

Harbinger

2013



BOMBERSHELL

Harbinger

2013

n. har•bin•ger [här•bin•jər]

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

Published by the *Harbinger* staff
of Stephens College
in cooperation with
the Alpha Epsilon Eta chapter
of Sigma Tau Delta

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Harbinger is a student-edited and designed magazine published each spring since 1980.

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FOREWORD

Bombshell: The Explosiveness of Life and Literature

Such a small, pure object a poem could be, made of nothing but air, a tiny string of letters, maybe small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. But it could blow everybody's head off. – Mary Karr

Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant . . . Today if my eighth grade Latin teacher showed up at Stephens College and asked me to conjugate “to love,” I doubt I would be able to get past the first person present tense “amo.” Actually, I know I wouldn’t because I can’t even do it now. Naturally, I’d have to Google it. So consider that. I might have failed eighth grade Latin, but because I sat down to write this foreword I now know amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant. Attempting to write about an unfamiliar subject can lead to discovery, even surprise. You learn unexpected things and gain insight into yourself. Sounds a bit dangerous, right?

So what was I doing in Latin class while my eighth-grade peers droned in unison conjugation after conjugation? I was sitting in the back of the room, avoiding my teacher’s gaze, and writing in my journal. Writing was my favorite pastime because it helped me learn about myself, find meaning in my experiences and come to terms with the bombshells that life seemed to drop around me. By the eighth grade I had been initiated into the world of living away from my family. I moved to Massachusetts for boarding school where I developed my first crush and learned how to walk on ice, do my own laundry, study, and self motivate. Walking on ice might not seem significant, but falling on my face on the chapel steps in front of my peers was.

We’re all thrown metaphorical bombshells throughout our lives that force us to develop ideas about who we are, how we are

going to live, and even how the world works. We create survival techniques: don't get too close to someone, don't ever try anything difficult in case you fail, don't be authentic so you can't be rejected, or in my case, avoid the puck in hockey to shirk the responsibility of shooting for a goal. Then one day, we realize that our assumptions have been wrong, the way we've been coping misguided. We've been the crackpot, the one mistaken. The goal has been right in front of us all along, and isn't smacking the puck with that stick kind of fun?

Writing and reading literature helps us discover our misconceptions. From the authors I have come to love, I learned a lot about dealing with life's bombshells. From Mary Karr, I've learned to be able to laugh at whatever misfortunes happen to me in life, to own my mistakes, and to make fun of myself without feeling embarrassed. Annie Dillard has taught me that everyone has a spiritual connection with nature and realizing that connection exists can fulfill me in surprising, unimaginable ways. Joy Harjo has instilled in me the importance of heritage, culture, and shown me the value of a strong connection between a person and her home.

Literature offers readers a sense of shared experiences. At its best it provides something universal, some statement about life, so that when those bombshell moments happen, and surely they will, we know that we are not the first to have suffered or the last.

Much of the work in *Harbinger* 2013 focuses on emotionally explosive events. In Emily Marchant's short story "My Experience in Syria," the narrator, a war correspondent in Syria, encounters the chaos and complexity of war and the lethal effects on her life as well as her fellow journalists'. The story's revelation is tough medicine: our efforts, no matter how self-directed and well intended, do not always change the world. "Signal Lost" by Kelsey Looney is a short fictional piece that packs a lot of narrative power. She explores the shocking realization that the deepest kind of caring can often seem cruel. Emma Deutsch's story "Hunger" also delivers a few hard

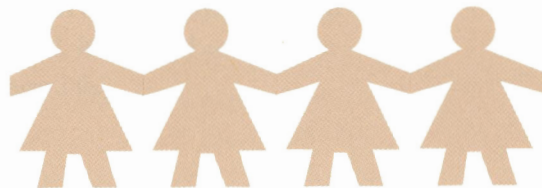
truths about the battle between the sexes. Love and the over-reaction to its loss are explored through a metaphor for the internalization of emotions. Deutsch pulls off a shocking twist as her narrator turns her anger on herself.

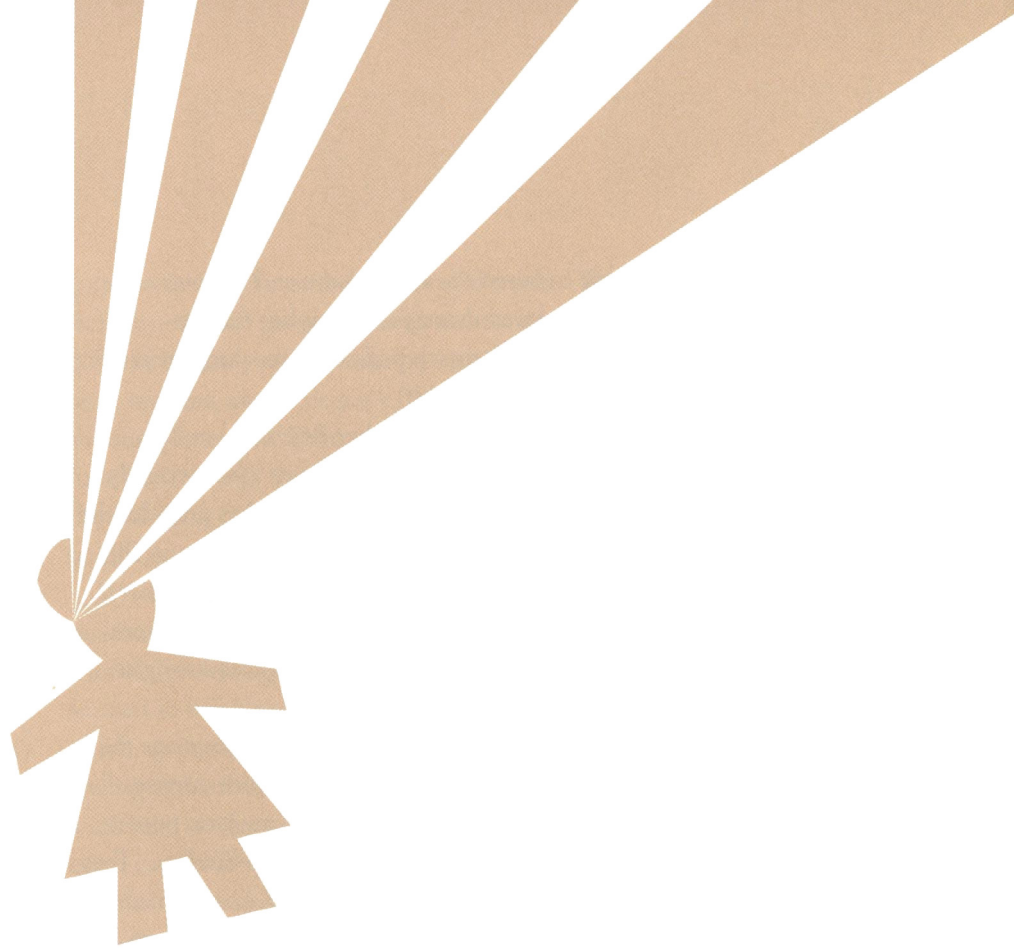
In “Snowman,” a one-act play by Heather Beger, the main character, Hope, finds that she must come to grips with a tragedy that has rocked her family. A snowman that she makes provides the solace that she needs. Arianne Kobler’s work of nonfiction, “The Gulf,” explores the uncomfortable truths one is left with when exploring family history. As she goes in search of her long-absent grandfather, she learns that family ties are not always as strong as one imagines.

Nichole Barth’s poetry conveys with sultry, sensual language the bombshell of early romance. The lines are infused with a sense of enticement, while it also might be safe to say that my lyric poems that appear in “Bombshell” have a quality of world-weariness. They are contemplations on past losses and the ones that are yet to come. Amber Surdam’s artwork, a collection entitled “In the Realm of Dreams, is a visual bombshell with explosive color and dreamlike images. She takes her inspiration from a variety of places: fairytales and folklore to ordinary objects such as dressmaker dummies and mirrors.

Congratulations to Heather Beger, Arianne Kobler, Emily Marchant, and Amber Surdam, winners of *Harbinger’s* first Editors’ Prize contest.

Enjoy! G.P.





Katya's Head, Peter's Heart

By Kelsey Looney

Peter's heart jumps, drumming against his ribs, and he stares resolutely at the front of the classroom where the teacher is giving notes, fighting the blush that he feels coloring his face.

She's looking at him again.

Peter steals a quick glance to his right and two seats over, sure enough, Katya is watching him with unabashed curiosity. He whips his gaze forward, determined to ignore her, and takes a deep breath, trying to calm his racing pulse.

It doesn't work.

Peter wishes she would stop doing that.

It's bad enough that he missed the bus that morning and had to walk to school. It was more exercise than he ever got, and he'd been sweating by the time he made it to his first class, his heart pounding away like a jackhammer.

And now Katya was staring again.

She's been doing it for weeks, ever since she'd noticed him ducking out of the school kickball tournament, and it never fails to make him feel like he's going into cardiac arrest. Peter supposes he should get used to the feeling, but he hates wasting heartbeats.

Since he only has about a quarter of what most people get, Peter calculates that he'll expire somewhere around age nineteen. But ever since Peter's mother had told him about his unfortunate situation, whispered to her by a mysterious stranger as she'd left the hospital with him after he was born, he's been determined not to rush toward his own death at top speed. If he could conserve his heartbeats, then he would live a longer life.

