Alice glared.

Jackie brushed back her curls. "You're the one who finds them. Just tell me the truth, tell me and we can be done with it."

"I am telling the truth."

"You're not, but it's okay." She took a breath and ran her hand along Alice's cheek. "I'm tired of lies. It's not the cheating or the earrings, it's the lying. That's why I asked."

Finally. She'd felt it coming for weeks, and it hurt all the same. She pulled her knees in toward her chest and leaned forward, pressing down her forehead. A heaving, deep-down pressure pulsed somewhere she couldn't name. Her stomach, maybe. This wasn't a grief she wanted to share, but she didn't have anywhere to go. She wanted to stop but she couldn't. She wanted to wake up. Wake up?

Jackie put her hand on Alice's back and rubbed in small circles that made everything worse. The tears turned into frantic, hyperventilating sobs. Jackie told her to breathe, and she choked, "I'm trying," but exhaling came to her just as easily as inhaling, which is to say, not at all easily.

It was a credit to Jackie's patience, Alice thought, that she didn't just leave her then. In her place, she would've left herself. She'd been a mess for weeks, and over what? She didn't know anymore. But Jackie rubbed her back, her hand moving up and down, up and down, reminding her to breathe while she choked on tears. And just as she thought, well this is lovely, she hiccupped and her teeth rattled against some strange metal and when she opened her mouth—earring in her hand.

"Oh," Alice said.

"Oh," Jackie said.

Alice hiccupped a second time, and another earring raked its way up her throat. She spit delicately into her hand. They listened to the clinking of silver and gold and gemstones. Inside, her belly rattled.

## MORNING EMBERS

By Emily Cross

Every night, I stack logs I can hardly lift.  
I heft them from the stockpile one at a time,  
logs as round as me, rolling them inside.  
I catch my breath over the pile of wood  
laid to rest at the feet of the black stove.  
Two by two, a log cabin to burn.  
I crumple the morning paper, tuck it in  
between the cedar and hickory and walnut.  
I strike the match: flame catches, travels,  
heats my face. I tell myself this fire will last  
but I awake shivering, house creaking with cold,  
the stove full of light ashes where heavy  
logs burned bright though the night.  
I begin again, stacking logs I can hardly lift.

# CHRISTMAS

By Rachel Cooper

The tip of my nose is frozen solid, but inside my fluffy, hand-me-down coat, I am as warm and light as the plaza lights, glowing in strands across the storefronts, winding up magnificent street lamps, blinking against the night. If I cross my eyes a little, the lights blur into a single strand. My sister tugs my hand, leading me down the street past store window displays. In one window, cakes and cookies sit frosted to perfection in red and green. In another window, mannequins sport knit scarves and hats and puffy coats. Everything I see, I want. It's Christmas time, and I can't stop thinking about which presents I'm going to find under the tree on Christmas morning.

Lily and my cousin Stephanie, who are both fourteen and more sophisticated than I am at nine, walk on either side of me, our feet slapping the sidewalk. Stephanie and Lily are wearing matching knit hats with long braids of yarn hanging from each ear flap. I want one of those for Christmas, too.

Lily stops walking and drops my hand, dashing to a glittering shop window.

"Stephy! Look how cute that giant teddy bear is. It's as big as I am." Stephanie joins Lily at the window.

"Want to go in and look at it? I wonder how much it is. I would put that in my bed and cuddle with it every night." We all giggle as Lily grabs my hand again.

"Come on, Rachel. Do you want to go look at all of the toys?" I nod, eager to go inside.

The store is warm and decorated with greenery and more twinkling lights. Shoppers bustle around in coats and hats, picking up toys from one spot and laying them back down in another. Children laugh and shout, and the large teddy bear sits on the highest shelf looking more perfect than anything I have ever seen. He is twice my size, and his brown fur gleams in the soft light. His plump head sits on top of a cherry-red bow that is tied around his neck. Elaborate nutcrackers spin on displays hanging from the ceiling. A miniature mountain town display sits in the center of the store like at Ball Brother's Drug Store

back home. A train whistles through the town, and lights twinkle in houses as the tiny people ice-skate on a glass pond. I am so delighted by this treasure trove of toys.

We make our way to the bear still resting on his throne. Lily stands on her tiptoes to check the price tag. “Forty dollars,” she says and sighs.

My joy deflates a little. Forty dollars is a lot of money, and Mom and Dad are somewhere else down the plaza with Aunt Kathy and Uncle Jim. I know I won’t be taking Teddy home tonight.

Lily and Stephanie decide to browse a cheaper section of the store, and I tag along, envious as I watch a blonde girl drag Teddy down from his shelf by his foot and carry him on her hip to the check-out.

I wish I was like orphan Annie on Christmas. Daddy Warbucks bought her a nice new coat and took her to a show in a horse-drawn carriage and gave her everything her heart desired. Back then, I didn’t know how lucky I was to have parents who put gifts under the tree every year with shiny paper and tags that read “To Rachel, Love Santa” or how fortunate I was not to be orphaned like Annie—how lucky I was to not have Kathy Bates ordering me to clean the halls with a toothbrush or to have a hard-knock life.

I feel happy though, to be in such a magical place—to run my hands over perfectly combed heads of cheeky dolls and to swing the nutcrackers’ arms up and down to make their teeth knock together.

When we leave the store, we are once again three kings walking hand in hand, admiring the dazzling lights of downtown Kansas City. Lily and I walk close together, hands swinging in rhythm with our steps, and I feel her phone buzz in her pocket—a text from Mom inviting us to eat ice cream around the corner. I haven’t stopped smiling, but I grin a little bigger at the thought of a hot fudge sundae.

The ice cream feels so delightful in my warm belly, and I smile thinking about Annie eating ice cream with Daddy Warbucks in her brand new dress. My own daddy grins back at me across his dish of ice cream. “Find anything at the toy store?”

I perk up, excited to tell him all about my adventures. “There was a giant teddy bear—bigger than me—like this big.” I make a wide motion with my arms to illustrate my point. “And we played with the nutcrackers, but this other girl bought the bear because he was too expensive.”

Dad laughs. “How much?” he asks.

“Forty dollars.”

“Forty dollars? I hope it was a fancy bear.”

“He was. He had a big red bow and everything. I wanted to bring him home and put him in my bed and cuddle with him every night. Do you think Santa will bring me one if I ask?”

“Well, we’ll just have to see, won’t we?”

“How many days until Christmas, Dad?”

“Five.” Five sounds like a long time. I can’t wait that long for Teddy. Dad sees the look on my face.

“Only five days. Four days until Christmas Eve and then one day after that.” His logic makes me feel better. I am getting sleepy with all the talk about Christmas and a belly full of ice cream. Dad removes my dish and scoops me into his arms.