So Peter is careful. He never runs or jumps or plays sports. He never watches horror movies or dances to rock music. When he gets angry he never yells, only counts slowly to ten and thinks of something nice to say.

Peter likes being alive, and he plans to stay that way as long as he can.

But Katya seems to be going out of her way to destroy his efforts.

When the bell rings for lunch, she drags him back into the now empty classroom and shoves his shoulders against the beige cinderblock wall, squinting at him critically and setting his heart racing all over again.

“You’re a puzzle, Peter,” she says. “I can’t figure out what’s wrong with you.”

Peter frowns at that. There’s nothing wrong with him. He tells her as much.

Katya rolls her eyes. “You don’t play, Peter,” she says, as though that explains everything. At his blank look she explains, “You sit, and you read, and you barely talk to people. You hardly ever laugh. It isn’t that you’re shy. You don’t have any sort of social anxiety. You just . . . don’t do things. I’ve always wondered why. And then a few weeks ago I realized that I’d never seen you play. Even when we were younger, you’d just sit on the playground and watch everyone else. I remember you looking at the jungle gym like it was heaven on earth, but you never climbed it.” She shakes her head. “A puzzle.”

Peter thinks he’s beginning to understand why Katya won’t let this go. She’s the smartest person he knows, always top of the class, and she loves mysteries, loves to find answers and sift the truth from a mountain of jumbled facts. He must seem like some kind of grand challenge to her—a mystery that she cannot solve.

He isn’t sure if it’s pity at that thought, or fear at being cornered so suddenly, or the worrying distraction of his heart still thumping

“He must seem like some kind of grand challenge to her — a mystery that she cannot solve.”

hard in his chest at her proximity that makes him blurt out the truth.

Katya frowns. "Are you happy?"

Peter blinks at her. Happy? He's never thought about it before. Well, he isn't particularly unhappy, but . . . being too happy would only exacerbate his condition wouldn't it? He'll live longer this way, so it's worth a little discontentment, right?

He tries to explain then, how he has to conserve his heartbeats, save them up so that he'll have more time.

"Isn't that just a waste, then?" she asks. "A waste of heartbeats, a waste of all that extra time? If you aren't doing anything, if you aren't using them, then what's the point? What's the point of having a billion extra heartbeats?" Katya huffs in irritation. "You aren't really living at all!" She jabs her finger into his chest on the "you," and Peter finds himself blushing so furiously that he can feel his heartbeat in his face.

"It's up to you, though. It's not really being alive unless it's your choice"

He tries to mumble something along the lines of Katya, please don't, but she arches an

eyebrow at him before he can even start.

"Do I make your heart race, Peter?" It's unfair that she can look so innocent and sound so impish at the same time. Katya slips her hand into his, slowly, like an offering. "It's up to you, though. It's not really being alive unless it's your choice."

It's a wild, reckless idea that's never entered Peter's head before. Being in control of his death, his life, his heart, by choosing to let it out of his control. It sounds crazy. It sounds dangerous. It sounds fun. It makes his heart pound even harder than holding Katya's hand.

For the first time ever, Peter likes it.

"I think I'm happy now," he says, twining his fingers with hers, and when she pulls him out of the classroom and down the hall at a run he finds himself laughing.

Peter likes living, and he plans to do as much of it as he can.

How to Love a King During Wartime

By Kelsey Looney

The beginning isn't the hardest part, but it is the bitterest. It stays with you until the end.

He will come, young and bright, seeking power and strength, an alliance. It is only right that he goes to your father first. After all, you are only the seal on an agreement; wax shaped like a girl and pressed down to hold the edges together.

But this king is not like others. Ahead of his time perhaps, but you won't think of that. You'll only know that he asks you honestly if this is what you want.

When the end comes, remember you said "yes."

You will be married on foreign soil. *This land belongs to you now*, he will say. You will think, *Or rather, I belong to it*. You won't think that he does as well. You will be wrong.

The people will talk of your beauty when you walk past in your wedding gown. They will throw flowers at your feet, call you their savior, and you will think that maybe you could learn to call this place home, once all the fighting is done.

“You will look back and wish for any truth but the one you are left with.”

When you marry war, your gown is golden and your dowry is the blood of his enemies. This will be important later.

You have two roles now: wife and queen. When your husband-king comes to you, bloodied from the battlefield, you must be both at once. He will leave his crown at the door, but you'll feel the weight of yours bearing down heavier than ever as he speaks of the things he has seen. It does him great harm to see the pain of others. You'll understand that this makes him a poor battle commander, even if it makes him a good man. You'll understand that he cannot understand this.

It's a cruel trick of fate that you'll see the bad end and come to love him anyway.

When you start seeing him less often, you'll dare to hope that this is

a good sign, that the enemy is being driven back, that the fighting is farther away. You will ask advisors, soldiers, messengers for any scrap of news about him, and they will tell you, with exaggerated patience, that, *Yes, the King has won several important battles.*

They won't tell you that you can win a battle, a hundred battles, and still lose everything else.

Wars are strange things. They seem to drag on forever but if one side or the other can find the right place to apply pressure, the whole thing can come toppling down and be finished overnight. Sometimes it's as simple as killing one man.

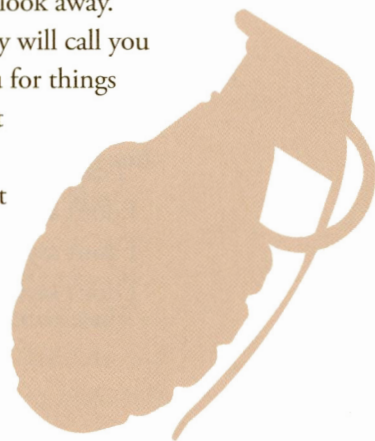
An ambush. A stray arrow. A drop of poison. An assassin in the night. Simple.

You will think of the last time you saw him, shivering in the dawn air, dressed in his riding clothes. You might have been any man and woman in love. Any boy and girl, really. You'll feel as if you've aged centuries since then. *Take me with you*, you'll remember saying, *at least to the camp.* His laugh will stick in your memory, and his voice as he says, *There is no need. We've nearly won.* You like the truth, but he's always believed in pretty stories. *I'll be home soon.*

You will look back and wish for any truth but the one you are left with, but the ending has already been written. A truth and a lie and a story all at once, though far from pretty.

When they come for your head, don't flinch. Don't look away. Don't let them forget that they deal with a queen. They will call you a witch. They will call you a whore. They will hate you for things you had nothing to do with: poor crops, drought, lost battles, a controversial alliance. Take credit for the last one and know what you've done. Know every moment you spent lonely in a strange land, every worry you bore for your King's sake, every hope you had that was crushed, every second of stolen youth and doomed love. See the path that leads to the block and don't let your steps waver or your hands shake.

Remember, you said yes.





Signal Lost

By Kelsey Looney

“I’m serious, Ash, screw him. Or, y’know, don’t anymore.”

On the other end of the line, Ash laughs. I like making him laugh.

“Defending my honor? I don’t have much.”

“I’m aware.”

He laughs again. “My hero.”

“Flatterer.”

I don’t say: *always*.

The muted television plays an infomercial for a machine that purees vegetables into baby food. The blue-white light plays over the floor, stopping short of where I sit on the kitchen counter.

“Where did you meet this one?” I ask.

“Nowhere. A club,” he says. “He was nobody.”

I don’t say: *you wanted to be nobody*.

“I can see why you went out with him. That sounds promising.”

“Don’t be such a bastard.”

“I’m honest.”

“I can’t help it if I always pick the wrong guys.”

I don’t say: *you could help it, but you won’t*.

I don’t say: *you’re better than this*.

I don’t say: *I’m not the wrong guy*.

I do say: "You're probably just looking in the wrong places."
Which isn't much better.

Ash laughs again. I'd normally be happy, but he wasn't supposed to laugh at that.

"Oh, please, advise me. Where did you pick up Julia? A quaint cafe? You two are so *perfect*. That's not me."

I don't say: *liar*.

"Well, it seemed decidedly less quaint after I ravished her out of her tiny barista apron behind the industrial coffee grinder."

"That sounds awfully dangerous."

"I'm a risk taker."

That laugh again. "I know."

The silence stretches across the line. I wish that Ash would talk because this weighty quiet makes me want to say things I shouldn't. There is a soft sound on Ash's end, like a sigh almost. But I can't tell. The connection's bad. "You know, if you . . ."

The door beside the television opens, and I cut off Ash with a hasty goodbye. If it were important he would have said it sooner. Julia pads closer on bare feet.

"Babe, it's three in the morning. What are you doing awake?" She leans against the counter at my side to look up at me, one hand resting slightly above my knee.

"Ash." I hold up the phone. "Had a messy breakup. Wanted to talk about it."

Julia hums as she wraps her arms around me. "I know how that is. Evie always calls me when she fights with Todd. She goes on and on. Sometimes I put the phone down and just let her talk." She pulls back slightly. "It doesn't annoy you?"

"No."

Julia smiles, leaning her head against my chest. "You two really love each other."

I don't say . . .

My Experience in Syria

By Emily Marchant

I don't believe in war, but I do believe in people. They are the ones who start wars, and they are the ones who can end them. The world may never reach a peaceful state. I'm not trying to be bitter or cynical, but I've become a realist. When I first started working in this field, I was hopeful. I wanted to change the world and bring peace to all countries. I was busy with my career; there are endless conflicts in the world. One after the other, I reported and wrote about what I saw until one day my perspective changed. I realized that I did not believe in the idea of peace anymore. I didn't believe that it was attainable or that this world would ever know it.