## **“I PERK UP, EXCITED TO TELL HIM ALL ABOUT MY ADVENTURES.”**

I close my eyes on the car ride home—dozing, but not quite drifting into deep sleep. My toes and my nose are chilly, but my fluffy coat still envelops me in warmth. I am in a cocoon, collar up to my chin and hem reaching almost to my ankles. Lily nudges me awake when we drive into town.

“Rachel, wake up. Dad’s taking us to see the singing Santa.”

Sleepy as I am, I’m not going to pass up a chance to see my favorite house in Atchison at Christmas time. When we turn the corner, Dad rolls down the windows in the van, letting in the cool night air. The house is lit up from the sidewalk to the gazebo in the back yard. Large, glowing letters read “Jesus Is The Reason For The Season,” and a large

nativity scene sits atop the hill next to the house. The steps leading up to the front door are adorned with flickering lights, and beside the front door, in his place of honor, stands a life-like, life-size Santa in his glass box, waving his arms and singing “We Wish You a Merry Christmas.” His soft music drifts in through the open windows, and I shiver as the cold finally penetrates my coat.

I think Dad notices my shiver because he rolls up the windows, but we sit, enjoying the décor, filled with holiday spirit. As we drive away, I turn and watch the lights, crossing my eyes all the way down the street until I can't see the blur anymore. Then Dad starts in on “We Wish You a Merry Christmas,” and we all sing along.



## MY ONLY LOVE

By Emily Ritcheson

He didn't pass the salt. He just sat there, gnawing at the pork roast and pretending he liked it. He didn't look at me. He hadn't looked at me all night. He hadn't looked at me when I first walked through the door and out of the late November chill. He hadn't looked at me when Grace had peeled off my coat, not even when Grace had forced him to pour me a glass of wine.

"Let's get some color in your cheeks," she twittered. "Then we can have a real party!"

Sweat trickled down the back of my neck.

**"I WAS HIS ONLY CONCERN. I WAS THE ONLY THING THAT MATTERED."**

Tonight was supposed to be the night. Just last week we had made the plan, huddled close together on my couch. Jack would do most of the talking. He would carefully explain to Grace that it wasn't her fault—that we had fallen in love on our own. I would sit on the sidelines, apologizing and most likely trying not to cry. We had smoked the same cigarette to toast the plan and then turned the lights off.

Jack understood me the way that other men didn't. He understood that I was scared and preferred to let others take charge. He could make my coffee just the way I liked it. He made me feel safe. Before we'd lit that cigarette, before we'd even made the plan, he'd told me that the divorce papers were already filed. His voice was deep and steady, so I knew he wasn't lying. He'd told me that Grace wasn't going to be part of the picture anymore. I was his only concern. I was the only thing that mattered. His eyes had been shining like blue stars when he told me that, and I couldn't help touching his face. I felt needed. I felt safe.

My body shivered as I sat at that table, forced to make small talk with Grace and pretend like nothing was wrong. Jack still ignored me. I didn't feel safe anymore. I felt naked on a diving board; one more step and everyone would be horrified at the sight.

Were we still going through with the plan?

Grace dabbed at each end of her mouth with a separate corner of her napkin.

"I'll be right back with the cobbler," she said.

Immediately after she disappeared behind the kitchen door, my eyes darted to Jack. I whispered his name, desperate.

He glanced at me for a second. His eyes, which last week had been shimmering and passionate, now turned steely and unwavering.

“I can’t. I just can’t.”

For the next thirty years that I lived next door to Grace and her husband, he never apologized. It doesn’t matter. I wouldn’t have accepted it anyhow.



## TIRZA AT THE BEACH

By Shelly Romero

On a cloudless day  
she emerged from the waters,  
Aphrodite reborn.

She walked slowly,  
fertile hips swaying,  
enjoying the feel of the warm sand,  
the small shells under foot.

She ran a delicate hand  
through wet, black curls  
whipped by the wind  
that encircled her waist.

Her wet one-piece  
glistened like silk,  
against her curved form.

Artemis interrupted.  
The click of a picture  
made her stop.  
An Actaeon man  
had watched her bathe.

She looked up, frowned,  
her eyes glimmering  
like honey brown tourmaline:  
the fury of a goddess within.

## MANGOS EN EL PULGUERO

By Shelly Romero

My mami hands me the plastic tub.  
Anxious, I watch the black pepper swirl in the cloudy vinegar.  
The mango slices are orange-yellow, perfectly ripe.

She pops the lid open  
releasing the sharp smell of vinegar into the air  
*Tranquila*, she says  
and hands me a plastic fork.

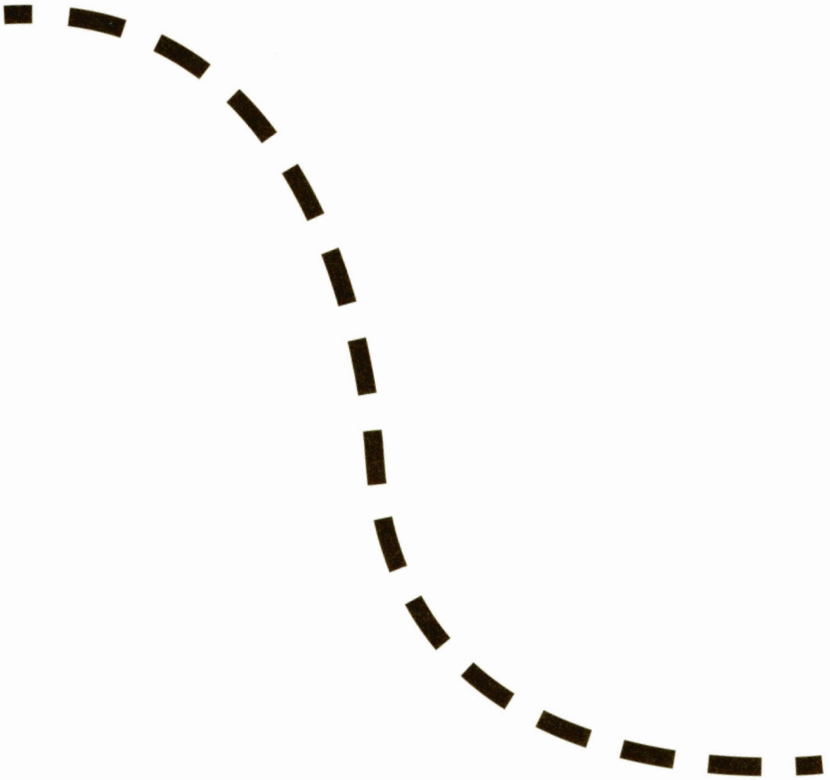
I poke the mango,  
carefully lifting it from the tub.  
I bring it to my mouth,  
let the vinegar run down the side of my hand

the mango is sour and then sweet,  
a perfect contradiction.  
I eat slices one-by-one,  
savoring the taste, the feel of the fleshy fruit

until there is nothing left  
but the black pepper and vinegar at the bottom of the tub.