Fiction

16

Marchant

My assignment was to go to Syria and report on the civil war. I was to meet the photographer at the airport, and we would be flown into the country. We were informed of our assignments two weeks before, and I began packing two days prior to the trip. I didn't need much; I never did. I looked around my one-bedroom apartment to make sure

“... I learned to make ‘home’ wherever I currently was.”

I had the essentials. Before I left, I wrote a note to my neighbor, instructing her where to leave my mail. It was not going to be a lengthy trip, just a standard, one-week assignment. As I closed the apartment door behind me, I didn't feel like I was leaving. Gradually into my career, the feeling of having a home disappeared. I was constantly traveling, so I learned to make “home” wherever I currently was—plane, motel, or hostel. Thinking this way made it easier to leave as often as I did. I walked out to the street and hailed a cab.

War correspondents deliver the news from an area at war. Like any reporter, they deliver the news in an unbiased, professional manner. Whether they write, film, or photograph, a war correspondent enters a location to get the facts and inform the public. The work



affects people in different ways. One cameraman I know can no longer sleep with the lights off. Another reporter can't sleep, period. Before I worked for the newspaper, I would watch the news to fall asleep. Now it makes me restless.

Entering Syria, you never feel safe. You have to be watchful of your surroundings and be aware of yourself. Be around others and don't attract attention; blend in. I arrived with the photographer, Brian, in the early afternoon. We had been in Syria together twice before, and four times in Iraq. He had been working for the newspaper for a couple of years and was a quiet but smart young man. We got our equipment; he had his Canon and I was armed with my pen and notebook. When traveling abroad, I keep my backpack stocked with basic items in case something happens. I realized that I didn't have any water, so I made a mental note to stop at a market. It was already hot out, but the sun wasn't yet at its strongest. We still had a few hours before the heat would become unbearable.

As a war correspondent, my lifestyle was one of solitude. I lived by myself and didn't communicate with others much. I spoke to my parents about once a month, maybe twice. I had to put myself in a certain state of mind to do what I did. It may sound lonely, but I was comfortable. It takes a specific type of person to work in this field.

We were reporting on a demonstration that was occurring in Hama. We heard that there were a few hundred people but that police were starting to arrive and break it up. We didn't have time to go anywhere; we had to get to the scene. We were driven in a Jeep for about fifteen minutes. I started writing down general notes about the area. Soon we heard voices yelling, and the sight of hundreds of people followed. Protesters and riot police stood

neck-to-neck; buildings and cars surrounded them. The protesters held their demonstration outside the city to avoid the police coming early to break it up, but someone tipped them off.

The Jeep abruptly stopped and Brian and I got out, our respective tools in hand. A riot policeman caught sight of us and stretched out his arm, blocking us from going any farther. Brian started taking pictures, and the policeman tried to take away his camera. I slipped past them and moved through a cluster of people, trying to find where the demonstration had started and who was leading it. I tried to ask questions, but nobody was paying attention. Some of the protesters began to disperse, and the shouts of the policemen became louder than the demonstrators'. I walked to what appeared to be an abandoned building and stood next to the door, facing the crowd to get a better look. Screaming erupted from a man about four hundred feet away. He was shouting something and repeated it a few times until he gained attention. He got into a car and started it. The vehicle exploded, erupting in flames. Riot police opened fire on protesters.

One of the hardest aspects of the job was refraining from biased reporting. I saw horrible things, and I didn't agree with them. I wanted to explain why but was not allowed to go in-depth about my opinions. I had to internalize them, almost as if I wasn't supposed to have any feelings at all.

Instinctively, I opened the door behind me and ran inside. It was dark and mostly empty except for strewn desks and garbage. I ran to the opposite side of the room, about forty feet away. I got on the floor behind a pillar as debris fell from the ceiling. I covered my head and huddled against the wall, hoping that the building would not collapse. Something was burning. I felt vibrations; more explosions were going off. I couldn't hear anything except

the distant sound of guns firing. Outside of my sheltered hideaway, battle ensued.

I decided that I wanted to be a war correspondent my last year of college when I started following Afghanistan's civil war. I became interested in watching the news and following the story. Interested in what other countries were going through, I researched other wars as well. Countless conflicts were happening in the world. I knew that I wanted to be a journalist and that I would report on wars in order to educate people and make a difference.

I stayed crouched and hidden for several minutes. I thought about the crowd outside and wondered where Brian was. Once my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I searched the room. About twenty feet to my left, behind another pillar, were two figures on the floor. I couldn't see if they were Syrian or hear what they were saying, but I could tell they were men, and one seemed to be injured. His hands grasped the side of his neck, while his friend looked anxiously around the room. Our eyes met. The man waved me over. Cautiously, I crawled to them. A wave of nausea passed over me as I saw the man's wounds. He had been hit in the neck and bicep on his right side. Suddenly, everything felt heavy. My backpack straps dug into my shoulders, and my clothes and hair were soaked with perspiration. The humidity was starting to choke me, and I had to put my head between my knees for a few minutes. The smell of burning became stronger.

Once, I hadn't seen my apartment in so long that I had forgotten what it looked like. Sometimes when I got back, I felt like a stranger. Fortunately when I returned from the assignment, everything was familiar. The only difference was that the apartment seemed brighter.

“Sometimes when I got back, I felt like a stranger.”

The injured man's name was John; he worked as a cameraman for a British news service. The other was a reporter named Eric. They had been in Syria for a couple of days working the story. After the suicide bombing, the riot police started shooting the crowd, and John was hit as he tried to get to shelter. Eric told me this because John couldn't talk. He was breathing heavily, and his eyes were half-closed. I made eye contact with him, and we looked at each other for a moment. It was hard to tell what he was thinking; his eyes were cloudy. A few minutes later, I recognized what was about to happen and looked away as John died.

“I had gone on for as long as I could and had reached my breaking point.”

As I started writing down my experience, I began to sob. That was when I realized that I had become too emotional to be a full-time war correspondent. I had gone on for as long as I could and had reached my breaking point. I could no longer write without revealing my opinions and strong feelings. I quit working for the newspaper before I finished the article. I switched to a career as a freelance writer. I am confident in my decision.

Eric took a few minutes of silence and then laid John's body down. I continued to look away, trying to be respectful of the situation. Eric and I sat down, no longer conscious of what was happening outside of the building. We were idle for a few minutes, and then Eric broke the silence by pointing out scratches on my body. Small pieces of metal had flown from the direction of the car, and I had several cuts and scrapes on my skin. I wasn't worried about it. Eric was scraped up as well. I glanced at John's lifeless body and noticed he was wearing a wedding ring. I felt nauseous again.

When I walked into my apartment, I rushed for the kitchen sink, grabbed a nearby glass, and filled it with water. I lost count of how many times I refilled it, but I drank as fast as I could, until I couldn't hold it in anymore, and then went into the bathroom to shower. In the mirror my skin appeared pale. Dark circles ringed my eyes, which were red and puffy. There was a mixture of dirt and scratches on my body. The sight caught me by surprise.

Eric and I talked to pass the time until it was safe to leave. He was from London and had been a war reporter for six years. He still believed in peace. We talked about our stances on war and conflict. It was nice to do that. We didn't know whether or not this would be our last conversation, so it felt good to openly express our views. The noise from outside picked back up, and the front door to the building was opened. Two riot police stormed through the front door.

It was difficult to learn to open up to people. I'd lived alone for so long that it felt natural to be secluded. It took a couple of years for me to learn to create a schedule and regularly spend time with others. I decided to go back home. It was too easy to isolate myself in New York City.

My heart started racing as one of the policemen grabbed my arm, forcing me to stand. He asked questions, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. Eric answered for me, and the two policemen looked at each other. I was dragged outside the building while Eric remained inside with the other policeman. The door was closed. I heard a gun shot.

“I knew that when I woke up, I would be home. For the first time, I had a strong sense of where that was.”

It took me a while to decide whether or not to finish writing about John and Eric. I wanted to honor their memories before I published what had happened. The five-year anniversary of the incident was approaching, so I finally wrote it all out and gave it to the newspaper. I did not accept money for the piece; I wrote it as a tribute.

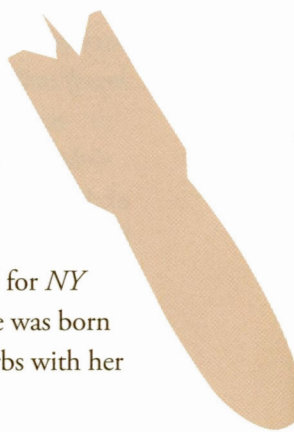
I jerked back, looking at the building behind me, listening for any yelling. The riot policeman pushed me away and motioned for me to leave. He put his hand on his gun and yelled something. I hurried in the direction of the Jeep. My eyes started to sting from the clouds of tear gas. Dozens of people were scattered around. Some were lying on the ground, bodies beaten, unable to move.

I couldn't find the Jeep, so I followed a large group of people moving in the direction of town. I called on my cell phone the paper's headquarters and explained what'd happened. They were sending someone, and I would be flown home.

Two hours later, I was on a plane for New York. I thought about the people I briefly knew that day and hoped their lives would be recognized for their brave coverage of the horrors of war. It took me awhile, but I drifted off to sleep. I knew that when I woke up, I would be home. For the first time, I had a strong sense of where that was.