It is always a good day  
when mangos are bought at the *pulguero*.

X



## MAPS OF OUR LIVES

By Coral Hoelscher

As the mustard-colored walls started to swirl, they brought in browns, greens, and grays, which transformed into a deep forest, with dangerous cliffs and dark mountains. I sat on what was once a bed with built-in dressers but was now a tattered tent balanced on a rock, a few feet from the forest floor. Julian, who sat on the forest floor, looked up at me, brown eyes filled with fear.

“Here’s the map. I think we should go this way,” Julian stated, pointing toward the end of tree line, which was simultaneously the end of the bedroom.

“That’s far away,” I said. “But, if we pack enough food, we will make it fine before the sun goes down.” I started loading my pink Hello Kitty backpack with cheese sticks, a Ziploc bag full of homemade beef jerky, two waters, and four Capri Suns. Food was always the most vital part of an adventure. I squished my pillow in last and nodded to Julian. The nod implied, “Our supplies are packed. Let’s get going.”

I double-checked the crinkled brown map. If we went through Gondor, we would have to trek through the mountains to get to the City of the Corsairs. Yet, if we went in-between Gondor and Mordor, we would have an easier trek physically, but more dangers from Orcs. I didn’t think that sounded ideal, so I decided to agree with Julian. We would head straight through the forest.

I hopped down on the floor next to Julian, handed him back the map, and looked around the dresser for the other two adventurers. Khaymen was putting together another LEGO house as he patiently waited for my word on the next move. I had interrupted his window design, but he didn’t mind. He knew we were on to better things.

“You two stay here. I’m going to find Jaden,” I said. I left our Middle Earth bedroom to find the youngest of us. He was still too little to understand the game we were playing, but I liked including him, sometimes using him as a prop, if allowed. Jaden was with my mom in the upstairs living room. She was rocking him to sleep while she filled out paperwork. They both looked tired, so I swiftly ran back downstairs.

“Jaden can’t play right now. It’s not safe for him in here anyway.” I was back in our fantasy world, ready to take on whatever kept us from the city. Khaymen and Julian stayed on either side of me, my body guards, even though we were all similar in height. We stepped over LEGOs, which our imaginations transformed into bugs and rocks. Carefully, each of us helped one another over boulders, or, in reality, desk chairs. When we came across a bunch of wild animals, unafraid, we threw them in the air, far away from our path, their stuffed bodies making soft thuds on the floor.

After circling the room, we came to the end of the forest. I sat down with our knapsack, taking out our supplies. I passed each of us a cheese stick, two pieces of beef jerky, and a Capri Sun. I made sure our rations were fair, otherwise a real battle would begin between Khaymen and Julian. Being the oldest, I usually decided on what the next step was.

**“WE STEPPED OVER LEGOS, WHICH OUR IMAGINATIONS TRANSFORMED INTO BUGS AND ROCKS.”**

“Okay boys, we have enough time and food left to get to The Hidden Door. The only problem with the door is that it has a password. It’s only a little bit away. Are you ready?”

I repacked our items, and we left our trash on the floor. We had walked a few feet to the closet, and looked up at the closed brown door. In my mind it was a large, gray stone covered with green ivy and rock monsters hid behind it.

“Julian, you can say the password,” I said. Khaymen had gone last time so it was fair. Julian stared at the door and said, “Ring,” without hesitation. I turned the brass knob slowly and pushed the door inward. Julian looked pleased with himself. I was proud of him, too. His password could have been any word, but he was smart to stay on track with the theme, even if he didn’t know that at his young age. Khaymen and I were the first to step into the dark closet. We looked around slowly, unable to see what was lying ahead.

“Goblin!” Khaymen yelled, and the three of us started kicking and

swinging at the air, accidentally hitting each other, until we were all satisfied that the goblin was down. Clothing had fallen from their hangers during our battle, but picking them up would have to wait. We had to check the toy chest to make sure there wasn't anything evil lurking in there. The back corner of the closet held the white chest, which I felt for sure was holding something awful. Khaymen stepped forward and started to lift the lid slowly when we heard a moan and a saw burst of light in the room! My mom stood in the doorway with Jaden balanced on her hip.

"Mom! Why did you turn on the light? We were about to see what was in the chest," I whined.

"It was going to be a sword!" Khaymen said.

Julian disagreed. "No! It was going to be a skeleton!"

The two of them started bickering, which happened a lot toward the end of our games since everyone started to get cranky before naptime.

"You guys have ten minutes and then you need to lie down. After naptime you all are going to help me pick up this room; it's a disaster," Mom said as she looked at the mess.

Khaymen and I made the scowling face of two kids who hated cleaning their room. Julian didn't hate cleaning yet.

We turned off the closet light and returned to the chest. Khaymen slowly opened the lid, and instead of old Halloween costumes and dress up items, the chest was filled with gold coins and jewels waiting to be stolen away. I took out a silver tiara lined with emeralds. Julian and Khaymen each found their own treasures, which we took out of the dark lair to admire.

"Time's up, kiddos," my mom said coming back into our room. We went to our separate beds and my mom tucked us in with our prizes.

We never made it to the city. I started to think how we would travel there next time. We would have to cross a river, so we'd need a raft or boat and more cheese sticks. Drifting off to sleep, I dreamt about where our map would later take us.

## J A Z Z

By Rachel Cooper

There's somethin'  
kinda like jazz  
about the rain.  
Kinda like a man  
pluckin' real smooth  
on the bass, somethin'  
that makes you happy  
when it's there again.

Miz Fitzgerald and Mister Armstrong  
ain't plain  
when they be-bop  
and doo-dot.  
And those bops  
and those dots they  
chase each other  
through the mic  
out to me.  
And that somethin' about jazz  
feels like rain.