I believe in people and their capabilities. I believe that they will make a difference. When they do, I will be there to report it.

Stephanie Holmes is a freelance writer who reported for *NY Daily News* as a war correspondent from 2000-2011. She was born in 1974 in Chicago and currently lives in the city's suburbs with her husband, son, and dog.



Hunger

By Emma Deutsch

“I’m sleeping with your best friend.”

It had started out as a joke. Seth picked on Chloe constantly, jokingly telling her all the things he would supposedly do with

other women before she rolled on top of him in a fit of giggles. She loved to hear him pretend to be one of the million other guys she had

“You make sure Seth takes good care of you, now . . .”

met in her life. They had been together for three years, and Chloe knew she could trust him. He’d never even once glanced at another woman, unless it was her reflection. She loved that joke the most.

“Uh oh, honey. That woman over there . . . I’m captivated,” he’d exclaim, raising his eyebrows at the mirror.

“Bitch better back off. You’re mine,” she’d reply, cracking her knuckles.

Then it happened.

Chloe was out with her friends, enjoying a night on the town. She’d had too much to drink and had to call a cab to haul her home. Marissa, being the good friend she was, tagged along to make sure her dazed sidekick got home safely. Chloe stumbled out of the cab, laughing at nothing, and turned to say goodbye.

“I’ll see you atworktomorrow, ‘kay?” she slurred, smiling.

“Okay, babe. You make sure Seth takes good care of you, now,” Marissa said, winking. She had the cabdriver wait until Chloe made it through the front door before mushing him onward.

The first time Seth had taken Chloe out, he messed everything up. He ordered the wrong drink while she was in the bathroom, spilled beer on his shirt, got marinara on his lap, and left his wallet in his car. Chloe had loved that he tried so hard and overlooked his clumsy behavior. Keeping his eyes on his feet as they left the restaurant, he’d said goodbye like he’d never see her again. Without

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Deutsch

thinking twice, Chloe had grabbed his arm, pressed her lips to his, and asked him when their next meal together would be, that she'd be sure to wear her food-proof dress.

Inside, Chloe thumped her purse on the counter and ran her fingers through her long brown hair. Her head was spinning, and it took concentration to see straight. Okay, only one margarita next time, she thought, shaking her head lightly. Blinking in the dim living room, she noticed a thin strip of light coming from the bedroom door.

"Seth, you sneaky turd," she called, tiptoeing to the cracked door. "You got all ready and sexy, didn't ya . . ." She stopped as soon as she reached the light, noticing a pair of heeled feet at the end of the bed. What the . . . she thought, squinting and rubbing her eyes, her vision spinning. Pushing quietly into the room, she saw the covers rustling where Seth's waist would have been, one of his feet peeking out from the covers on the side of the bed. His head was tilted back, eyes closed and mouth open, and he was sighing rather loudly.

Chloe cleared her throat. Seth jumped and whipped his head around to look at her. The rustling stopped immediately. Another head popped up next to his, this one tanner than the legs that protruded from the ruined sheets. Wide-eyed, Chloe stood and examined the situation in her head. One . . . two . . . and Seth . . . three? She pinched her arm to make sure she was really seeing this: her trustworthy man in bed with a couple of sluts. She wasn't drunk. She wasn't dreaming. This shit is real!

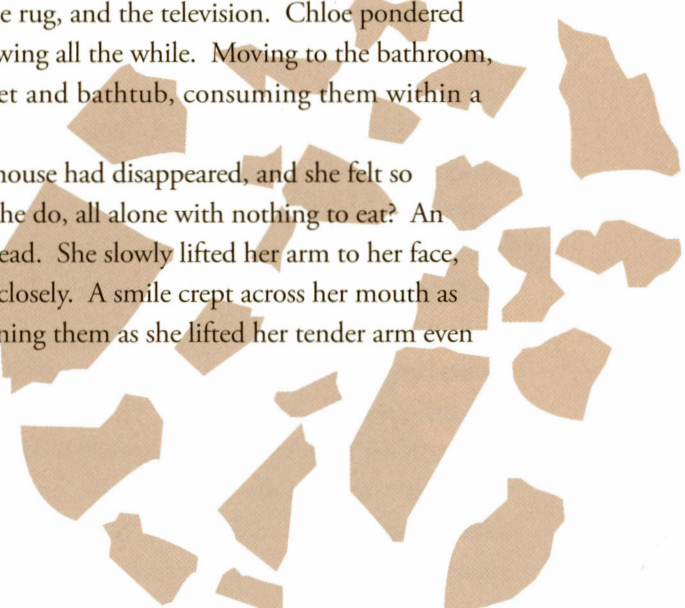
"Chloe, baby, it's not what you think," Seth stuttered, sitting up and reaching out to her. She turned and walked toward the kitchen, flinging her heels off and knocking things off tables and counters. Quickly, the two women scrambled to the front door, Seth following, half dressed.

“Chloe, please listen,” he said at the door, before she closed it.
“Get out, Seth. I don’t need your bullshit excuses, just go. Now.”

As soon as he was out of her sight, Chloe burst into tears. She headed straight for the refrigerator, pulling out the first brightly colored jar she could find. She grabbed a spoon and slid to the wooden floor, scooping the sweet strawberry preserves into her mouth like it was ice cream. She ate and ate, the jar suddenly empty. She blinked at it, tears still streaming down her face, and tossed it aside. Opening the fridge once more, she pulled out more jars and containers of food, gobbling them all down in her sorrow. Once the fridge was empty, she moved to the freezer, then the cabinets. In her eating rampage, she crossed over to a calm state, staring blankly ahead of her, searching for anything to consume. When everything edible in the house was gone, she shambled to the living room and plopped onto the couch. She stared at the coffee table, her eyes dry, and sighed.

Before she knew it, the table was gone. So was the couch, the recliner, both chairs, the rug, and the television. Chloe pondered their whereabouts, chewing all the while. Moving to the bathroom, she started on the toilet and bathtub, consuming them within a few minutes.

Everything in the house had disappeared, and she felt so hungry. What would she do, all alone with nothing to eat? An idea popped into her head. She slowly lifted her arm to her face, examining its paleness closely. A smile crept across her mouth as she licked her lips, opening them as she lifted her tender arm even higher toward her face.



Possibilities

*Inspired by Margaret Atwood's "Happy Endings"

By Nicole Barth

Michelle was born in New York City. She applies to colleges. What happens next? If you want her to successfully live out her plans, read A.

A. Michelle applies early decision to the best equine management program in the country and gets accepted. She carried a 3.6 GPA in high school and barely had any friends, so this makes sense. She tells herself she won't die of boredom in 'the middle of fuckin' nowhere' Missouri because there is some semblance of a town around her college. She spends all of her time at the stables: tacking, grooming, and riding horses. She is offered a summer internship working at the barn. She takes it. She graduates with a 4.0 and is offered a position as head trainer at Stephens College stables. She can do better. She takes out a loan. She buys her own stable and becomes very successful. She meets Jack. They go steady and get married after two years. They have three children. She lives out her horse-related dreams and dies happily married. This is the end.

B. Michelle applies to all the best equine management programs in the country. While she is anxiously waiting for replies at home in New York, she continues horseback riding every weekend. On Sunday, November 1st, Jupiter spooks at a plastic bag while they are riding in Central Park. He throws her onto the gravel trail and canters off. Her back is broken. A jogger notices her two hours later and calls an ambulance. She tells the jogger she's fine, but she's not. She goes to Lenox Hill Hospital. The radiologist takes X-rays of her neck and spine. Michelle is having trouble breathing. She has two broken ribs and a fracture in her C4 vertebra. L4, L5 and L8 are broken and displaced. She needs surgery to repair the damage. Her father is concerned. She is banned from horseback riding.

Her father tells her she has plenty of talents and interests she should focus on now. Like poetry or music or things in New York City. She doesn't know what to major in. She tells herself that's fine, but it's not. She smiles whenever her dad looks at her and tells her friends it doesn't really matter. Her friends at the barn hardly talk to her anymore. She tries not to cry when they mention horseback riding on weekends, but she is never successful. She spends more time reading. She isn't strong enough to use crutches yet, so she relies on an electric wheelchair. They tell her she won't be able to walk and might lose feeling in her right hand because of the neck injury. They give her morphine for the pain. She overdoses on morphine and dies. Her father is never the same.

C. Michelle was in a severe horseback riding accident when she was seven. She broke several bones. Lucky for her, she can still walk and did not need surgery. She realizes she has to rethink her plans for college. Managing a horse stable in the future is no longer a possibility. Her father offers to let her work for his furniture company for a semester until she figures out what she wants to major in and where she wants to go to college. She falls in love with the marketing and advertising aspect of the business.

During the time spent working for her father, she meets one of his younger employees, Jason. Jason is handsome and well educated. He works hard, which is why the two of them can be seen grabbing coffee at Starbucks at ten in the evening for their first date. He likes to hold her hand in public and tell her she is pretty when she wakes up in the morning and her hair looks like seaweed. She's funnier with him. He tickles her often. She pretends to hate it and smacks his hand away from her as she squeals. The semester ends and Michelle has to make the decision to apply to colleges. Jason tells her she should go wherever she wants to. He secretly wants her to stay in New York and continue dating him. In fact, he could see himself marrying her.

Michelle decides to go to the University of Chicago to major in marketing. Then she calls her father to tell him she is moving back to New York. She tells him she thinks there are better opportunities for her in the city. She actually just wants to be closer to Jason. She transfers to NYU. She continues to study marketing and graduates in the middle of her class. She moves in with Jason, and they get engaged. Their marriage is happy, as in A.

D. Jason, who is about to graduate from college, meets Michelle at a football game. They fall in love. They have been dating for six months when Michelle tells him she was offered an internship in Milan for the summer. It's not just any internship. She could work for a multi-million dollar marketing company there. Jason is excited for her and encourages her to go. He promises her he'll be waiting for her when she gets back. And he is waiting . . . in her roommate's bed. Michelle breaks up with him and tells her roommate to go to hell.

Michelle finds another roommate. The room has extensive water damage, but she tells herself it's a much better situation than continuing to live with a cheating bastard. The marketing company in Milan calls her two months later and offers her a full-time job once she graduates. Considering she only has one semester left, she offers to come immediately. American men are worthless and roommates can't be trusted anyway. She continues her life in Italy. She gains seven pounds in the first month because the food is so delicious. She does not regret it. She considers having an affair with her handsome (and married) employer, but decides she's not that kind of girl. He realizes it would have been a mistake, anyway. So he decides to be stereotypical and sleep with his secretary instead. She keeps her job and goes on to be very successful.

If you want to be a fantastic writer, the best piece of advice is this: Write about what you know. Then add lots of lies to make things more interesting. Write about yourself for that matter. Every writer is actually very selfish when it comes down to it. They just try to hide it by giving their main characters different names. But I don't always change names.



Fiction

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Barth

Just Listen

*Inspired by Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"

By Nicole Barth

Fiction

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Barth

This is how you love him; pick something tragic; fracture your back when you are seven and blackout after being thrown from a horse; then suck it up because that's what women do. And you're a horsewoman. Go to college in the middle of nowhere—like Missouri—in order to ride every day and ignore the back spasms in your spine; and don't you ever tell your father or he'll pull you off horses. You want to meet your lover, don't you? Now abandon the Empire State Building, Grand Central Station, 120th Street and Manhattan Avenue on the second floor with the two teal walls. Forget Burritoville and the bodega on the corner where a gang of ten-year-old boys once mugged you. Pack your crap in Space Bags so that it will all fit into your suitcase with the handle you broke on the last visit to your nonna and then get on a plane for college. Don't dare ask for help from those campus security guards who take ten years to walk up a flight of stairs. They don't want to help you move in, and you were born half-Russian for a reason. Pull on the Italian leather paddock boots your late nonno gave you for your seventeenth birthday and walk across the manure in the hunter barn until you find the 15.2 hand horse who only cocks his hip to the left. Remember this is your dream; this is what you wanted to do since you were three; then ride this horse for two weeks until you fidget in class because you can't sit for longer than five minutes without screaming like a banshee; see where your pride gets you now? Remember you're worthless; pick a Sunday in October when you come to the epiphany that you are a complete failure and limp your way down East Broadway; remember you're worthless; find a coffee shop that reminds you of the Ozzie's you used to sneak off to inbetween Mr. O'Connor's Spanish class and that witch of a trig teacher's class every Thursday back in high

**“Find your own happiness,
you twit.”**

**“... you’re just a chatty girl
from New York City who
only wanted a good cup of
blueberry black tea.”**

school. Look at the Navajo print chairs with their hand-sewn cushions and branch armrests and look around for a table. Sit down in the middle of the café and cross your legs; no one thinks you’re sexy anyway; open the Moleskine journal that isn’t actually the real deal because the binding is coming undone and the front cover is made of a rough cardboard material; remind yourself you’re worthless. Realize that you are sitting across from a 50-year-old man whose dreads are tighter than a fist; he’s probably a caveman who only comes out at night; but it’s okay because you just want to write about how nothing is working out, right? He won’t kill you because he has an eight-year-old daughter and you’re in a coffee shop; and he owns a horse farm. Horse-people don’t kill people. This is how you meet him. The (not) serial-killer man leaves with his daughter, and the handsome man you will make a habit of calling “babe” from now on looks at you; he asks you how you know the caveman Mike; and you tell him you’re just a chatty girl from New York City who only wanted a good cup of blueberry black tea. He tells you he’s a photographer and web developer; and you try to make less of pretty much the only thing you’re proud of—your poetry. Don’t ask him to be your friend. Don’t ask him to rescue you and tell you what you should be doing with your life, even if he does that within two months’ time. Find your own happiness, you twit. Appreciate how his mother is an ex-Hollywood makeup artist and his father was a producer for Paramount back in the day; inch closer to him on the suede couch in his studio, but suppress the need to hug him, to tell him you know he’s in love with you. Laugh and forget that you’re worthless. “Can I see you tomorrow?”

The Gulf

By Arianne Kobler

About thirty years ago Robert Chord hightailed it from the Gulf of Mexico and forgot his way back until his children were out of the house and had children of their own. So my mother and her siblings lost their father. Occasionally he would try to wiggle back into their lives as if he had just been at the Laundromat and was late for game night. He stopped trying before my birth, and there isn't even a letter from him acknowledging my existence.

Everything I knew about my mother's father came secondhand and felt like a boot that didn't quite fit. My mother and her family grew up in Gulf Breeze, a place where my mother says, "The people's wealth comes in sunshine." It's only a bridge away from Pensacola. It sits right on the gulf, one of the last pit stops on the way to Louisiana. I remembered a green, lush place, where nature had taken over the houses, creating shanties filled with Florida foliage.

I wanted to move down there when I was younger, but my mother only remembers hurricanes, Spanish moss, and a father who walked out on the family before she'd hit high school.

He'd refused to pay college tuition after her freshman year in favor of a trip to Jamaica.

I, on the other hand, romanticized this grandfather I had never met. I knew what he looked like when he married Grandma Di one hot day in Maryland. I imagined they met sometime after World War II. Grandma Di fell madly in love with Robert Chord who was a dashing youth, with all the suave of Cary Grant and the manliness

"Everything I knew about my mother's father came secondhand and felt like a boot that didn't quite fit."

of Gary Cooper. Of course a young woman, the only daughter of Polish farmers, would have been swept away by such a charming young man. Who cared if he had been married before? Not my grandmother decked out from head to toe in a lace wedding dress. Her off-the-shoulder dress nearly gave her mom a heart attack. Her smile hung on her face, bright as sun glinting off glass. She looked so happy before alcoholism set in. My grandfather hot spurred it out of the marriage long before then.

I wonder if there was much fighting. Did the palm trees outside my mother's childhood home quiver with anticipation at Robert Chord's late night arrivals home from work? Did my mother cling to her sister late at night and whisper nothings into her ear? Did she tell a young Aunt Donna that everything would be all right while just outside the door her parents railed like two idiots caught in a storm? No. More likely Robert Chord sired three children and then left like a stealth pilot. This is what I daydreamed about during 2004 in Huntsville, Alabama. My parents were going through their own divorce. While my family splintered, I imagined my mother's family reconciling. Grandma Di died when I was eight, but Robert Chord lived somewhere out there, an abstraction of a person.

My mother was tight-lipped about the whole affair, but my father was different. I needed him for information one day after their divorce. We were standing elbow-to-elbow in his new kitchenette, the one that came with the apartment he had rented. One Wednesday night my sister, brother, and I stayed at his place. While my siblings played video games spitting distance from the kitchen, my father and I breaded and fried chicken tenderloins in a cast iron skillet. My job was to coat the chicken in egg and breadcrumbs before my father set it in the pan to sizzle. I loved the way it hissed and spit, one last rebellion before it hit the plate and then our stomachs. My father hadn't gotten the hang of cooking by

then. Fried chicken, collards, and sweet potatoes were the only foods he knew how to make besides pancakes.

“Dad,” I said, “what do you know about Mom’s dad?”

My father stopped flipping around greased chicken for a minute and stared at the tiling above the stove. He moved again and then answered: “He was a very stern man. Clean. Organized. That was the military training.”

“What branch of military was he in?” I didn’t know my mother was a military brat. We were both the firstborn children, we both lived in divorced homes, and now we both had fathers who had been in the military.

“He was in WWII. Fighter pilot in the Philippines.”

No wonder he had run away, guilt-ridden over killing the Japanese, unable to face his wife or children, he left in a plume of smoke. Destined to wander the earth until the end of his days rather than face the children who thought he was a god.

“As far as I’m concerned,” my father said, putting sizzling chicken onto the plate, “Robert Chord got out so fast he forgot how to get back in.”

My senior year of high school I gave up on trying to reunite Robert Chord with my mother. She clearly wanted nothing to do with the man. I just tried to reunite him with me. He had to know I existed. As his firstborn granddaughter, I demanded recognition. I would kick and scream into his consciousness if need be. As my high school graduation drew nearer, I begged my mother for his address.

“Why do you want to invite a man you have never spoken to?” she asked one day while we drove home from grocery shopping. A storm approached. As we drove past the Jones’ cow farm, the brown and red cows gathered attentively under their trees. I held a dozen

eggs in my lap, careful they didn't break.

"Come on, Mom. I just want to ask him if he'll come. I think I deserve the chance to get to know my grandfather at least once."

"He's barely your grandfather." My mother had this idea that family only counted if they were there for you when you needed them.

"You might have heard of me.

I am your granddaughter."