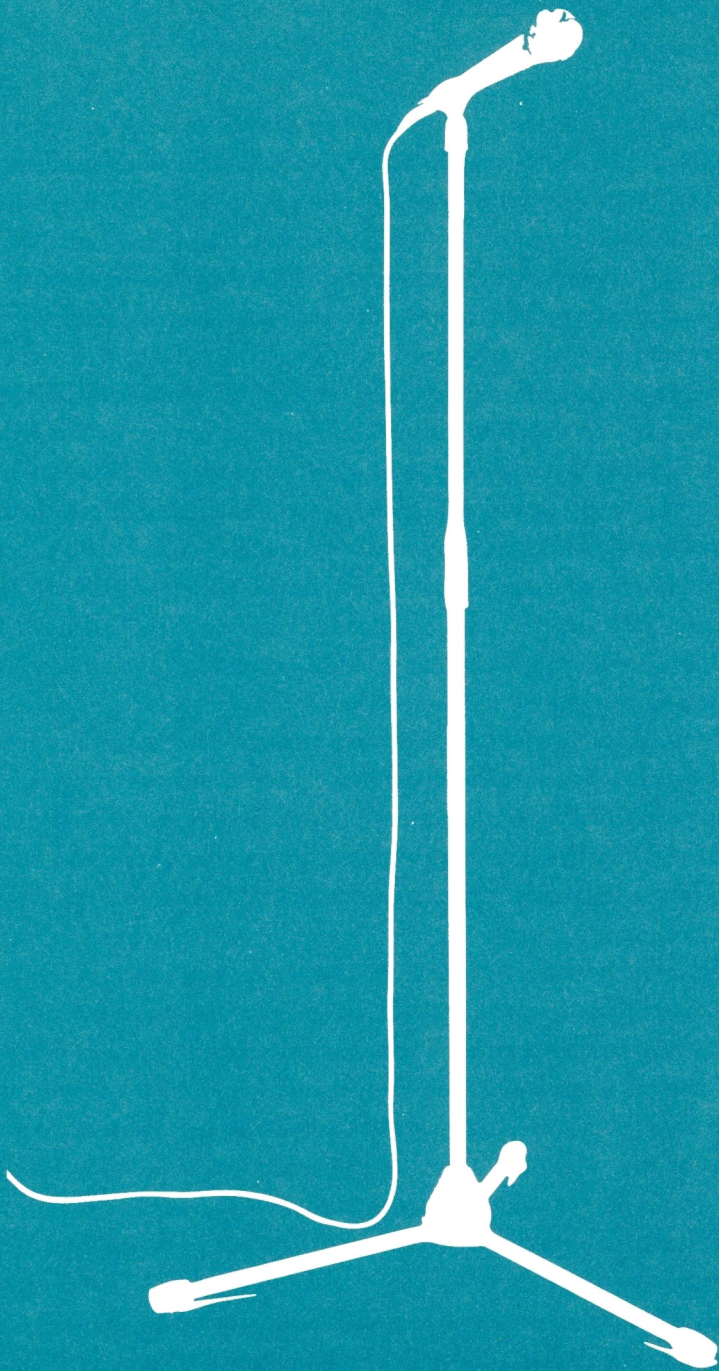
I wait for the A train,  
and I listen to them wheels  
come rumblin' over the loose  
rails at the quickest pace,  
and I'm ready to board  
when it's here again.

Frank and Bing  
got those cool blue eyes  
that make a woman  
insane,  
and I wouldn't mind

takin' a pair of those eyes  
back to my place,  
and makin somethin'  
like jazz music  
like rain.

I guess somethin' about boys  
like Fats and Louis  
keeps me sane,  
and girls  
like Ella and Billie  
no woman can replace.  
Besides—  
what if we couldn't  
switch on the radio  
while smokin' our cigarettes  
and say, "Ah!  
There's the Old Girl again!"

Somethin' about  
that familiar refrain—  
blue skies  
smilin' down on my face  
don't mean much  
cause there's somethin'  
kinda like jazz about the rain,  
and I'm sure happy  
to see it's here again.



## KARAOKE NIGHT

By Jamie Warren

“I hate your name,” the boy next to me says, as he plays with my hair. He says it like he’s doing me a favor by finally telling me how he feels. Like it’s a line. Like he’s planning on giving me a new name. How romantic.

“Okay,” I answer, flatly, because what else is there to say? Normal people don’t go around critiquing the names of others, especially as pillow talk.

“Aggie. Agatha.” He tries my name out like it’s a free sample. It’s not. It cost me sixty-five dollars for the price of the court fee to get it changed; a whole day’s pay that could have been spent on much needed clothes, hair dye, hormones, or groceries. “It makes you sound so old,” he continues. “You’re not an old lady. You’re a hot, sexy, little . . .”

“What was your name again? Started with an ‘M’, right? Michael? Matthew?”

“Max,” the boy says, obviously a little hurt I didn’t remember. I did remember.

“Max! That’s right.” I laugh. “Makes you sound like a fucking kindergartner, man. The kind that picks his nose and pulls on girls’ pigtails. Shit. You’ve got the name of an asshole right there, bro.”

“All right, chill out,” he says, pulling his arm off my waist and scratching a dry patch of skin below his knee as he broods. “You don’t have to be such a bitch.”

“You’re lucky you’re not shit in bed, because you’re shit in everything else,” I grumble, mostly to myself. I hoist myself up and grab my shirt from where I’d folded it neatly on top of my shoes.

“I’m good at math,” he mumbles defensively.

“Oh, *congrats*,” I respond, too soon, too sarcastic. It’s obvious he’s gotten to me. “You should combine the two. Do a dual-degree. One titty, two titty,” I say, pointing to my bare chest.

He leans back against his grimy wall. “What tits? I don’t see any tits in this room.”

I hit him a little too hard for someone who’s trying for the reputation of enigmatic. Being aloof is not in my nature.

I leave his dorm room still working my shirt over my head. People in the hallway gawk at my half-nakedness. One girl goes bright red when she sees me. She's got her parents with her.

"Oh my," her graying mother gasps with a delicate Southern lilt. The father, just as gray if not more so, places a tight hand on his wife's shoulder and averts his eyes.

I shoot them a lazy sneer, the kind I spent hours rehearsing in front of the mirror in high school. It's immature, but I'm still trying haphazardly to recover my cool.

Somehow I manage to get my arms into both sleeves of my jacket before barreling outside. "You've got the grace of a water buffalo," mom used to say, when she still knew what to say to me. When I told her that was why I changed my middle name to "Grace", she just gave me a tight-lipped smile and asked me to clear the table.

I curse as I dig into my pocket, searching for my car keys. Instead I pull out my old lighter. I lick my chapped lips, tempted to seek out the nearest cigarette. Tempted to pull out my phone and call up the douchebag who gave me the lighter in the first place and ask if he wants to hook up. My breath fogs around me, and a thousand tiny voices, like angels, sing out a chorus of *Don't be stupid, you needy loser!* The Choir of Reason then leads into a round of *You're pathetic, Agatha Grace!* as I make my way to my car.