"Mom! I don't even know what he looks like. What if one day I pass him on the street, and I don't recognize him at all?" I whined. The thought terrified me. What if he died before I had a chance to meet him? Grandma Di died at 59. As far as that side of the family was concerned, my grandfather had lived past his expiration date.

"Arianne Virginia Diane, I don't want to talk about this anymore," my mother said as we pulled up the sloped driveway of my childhood home. I shut up. My mother only used both middle names when she meant it. She opened the garage. "Get your siblings and empty out the car."

My mother eventually relented and gave me the address in time to invite Robert Chord to the graduation ceremony. Perhaps this was to teach me a lesson, because he didn't show up. He never responded. I tickled the notion that the letter got lost in the post, but it hadn't been returned to sender.

Here's what the letter said:

Dear Mr. Chord,

My name is Arianne Virginia Diane Kobler. You might have heard of me. I am your granddaughter. We've never had the pleasure of meeting, but rest assured that Wendy made a suitable match and produced three intelligent, fairly good-looking children. In fact, I am graduating with an advanced degree from Huntsville High School this May. If this letter sounds awkward, do not be alarmed,

I'm not used to writing letters to long lost relatives. Anyway, I am graduating May 26th this year, and I hope you and your wife can make it. Next year I will be attending a two-year women's college on scholarship. I'm going to study English, then graduate and become a civil rights lawyer for the ACLU. Anyways, I hope you are proud of me and of my mother. Reply ASAP.

Sincerely,
Arianne

I did learn one thing. Robert Chord had settled in Virginia, not too far from Virginia Beach, where my family had lived for a few years when my sister had been born. He was not in any pictures with Mallory in the waiting room.

I did not think about Robert Chord much after that. College started and I had better things to do than pine for lost grandfathers. I quit my daydreams. I stopped thinking about the ace fighter pilot, turned nervous father, turned runaway Robert Chord.

I might have forgotten about him altogether if he hadn't decided to move back to Pensacola, Florida, in 2009. In the winter of his life, he decided to reconnect with his family and the best way to do that was to get close to Aunt Donna, his middle child. Aunt Donna, a bachelorette, welcomed him back. His wife, a woman named Candace, moved with him.

My mother went down to Florida twice before seeing him. When she did see him, the encounter was odd.

"Just so you know," Mom told me one night on the phone, "it was a little odd."

Miles away at college I was in my dorm room, fiddling around with an empty water bottle. "What was he like?" I asked.

"What do you mean?" my mother said from the comfort of her

couch in Alabama. “He was the same as ever.”

“When do we get to meet him?”

“Your siblings already have. They went down with me. You can meet him when we go to Florida next. If you’re on break.”

We didn’t go to Florida that Thanksgiving break, or that Christmas break, or that summer. I asked my sister what he was like the next time I was home from school over Thanksgiving. The day after Thanksgiving is when we put up our Christmas decorations, conveniently timed for when I’m home.

As Mallory and I trimmed our grandmother’s tree, I pestered her about Robert Chord.

“What’s he like?”

Mallory picked up a white lace angel. “He’s very quiet. I don’t think I ever heard him talk.”

I picked up an ornament that resembled an icicle. “What does he smell like? Does he have ‘old man smell?’”

Mallory frowned. “I don’t remember. Yes? He is old. Really old.”

“How old? Going to kick the bucket old? Is he frail looking? Fat?”

Mallory redistributed the icicles I had hung too close together. “Just normal old. I think he’s in his seventies maybe? Or eighties.”

I figured he had a few good years left before I lost my chance to get to know the enigmatic Robert Chord. I returned to school determined to meet him.

I finally met him in 2012. In August, right before I had

“I figured he had a few good years left before I lost my chance to get to know the enigmatic Robert Chord.”



to return to school, my mother announced a weekend trip to Niceville, Florida, to celebrate my new cousin's first birthday.

Scott Chord married a young woman named Katie shortly after I was born in '91. Six years later, their first and only son, Josh (Mallory and I affectionately call him Josh-Posh), was born. Like so many people in my family, Scott divorced Katie. In 2003, he met Kaylee Chord. They married and had their first child, Samantha, in 2009. Just two years later, Kaylee was pregnant again. Nicholas Chord was born August 11th.

A year later, I would get to meet Nicholas and Samantha for the first time. Sam hit three like a shot, cute as a Gerber baby. Nicholas gurgled around, curious like all babies. They both lived just two hours away from Robert Chord.

My mother, Mallory, Drake, and I packed into the car to make the eight-hour drive. It's beautiful though hot driving through Alabama in the summer. On our way down we picked up Josh. He'd grown up with an alcoholic mother before Uncle Scott adopted him before his thirteenth birthday. Two years later, he still visited her for two weeks during summer, which meant he lived two hours away from us in Birmingham, Alabama.

"Have you met Mom's dad?" I asked when he got into the car. He towered over me at fifteen. Blond and cut like Adonis, he looked older than his age.

"You do that too?" he said.

"Do what?"

"Call him 'Mom's dad' instead of 'Grandpa'. I call him 'Dad's dad.' It'd be weird to call him grandpa." Mallory nodded in agreement.

"It would be weird," she said.

“Right? I went to go stay at his house once, and I told my friends that I was going to stay with my dad’s dad. And they were like ‘Why don’t you just call him Grandpa?’” He shook his head. “It would be too weird.”

Even my younger cousins had met him. I would be the last person in the family. I stared out the window and thought about what I was going to say when it finally happened: “Hello. I’m Arianne. Perhaps you’ve heard of me?” was a good one. Or maybe, “I see your name is Robert Chord. Funny, I’m related to a Robert Chord. You don’t know him do you?” I considered, “What’s it like having two lesbians in the family? A daughter and a granddaughter? I’m sure we get it from your side of the family.” My favorite was, “So you’re the reason I’m going bald. Thanks a lot, asshat!”

We arrived late that night. Uncle Scott and Aunt Kaylee are staunch Republicans and Rush Limbaugh fans. My immediate family has always been liberal supporters of the Democratic Party. But what of my grandfather? Republican? Democrat? Neither? Would he be disappointed if I was liberal and he conservative? On that note, what was his favorite color? Or flower? Or food? What I knew about the guy could fit inside one box. Quiet and in the military. If I had to write an obituary about him I would fail.

My sister snored softly beside me, but I couldn’t sleep. I was going to meet a stranger tomorrow. It was exciting.

The morning of Nicholas’s birthday party, Uncle Scott and I drove into town to pick up two pounds of shrimp for the boil. My mother had insisted on real seafood since she only had a few opportunities a year to indulge in the food of her youth. She refused to eat fish that had to be shipped north of the Florida-Bama state

“. . . I couldn’t sleep. I was going to meet a stranger tomorrow. It was exciting.”

line, unless it came out of a river. Eating a hamburger in Florida is paramount to sin.

On the drive over, Uncle Scott and I talked about all the normal bits of conversation that come up when you're a college student. Did I like school? Was I doing well? An all-girls school? How did I decide on that? When would I graduate? Eventually the subject turned to Robert Chord.

"Have you met him before?" he asked me.

"No sir, I have not," I said. My stomach flip-flopped. Niceville touches the Gulf and is far enough away from any tourist trap that during the day you can actually see the water. The Gulf glittered pearly blue, the most inviting ocean I've ever been too. It's all a façade though. The Gulf is just as dangerous as any other ocean, and when the moon gets ripe, it will drown you twice as fast.

"Nervous?" Uncle Scott asked. He still looked in his twenties, despite turning 42 last year.

I nodded.

"Well, don't make a big deal of it. He met Josh recently and it went fine. Everybody had a fine time."

It took 30 minutes to drive to the seafood store and fifteen minutes for them to boil our shrimp. Another 30-minute drive back and Robert Chord and his wife, Candace, were already there.

While Uncle Scott loaded in the shrimp, I slipped in the front door. Aunt Donna sat on the couch, sucking down a glass of wine. She hugged me when she saw me.

"Arienne! How it's going?" Years in the Florida sun left Aunt

**"They talked like old friends
who had simply lost touch.
Not like a woman who had
been abandoned by her father."**

Donna walnut brown. She lives in shorts and flip-flops.

"It's going pretty good." I moved over to the patio door and looked through the glass. Mallory, Josh-Posh, and Drake talked outside.

"Where's Robert Chord?" I asked.

"He's just around the corner." Aunt Donna picked up her glass and poked her head into the kitchen. "Dad?"

Robert Chord and his wife Candace came around the corner.

"Oh," I thought. "So this is my mother's father." He was shorter than I expected, though that could have been from age. Once he had been a brawny man's man, but that muscle had softened over the years. He could have easily been 85. And he was balder than an eagle.

"Dad," Aunt Donna said. "Have you met Arianne?" She motioned for me. I stepped forward. I didn't say anything, could barely breathe. "I hope he likes me," I thought.

He looked at me dewy eyed for a minute, as if he was trying to remember the name of an old movie star. Then he said, with a voice like gravel, "Of course I've met Arianne! She's Wendy's oldest!" He turned back to Aunt Donna then and left me alone the rest of the night.

At dinner we sat across from each other, Robert Chord and I, with shrimp, greens, and silence between us. All around me, the Chord family shelled husks and tossed them on empty plates. They sucked down shrimp, their fingers slick with juice and cocktail sauce. But Robert Chord only had two shrimp. He said the boil upset his stomach. Instead, he ate two pieces of ice cream cake.