"You're pathetic, Agatha Grace," I sing/hum with them, tapping an impatient beat against my steering wheel as I shove my keys into the ignition and start the car. I back up and drive out into the street in one carelessly fluid motion. I navigate my way to the shitty hipster bar where I became a regular as soon as I hit twenty-one. It's a lot easier to be a drunk when you can do it legally.

There's something about driving that makes my mind wander to places in my head I don't want to examine. No matter how many papers I write on compartmentalization and intrusive thoughts, no matter how loud I have my radio blasting, like a sadistic hypnotist the

winding wintery roads have me at their mercy.

I stop at a red light, and I'm back to the first night, when we lay together in the back seat of my car. Our legs were cramping from such a small space, but he didn't seem to care so I didn't either. When he pulled out a pack of cigarettes, I couldn't find the words to tell him I didn't let people smoke in my car.

"Got a light?"

I shook my head. "Don't smoke."

The words I'd said numerous times before now sounded ridiculous out loud. I almost wanted to apologize. He handed me a cigarette anyway.

"It's a post-sex tradition. You have to do it. For the sake of the dying cliché." He raised his cigarette, toasting the affair, and then brought it between his lips. I took the liberty of staring at his mouth as he searched through the pockets of his jacket, which had been flung onto the floor during our passionate tryst. His lips were still wet and swollen from my impatient kisses.

"Here," he said after he'd lit our cigarettes. He offered me the lighter. It wasn't anything special. Black metal with an iridescent shine.

"Don't smoke," I said again weakly, resisting the urge to cough and hoping he wouldn't see the way my eyes were watering from the smoke.

"Everyone needs a lighter," he insisted.

Max won't stop texting me, so I turn off my phone and watch my fellow scum filter in as wintry dusk falls, rating them from one to ten for looks, potential douche level, and likeliness to please a lady in bed.

A burly, bearded ginger guy catches me staring and then doesn't break eye contact like the rest of the bar patrons typically do. He flashes an enviably white smile and heads for the bar where I'm sitting.

"What's a pretty girl like you doing here all alone?" the guy asks, sliding onto the stool next to me.

My eyebrows shoot up in surprise. Wow, way to keep your cool, Aggie. I'm not used to guys being so direct with me.

“Oh, you know. Procrastinating. Typical college student wives,” I say, smiling.

He’s not greasy enough to fit my usual type, but he’s got a charm to him. He looks like he reads a lot of Shakespeare and listens to Vampire

**“HE TRIES MY NAME  
OUT LIKE IT’S A FREE  
SAMPLE. IT’S NOT.”**

Weekend and thinks himself an original.

“How are you doing on that psych paper?” he asks, and I’m struck with the realization that he knows me.

Even worse, he’s in at least one of my classes. I feel awful that I didn’t recognize him, but before I can apologize, he’s moved to the table behind me, where a short, perky blonde is packing up her bag.

“What’s a pretty girl like you doing here all alone?” he asks her, just as smoothly as he asked me.

“Robbie!” she exclaims, throwing her arms around him.

I avert my eyes in embarrassment, apparently being the last to find out I wasn’t being hit on. Within seconds I’m surrounded.

“Terryn, you know Agatha.”

I swear I have never seen this girl in my entire life.

“Yeah! We’re in statistics together.” She waves at me even though our faces are less than three feet apart. God, I hate when people do that.

“You can call me Aggie,” I say with a polite smile.

“You’re a psych major, right?”

“With a minor in music theory.”

“Ooh, how exotic.” Her eyes widen and she moves her face closer to mine. I automatically lean away from her. “Your eyeliner is seriously amazing, holy shit. How did you get the point so crisp?”

“Um, I watch a lot of makeup tutorials.”

“Are you here for karaoke?”

“Huh?”

“Every Thursday night is karaoke night! That’s why me and Robbie are here.”

“Robbie and I,” Robbie corrects.

“Shut your goddamn shit mouth, Robbie,” she spits back. I glance

between the two of them. Terryn's fury melts almost immediately. She smiles sunshine at me, and I'm reminded of my several untreated cavities. "So are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Here for karaoke night, silly!"

"Christ, no."

"But you're a music major —"

"Minor," Robbie corrects.

"Can't you sing?" she continues, ignoring Robbie. "You love music, don't you?"

"Uh, I mean. I guess? But I can't sing. Not in front of people."

"A-ggie, A-ggie," Terryn starts to chant, clapping out the syllables in my name. "A-ggie! A-ggie!"

"A-ggie! A-ggie!" Robbie joins in, and soon I've got a two-person cheerleading squad on my back trying to coerce me into making an ass of myself in public.

I shout "no" back at them until they're practically in tears, and then someone taps on a mic and the speakers scream out feedback. I use the opportunity to discreetly slip under their radars. I order another beer and watch sad American Idol rejects line up near the edge of the stage.

On stage, this cool chick I recognize as a bartender croons along to some song I've never heard of, but apparently everyone but me knows the chorus to.

Once she steps down and the scarce audience gives her uproarious applause, my newfound friends swarm around her and bring her back to me, like she's a ritualistic sacrifice. If I'm a god, I'm a disappointing one who doesn't do housecalls. I consider making a run for it, but I hesitate and then it's too late.

"This is Aggie!" Terryn shouts excitedly, practically bouncing on her heels. "She's a psych major, too!"

The girl nods in my general direction. "Nice to meet you. I'm Monica." Holy shit. So cool.

"Aggie's going to sing karaoke with us tonight!"

I blink, and realize I've been staring at Monica's flawless pokerface for way too long.

"Whoa, whoa. I am not," I say.

Terryn frowns. "But we cheered for you."

I cross my arms. "I'm not getting on that stage."

Thank god for Robbie, who snatches Terryn away to sing a heart-wrenching duet of "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun." This leaves me alone with Monica. She pulls a pair of sunglasses from her purse and puts them on, still sitting next to me in the dimly lit bar. Could she get any cooler?

Terryn refuses to give the mic up to anyone else once their song ends. After she almost starts a bar fight, the guy in charge of the event reluctantly allows her one more song. They stumble back nearly twenty minutes later and she pulls me into an affectionate headlock.

"Aggie," she whispers to me, stroking my hair. "Promise me you'll sing next time."

By this time in the night, after too many beers, I'd have promised her a damn pony if that's what she'd asked me for. I nod. "I promise." She squeals with joy and kisses my forehead before letting me go.

I lie on my bed, on top of unwashed sheets. I think about what it was like to come out the first time, not because I want to, but because it's three in the morning, the bar is closed, and I've got homework and laundry I should be doing instead. Right now mulling over the uncomfortable memory feels easier than doing any of that.

Mom didn't know what I meant at first. She thought I was saying I was gay, and that I wanted to drop out of high school and become a drag queen. Once I was done assuring her that wasn't the case and she was done crying her eyes out, she said something along the lines of, "Your father will be home soon. Put on some real clothes and come help me with dinner."

To my surprise, Dad wasn't nearly as difficult about it as Mom was. He told me later it was her guilt that made her so hard to talk to. I said

I didn't give a fuck whether she was feeling guilty or not, and he told me to watch my language.

When I came out to Dad, he sat across from me instead of next to me on the hideous orange floral-print couch that was the centerpiece of our abode. This was about six months after coming out to Mom. This was after I'd grown my hair long and before I cut it short, and I had to busy myself with braiding and unbraiding it to keep from crying.

"You're not gonna get weird about it like Mom?" I'd asked when the worst was over, letting a nervous giggle escape my lips. I'd originally had lipstick on, which was what started the conversation in the first place, but I'd chewed my fingernails during his little "I'll love you no matter what" speech, and now the blinding fuschia was smeared all over my teeth and caked into my cuticles.

"I'm just glad you're not on drugs," he said, with an easy shrug. I forced a smile, making a mental note to leave my bong at a friend's house from now on. He leaned forward. "Do you need us to start setting aside money for, uh, surgery?"

"Oh god," I'd answered quickly. "No. Please no. Not right now. I'm not ready to think about that." That was a lie; I'd thought plenty about it. In fact, all the time.

"Do you know what day it is, Agatha Grace?" Robbie asks. He told me last Sunday he thought my full name was beautiful and asked if it was okay if that was what he called me. I'd nodded and felt butterflies in my stomach. Not the flirty kind. The kind I got whenever I hung out with these dweebs. I haven't had a best friend since sixth grade.

"A Thursday?"

"That's right. And do you know what that means?"

I shrug, playing hard to get, even though I can guess what's coming.

"*Karaoke!*" Terryn screams into my ear.

"Jesus, Terryn," I say, shoving her away.

"This is the night! This is the night Aggie sings for us!"

"What the hell," I try to grumble apathetically, but I end up smiling

instead. Damn, having such nice friends is really messing with my reputation as an icy bitch.

“You *promised!* Isn’t that right, Monica? Didn’t Aggie promise the first time we ever talked?”

I turn to Monica, pleading with my eyes to save me from this first-hand-embarrassment hell. She stares back at me suspiciously.

“You did promise,” she says.

I look at each of their eager faces, and then put my hands up in surrender and sigh dramatically. “Oh, fine. If you insist. I’ll sing for you.”

Terryn and Robbie make a show of high-fiving each other, and Monica rolls her eyes at them. They cart me over to the back of the bar as the previous song ends.

“Just like *High School Musical*,” Terryn whispers, too softly for her to have been talking to me. I step onto the stage, disoriented by adrenaline and peer pressure. I snatch the mic away from the less-than-decent sap who was on before me, my inevitable bar fame guaranteed.

And then the universe rips away the metaphorical chair (representing my self-esteem) and lets my metaphorical ass (representing my literal ass) hit the floor.

That’s right, folks. There he is. Lighter Boy, with his bad dye job and fingerless gloves and pretentious music taste and the Prince Albert that would always catch my hair during blowjobs. There he is in all his disgusting hipster glory sitting at the table closest to the stage. The man who singlehandedly got me hooked on cigarettes and then quit cold turkey a week before breaking up with me. The man whose couch I lived on for the entirety of junior year. The man who talked me out of killing myself last winter, and within the same day single handedly talked me into getting half a dolphin tattooed under my ribs. You’re fucked, Agatha Grace! the Choir of Reason sings in my ear, this time with an impressive four-part harmony. My only consolation is that he’s as surprised to see me as I am to see him. Actually, that might make it worse.

“Um” is all I can manage before I attempt to put the mic back into the stand and wander off stage as casually as possible, but Terryn beams

brightly and catches me in her surprisingly strong arms. She herds me back into the spotlight and places the mic in my shaking hands.

**“THE BEGINNING CHORDS OF  
ABBA’S ‘DANCING QUEEN’  
FINALLY COME TO MY RESCUE.”**

“I think I might need another drink,” I say, then realize I’m talking directly into the mic. The audience

is nearly invisible because of the stage lights, but I can feel their eyes on me. Lighter Boy’s in particular burn holes clean through me. Someone standing in the back clears his throat awkwardly.

The beginning chords of ABBA’s “Dancing Queen” finally come to my rescue. The first word leaves my lips, out of tune and screechy, and I burst into tears. I don’t stop. I make it to the second verse, and then the song unleashes something inside of me: the near-demonic choreography of a dance left over from a middle school summer camp talent show. Vague muscle memory tugs my limbs around mechanically through a Frankensteinian combination of amateur ballet and the Macarena.

*“You can dance, you can jive!”* I howl miserably as I stumble through a jazz square. *“Having the time of your life!”* The irony of the situation is not lost on me. I can do nothing but hope Terryn, with her disturbingly powerful upper-body strength, will pull me off stage soon.

My mascara is streaming down my face by the time the music fades. I freeze with my fist in the air, shaking it hysterically at whatever god destined me for this public humiliation. It’s only then that I feel Terryn’s steady arms embrace my torso.

Somehow we end up in the bathroom, and she holds back my hair as I wretch into the toilet.

“I don’t get it,” she says. “You only had like two beers. Was it nerves?”

I look up at her, squinting in the ugly fluorescent lights that make her hair shimmer like pixie dust. It might just be the shadow on her face, but it looks like she’s got a wicked shiner.

“What happened?” I ask weakly, pointing at her eye.

“Oh, uh.” She laughs awkwardly. “You kind of punched me in the face while you were dancing.”

I stare at her. “I don’t even remember . . .”

“No, you wouldn’t. You were in the middle of an aggressive pirouette. You seemed pretty out of it.”

I open my mouth to apologize, but stomach bile forces itself up into my throat, and I vomit again. She rubs my back as if to let me know she understands.

When my guts have been properly shaken up, Terryn, being the brilliant, freakishly strong angel she is, pulls a disposable toothbrush out of her purse and hands it to me. She makes sure I’m all cleaned up before allowing me outside again.

I make a beeline for the bar, planning on drinking until I’m swimming in unconsciousness and the traumatizing events of the night have become as hazy and forgettable as a bad dream.

Monica and Robbie are waiting for us. Monica pushes her sunglasses up to rest on the top of her head and gives me an approving smile. There go those platonic butterflies again.

“That was funny as shit, Aggie,” she says.

“Yeah, for real.” Robbie’s grin fades responsibly. “Are you okay though? Do you need to see a doctor? An exorcist?”