The rest of the night he sat on the couch, quietly talking to my mother. She did most of talking, with my grandfather adding in his two bits. They talked like old friends who had simply lost touch. Not like a woman who had been abandoned by her father.

"It's gift time!" Aunt Kaylee said. She handed me the camera,

made sure the settings were right. “Come on, Nicholas. It’s gift time.”

Mom handed Nicholas his gift; Gap Baby clothes. Then my aunt who had bought some toy keyboard that made noise even when no one was touching it. Uncle Scott grimaced at the thought of waking up at four in the morning to turn off that damned contraption. Aunt Kaylee reached for Nicholas’s last gift.

“Wait,” Robert Chord said, reaching over the arm of the couch to retrieve a present. “I have one for Samantha, too.”

I got angry. Where was my gift? Or Mallory’s? Or Drake’s? What did Josh get? For that matter, what about Mom? Did he buy her an “I’m sorry” gift? Did he send it with a card that read, “I’m sorry you had to grow up so fast”? Where was the condolence letter after Grandma Di passed? Where was he when I was graduating?

I know it’s ridiculous being jealous of a three year old and a one year old, but I seethed there with a camera in hand, documenting every moment of their budding relationship. They had an opportunity to get to know Robert Chord, a man who had been an enigma to me my entire life. Lucky bastards.

That night Mallory and I whispered secrets in bed. We shared a full-sized bed in Josh-Posh’s room, while Drake and Josh slept on trundle beds down in the family room. Josh was a huge Gator fan and his bedspread was the team’s colors. We had the covers pulled up to our chins, and we shifted under them, letting the blankets cool our thighs and feet.

The thing about Florida nights is that they choke you, but in a way that’s tolerable. Florida has thick, almost creamy air. As we huffed our way through the night, Mallory splayed out her legs to

“... I felt empty, almost like crying. But I didn’t cry over him when I was little and I wasn’t going to start now.”

enjoy the coolness of the sheets.

“Hey, Mally?” I whispered after a brief silence.

“Yes, Arianne?”

“Are you sleeping?”

I couldn’t see her in the dark, but she kicked me under the covers to let me know she was annoyed.

“Did Mom’s dad treat you the same way when you met him for the first time?”

“Treat me how?” She shifted her legs around in the sheets, so that her right leg draped over my left. The sheets pooled down around my feet, and I buried my feet in them.

“You know, disinterested in you. He sort of pretended I wasn’t there.”

“Yeah.” Mallory rolled over, and I could really feel her looking at me now. “He did the same to me and Drake.”

“And that doesn’t make you angry?”

The sound of breathing filled the room. She gulped air and then let it leak out in a steady stream. “A bit.”

“He’s more interested in Sam and Nicholas than us.”

“Can you blame him,” Mallory said. “He hasn’t fucked up with them.”

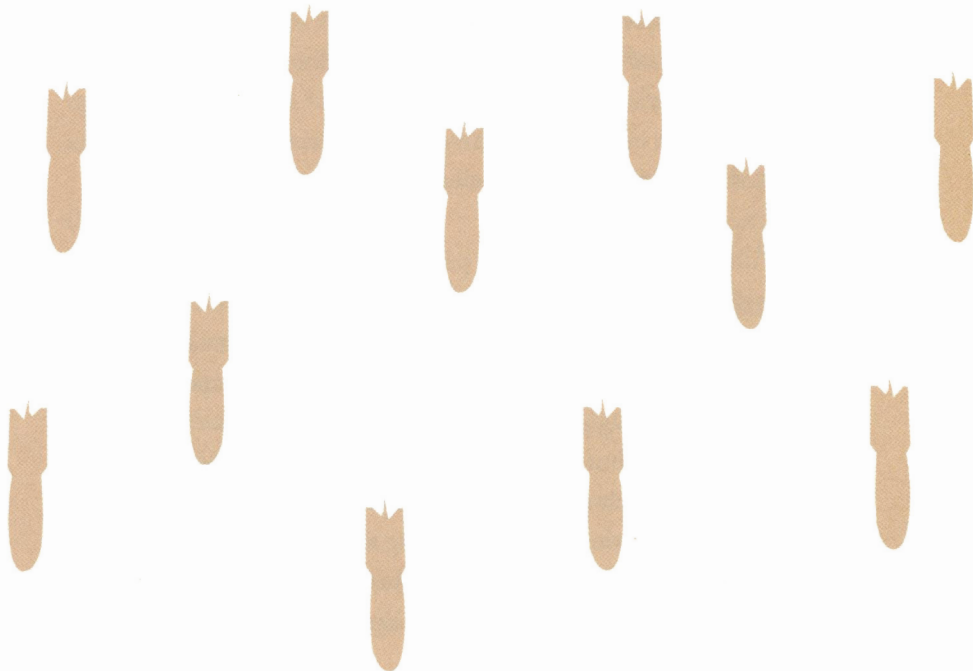
I unclenched my toes and pushed the covers down around my ankles.

“Yeah. I guess there’s guilt.” Mallory nodded. Eventually we grew quiet again, and it was just our breath coming in and out through the night air.

I didn’t sleep, but I did wait for morning to come. As it broke, bright and hot, I felt empty, almost like crying. But I didn’t cry over him when I was little and I wasn’t going to start now. My childhood motivations for this obsession with Robert Chord seemed innocent, but as an adult there is a darkness that tiptoes around the edges of

my mind. I wanted to know if there was a connection between my parents' divorce and my grandparents' divorce. At least my parents knew what they were getting their kids into.

The next morning we said goodbye to Josh-Posh and the rest of the Chords. We held on tight to Sam and Nicholas while they scrambled to get away from us. Aunt Kaylee and Uncle Scott said that we should come back soon, that because they lived so close we could visit whenever we wanted. We kissed and hugged and promised we would. Then my four-person family piled into the car and hightailed it back to Alabama, away from the Gulf.



Snowman

By Heather Beger

Characters

Hope: A twelve-year-old girl.

Jack: A seventeen-year-old boy who appears as a snowman. He remains stationary but can move his arms. He holds sticks in his hands.

Scene

Hope's backyard.

Time

Winter.

Lights come up with Hope on her tiptoes, reaching for Jack's hat. Jack in return pushes her away.

HOPE

Just give me the damn hat.

JACK

Whoa! Since when have you been saying damn? Is that even possible for a twelve-year-old?

HOPE

Just give me the hat, Jack. Mom doesn't want it to get ruined.

JACK

Maybe you shouldn't have decorated your snowman with my favorite hat.

HOPE

But then he wouldn't look like you. You're only you when you're wearing your hat. Or you used to be.

Drama

45

Beger

JACK

Hey now, that was a year ago. You still gonna get hung up on what happened?

HOPE

You wouldn't understand. You weren't there. I mean you don't understand what we went through.

Hope sits down and begins drawing in the snow.

JACK

Okay well, I was there.

HOPE

I had never seen Dad cry before.

JACK

(laughing)

I have. Remember when Dad and I were outside that one summer and he was teaching me how to pitch? Man, I must have hit him square in the . . . well, maybe you were too young to remember.

HOPE

(laughing)

Oh, I remember. Dad was trying his best to calmly yell into the house, "Hope! Can you get Daddy an ice pack?" (beat) You know, you can still turn situations around like that and just make me laugh. You were so good at making people forget about whatever was bothering them.

JACK

Like how I made you forget about trying to take my hat?

HOPE

Hey!

(stands for another big reach, gets shoved away again, steps back and crosses arms)

I'm serious, Jack. I need the hat.

JACK

Oh you could never pull this hat off like I could.

(grabs the bill of the cap and smiles)

HOPE

How did you do it, Jack?

JACK

Do what? Be so good looking?

HOPE

How were you so good at everything?

JACK

Easy. I was older than you. Older people are always good at everything.

HOPE
But how?

JACK
Someone even older teaches them.

HOPE
I guess you weren't really good at everything.

JACK
Oh, what wasn't I good at?

HOPE
Driving.

JACK
That's a pretty sadistic joke for a twelve-year-old.

HOPE
You're a pretty sadistic joke for a brother.

JACK
Don't get your feathers all ruffled, Dodo.

HOPE
Don't start that dodo stuff. You know I hate that ugly bird.

(tries another swipe at the hat)

JACK
Then don't be an ugly little bird. Dodo! Dodo!



HOPE

I thought I was done with that stupid nickname.

JACK

You would be, if you started playing softball again.

HOPE

I was never really good at that.

JACK

You were the best hitter on the team.

HOPE

Only because an older person taught me.

JACK

Why did you stop playing?

HOPE

You were the only one who came to my games.

JACK

So? You don't need an audience to kick butt.

HOPE

Yeah, but . . .

JACK

A bird doesn't need its momma bird to keep pushing him out of the nest every time he has to fly.

HOPE
I guess.

JACK
A woman doesn't need a man to feel beautiful.

Hope laughs as she hides her face embarrassed.

JACK
A book doesn't need to be a New York Times Best Seller just to be a great piece of literature, right?

HOPE
Yes.

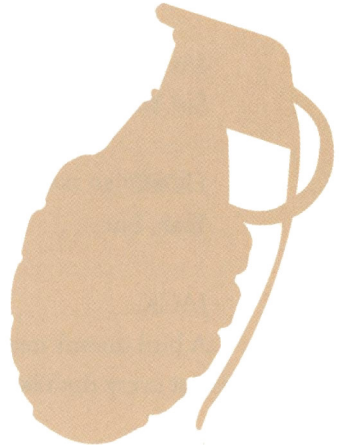
JACK
Then you don't need someone at your games to constantly remind you that you're a great player. You should already know that.