“I’m fine. Just. Spotted a rare ex-boyfriend. Kinda threw me.”

“Um, he more than ‘threw you off,’” Terryn cuts in, using the most wildly exaggerated air quotes I’ve ever seen. “That was some eighth level of hell shit. Which one is he?”

I sigh. “Come on, guys. He probably ducked out while we were in the bathroom” I say, before spotting him out of the corner of my eye. “Shit. He’s still here.”

Terryn looks around wildly. “Where? I’ll fight him.”

“Careful. She will,” Robbie warns me, wrapping an arm around Terryn’s waist just in case.

“Over there. By the door. Please don’t do anything.”

Lighter Boy leans against the wall, listening intently to a redhead

goth reading aloud from her dream journal. Monica leans forward next to me and snaps a picture of him with her phone.

“I’ll put him on the bar’s spit list.”

“Is that what I think it is?” I ask warily.

“We keep pictures of asshole customers and spit in their drinks every time they come in.”

“Ew!” Terryn squeaks.

“That is so immature,” Robbie mutters.

Monica shrugs. “You used to be on it, Aggie.”

I laugh awkwardly. “You’re joking, right?”

“Nah. You called me a skank once.” She shrugs again like it’s no big deal. “You were really drunk. But we’re cool now.”

I make a face. “Thanks, I guess?”

She nods once and pushes her sunglasses back down in front of her eyes.

We leave the bar when the night gets stale and we run out of things to talk about. Robbie and Monica split off in the direction of the apartment they share a couple of blocks away. Terryn hooks arms with me and leans her blonde head against my shoulder as we cross the parking lot.

“Let’s do this again next week,” Terryn suggests.

I press my lips together, absolutely repulsed by the idea of ever showing my face in that bar again. We stop at my car, and she looks at me

**“ARE YOU OKAY THOUGH? DO  
YOU NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR?  
AN EXORCIST?”**

expectantly.

“Sure,” I say.

“And if Mr. Shitpants is there again, we’ll challenge him to a sing off, and kick him to the curb.” She demonstrates for me what that might possibly look like and ends up slamming her sneakered foot into the car next to us. The alarm rings out, shattering the quiet of the frigid college town night.

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

By Haley Padilla

When the theme “Do It Yourself” was chosen for *Harbinger 2015*, I was very excited. The idea of taking your work, life, interests—and the world—into your own hands and doing things yourself is an incredibly powerful message.

In the spirit of DIY, I took to finding images, cut them out and arranged them until they evoked the right feeling. The images represent having your own perspective, independence, self expression and artistic vision. The punk and zine feel this magazine has was very inspiring. It is an area of design that I do not often get the chance to work in. This design aesthetic allowed me to branch out creatively and do something new, which I enjoyed.

I am honored to have been able to bring *Harbinger 2015* to life. Each of the pieces has its own voice and energy that the authors so easily express. While flipping through the pages, I hope you also feel their excitement, spirit and passion.

# CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES



## MAYA ALPERT

a native Californian, is a junior English major and a member of Sigma Tau Delta. This is her first semester as an assistant editor and first publication in *Harbinger*. She previously attended Metropolitan Community College of Kansas City, where her short fiction and poetry was featured in their literary magazine, *Shorelines*. Alpert is currently pursuing internships and a future career in publishing.



## HEATHER BEGER

is a junior creative writing major with an emphasis in scriptwriting. She is also minoring in digital filmmaking. Berger is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and her play "Snowman" was one of the winners in the 2012 Scriptwriting Competition. Her play "Delayed" was the product of a 24-Hour Play Festival and will be her third *Harbinger* publication.



## AUTUMN BROWN

is a sophomore film major and creative writing minor from Tennessee. She is on staff at *Stephens Life* as a photographer and enjoys snapping photos whenever she can. She aspires to be an acclaimed film director and comedic performer who spreads the joy of laughter.



## JESS COIL

is a theater arts major with an emphasis in technical theater, working with lights, set and sound. She enjoys writing plays, knitting, and eating pizza. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



## RACHEL COOPER

is a junior creative writing major from Atchison, Kansas. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta, Alpha Lambda Delta, and an assistant editor on the *Harbinger* staff. This is her first publication in the magazine. In the future, she hopes to live the life of a starving artist and pursue a career as a writer.



## EMILY CROSS

is a junior creative writing major with a minor in women's studies. She is president of The Human Experience: QSA at Stephens College, vice president of The Dramatists League, student advocate on Stephens College's Gender Diversity Task Force, and a resident assistant. She cares about friends, pizza, and destroying capitalism.



## CORAL HOELSCHER

is a senior English major. She is Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta and an associate editor of *Harbinger*. She attended the 2015 National English Convention where she read her short fiction piece, “Sticks”. This is her second publication in *Harbinger*. Hoelscher spends her free time reading and crocheting, even in public.



## FIONA KERR

is a graphic design student aiming to enter the video game industry as a texture or concept artist. She is the president of an on-campus book club called “The Dead Writers Society.” She also writes and performs poetry with the Poets of Infinity Club. In her down time she enjoys playing video games and spending time with her big fluffy dog.



## MINUETTE LAYER

is a sophomore creative writing major with an emphasis in scriptwriting and a minor in film and theater. She is founder and president of the Dramatist League and a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Alpha Lambda Delta.



## JESSICA LONG

graduated from Stephens College in December of 2014 with a bachelor's degree in creative writing. She is currently volunteering at True North and has been accepted into the Masters of Family counseling program at North Central University.



## KITIARA MCGUIRE

is a junior creative writing major and graphic design minor. This is her second year with *Harbinger* and “Catch-All Castoffs” is her first published short story. She is *Harbinger’s* 2015 Editor-in-Chief, a creative executive at Creative Ink, and the programming chair for Stephens’ QSA. McGuire is passionate about intersectional feminism, storytelling, illustration, and coffee— especially coffee.



## MAGGIE MYERS

a creative writing major, is president of Sigma Tau Delta. She has read her poetry at the Sigma Tau Delta conference in 2014 and 2015. This is her second publication in *Harbinger*. Her micro-mini pig Truffles has inspired her writing and earned her a Pig Mom of the Year award.



## HALEY PADILLA

is a senior graphic design major and digital film minor. She is a creative and account executive at Creative Ink. She has produced work for the Roots N Blues N BBQ Festival, United Way, Citizen Jane Film Festival and the Warehouse Theatre.



## EMILY RITCHESON

is a freshman at Stephens majoring in creative writing. She is originally from northwest Arkansas and has known she wanted to write for a living since childhood. This is her first publication.



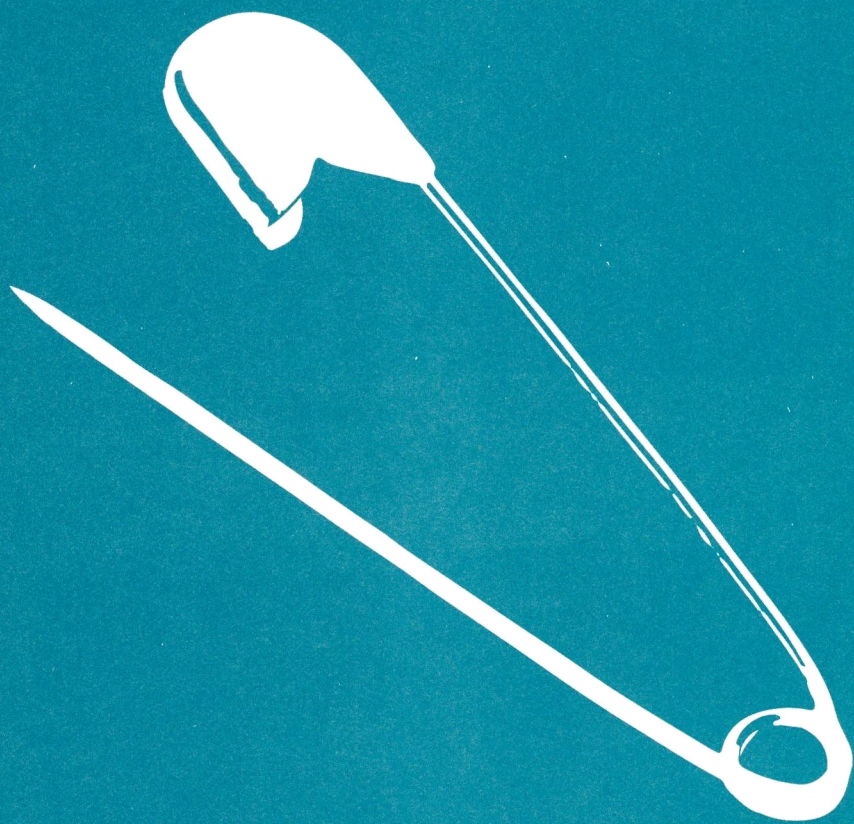
## SHELLY ROMERO

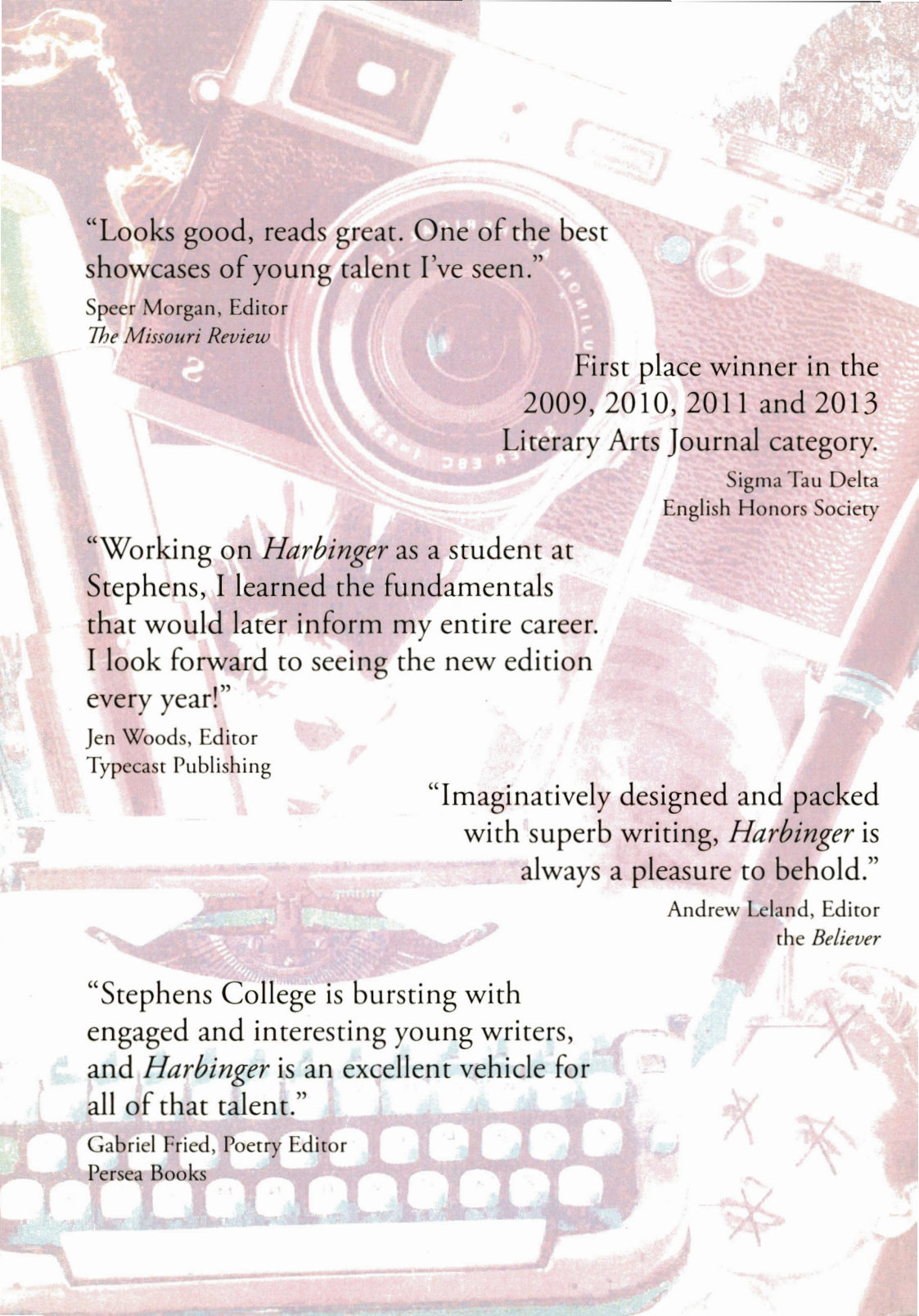
is a sophomore English major with an emphasis in editing and publishing. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and presented her short story “So, You’re In a Horror Movie?” at the 2015 National Convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This is Romero’s second publication in *Harbinger* and her first year as an assistant editor.



## JAMIE WARREN

is a sophomore majoring in creative writing and minoring in film. She is the vice president of The Human Experience (THE), Stephen’s queer-straight alliance. Her poem “Control Issues Making Themselves Evident in My Unconsciousness” was published in *Harbinger 2014*.





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