Hope kicks at the snow on the ground.

Throw me one.

HOPE
(looks around)
Throw you one what?

JACK
Throw me a snowball.



HOPE

But . . .

JACK

Or throw it at me. Just throw me a snowball.

Hope kneels and pats together a snowball. She stands and throws it at Jack, barely hitting him.

Well, at least you have an excuse.

HOPE

What?

JACK

You're a girl, explains why you throw like one.

HOPE

Oh, you wanna see me throw like a girl?

Hope bends over and makes a large snowball that she winds up and pelts into Jack's side.

JACK

Ugh, I think I need an ice pack!

(both laugh at the irony of this statement)

HOPE

(beat)

It's so nice to laugh again.

JACK

Again? Did you give up laughing like softball?

HOPE

No, I just . . . It's hard to find humor in things anymore.

JACK

Sounds like you're just a bit of a drama queen to me.

HOPE

A drama queen? My brother is dead. You are dead. You expect me to not be dramatic.

JACK

Dodo . . .

HOPE

Ugh! You're so frustrating! The only person who ever cared about me drives his stupid car into a tree and a year later you think I can just laugh whenever I want?

JACK

Well, sure.

Hope is left dumbstruck.

Laugh. Just do it!

HOPE

You're crazy.

JACK

I'm gonna tell you something kid, and you better remember this. The world is gonna keep turning, whether I'm alive or not. And you? You're gonna keep living, just like everybody else.

HOPE

It's so hard to get through it all. I feel so stuck. I'm . . . I'm lost, Jack.

She pauses and looks at Jack.

JACK

Hey, remember what Grandma used to tell us when we didn't want to go to school?

HOPE

So? This isn't about being able to go to school. It's about every day.

JACK

The same thing applies. Now, what did she say?

HOPE

(reciting)

You always have a choice, kid. You can either go to school with that horrible attitude and come home depressed or you can go to school and put a smile on your face and come home happier. But either way you're going.

JACK

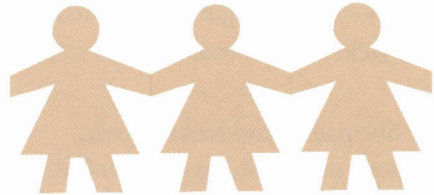
Or as I like to put it, you can take each day as a slap to the face, or you can beat it to it. Either way, it's comin' at ya.

HOPE

All right, I get it.

JACK

Really?



HOPE

Yeah.

JACK

So what did we learn today, Dodo?

HOPE

You can sit around waiting for someone to come tell you everything is going to okay, or you can take matters into your own hands.

JACK

Exactly.

Jack closes his eyes peacefully.

HOPE

You can wait around for your brother to give you his hat, or . . .

Hope snatches the hat while Jack isn't looking. Jack opens his eyes stunned.

You can sneak up on him and take it for yourself.

JACK

Well done little sister. I think you'll get along just fine.

HOPE

(speaking to herself)

Yeah, everything is going to be just fine.

End.

Spaghettification

By Arianne Kobler

Characters

Astrid Lyra: The captain of the Voyage.

Quinn Vega: Lyra's long suffering first officer. She is short in stature.

Boots: One half of a renegade couple. She is seeking paradise.

Tau: Boot's girlfriend. More than anything, she wants to live.

Scene

The helm of the space ship, the Voyage.

Time

The year is 2255.

Lights up. Boots and Tau are aboard the spaceship, Voyage. They are in love and sneaking aboard this ship. Crouching, they make their way across the helm or control room of the ship. Boots suddenly stands up and looks out the window.

BOOTS

Wow . . .

TAU

Boots, what are you doing?

BOOTS

Checking out the view. Could you see us like this? Living in the stars?

TAU

Boots, get down!

BOOTS

I've dreamed of places like this.

TAU
Boots!

Boots takes Tau's hand and crouches. She kisses her hand.

BOOTS
Baby, I'm going to find us a place like this. It'll be 11:59 all
the time.

TAU
Why 11:59?

BOOTS
It's always darkest before midnight.

TAU
No, it's always darkest before dawn.

BOOTS
I've heard it both ways.

TAU
I doubt it.

BOOTS
Where we going again, babe?

TAU
To Druin. Far side of the galaxy.

Drama

57

Kobler

BOOTS

I've heard that they don't like outsiders.

TAU

Babe, they'll like us.

BOOTS

Love it when you call me babe.

A sound. They freeze. There's loud talking in the distance.

TAU

Babe . . .

BOOTS

I know.

They hide behind the console wall. Enter Captain Astrid Lyra and First Officer Quinn Vega.

VEGA

Ma'am.

LYRA

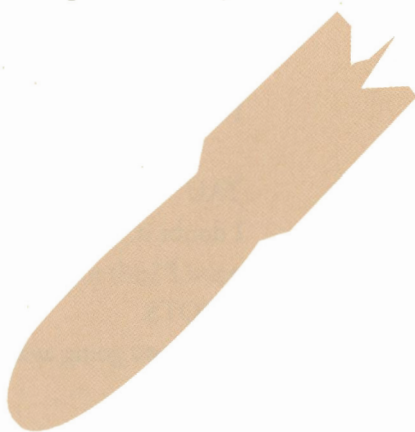
No, not "ma'am".

VEGA

Sir?

LYRA

Yes, "Sir." I didn't fight my way tooth and nail to be called ma'am.



VEGA

No of course not.

LYRA

I didn't battle through red tape and all the "no she can'ts" and "bite my asses" to be called ma'am.

VEGA

Yes, thank you, sir.

LYRA

I didn't punch my way through the glass ceiling so that I could be ma'amed by a half-pint officer in mismatched socks.

VEGA

I would like to remind *Sir* that *Sir* is dangerously close to insulting an old family tradition. If *Sir* should like to continue this train of thought then I would like to remind *Sir* that there is no clinic on the way to Axta. I mean if *Sir* happens to be injured between here and there. (beat) *Sir*.

LYRA

Noted. Thank you.

VEGA

Should I remind *Sir* why we are going to an outpost at the end of the universe and not, as was scheduled, Druin, *Sir*?

LYRA

That won't be necessary.

VEGA

Fruit juice. Nothing of importance. Just old world nostalgia. Stuff so loaded with sugar it goes down like bad whiskey.

LYRA

Never liked the stuff.

VEGA

No one likes it.

LYRA

Do you know why I took this job, Vega?

VEGA

There was a reason?

LYRA

Your sarcasm is noted. Yes, there was a reason. There is a reason behind every job and that is to buy this ship.

VEGA

To buy this ship?

LYRA

One day, the Voy-ah-jay will be mine.

VEGA

Voyage, sir, I keep telling you it's Voyage.

LYRA

I've heard it both ways. The Voy-ah-jay will be mine one day.
When I can buy it.

VEGA

Do you do the soap opera villain impression on purpose?

LYRA

To be honest, it helps.

A quiet, almost unnoticeable alarm sounds.

LYRA

Dear god! What is that?

VEGA

The alarm, sir.

LYRA

Is that what it sounds like? Who is it warning?

VEGA

You, sir.

LYRA

Well, what's it saying?

VEGA

(with gravity)

We've passed the event horizon.

LYRA

What in the blazes does that mean?

VEGA

It means we're going to die.

LYRA

What?

VEGA

My mother told me stories about this. Don't get so close that time stops.

LYRA

What are you talking about?

VEGA

Black holes. There's a saying about black holes . . . don't get so close that time stops.

Tau walks out of hiding. Boots tries to grab her arm.

TAU

What do you mean die?

LYRA

Who are you?

BOOTS

Nobody. We're nobody. And you?

LYRA

Astrid Lyra, Captain of the Voy-ah-jay, owner . . .

VEGA

Nearly owner . . .

LYRA

Of this ship.

TAU

I thought it was pronounced Voyage.

LYRA

I've heard it both ways.

BOOTS

We aren't going to die.

VEGA

I'm afraid . . .

BOOTS

No. Nope.

LYRA

I'll go down with this ship. Not a bad way to go.

BOOTS

Tau and I aren't going. Not at all.

The alarm sounds again.

Drama

63

Kobler

BOOTS

There has to be something you can do. Call in the calvary,
reverse the polarity, something.

VEGA

Not this far in. Not past the event horizon.

BOOTS

What does that even mean?

VEGA

Mother always said, "Everything gets spaghetti-fied at the event
horizon." Times stops and everything pulls a part.

TAU

(out of nowhere)

Shut up with the nursery rhymes and the creepy midget deal.
We aren't dying today.

LYRA

(full of vigor)

Oh, I don't know. Today's a good day to die!

VEGA

Better then Axta, anyway.

TAU

You two get us out of this or I swear I will make your last few
minutes hell.

Lyra points to the door.

LYRA

Escape pods, down the corridor, to your left. I doubt you'll get far. Black holes.

VEGA

They're a bitch and a half.

TAU

We'll take our chances. Come on, Boots.

Boots and Tau exit. Lyra and Vega try to stand up, but can't. The pressure weighing down on them is too strong. They crawl toward each other.

VEGA

You weren't so bad, sir.

LYRA

This ship. The Voyage. Isn't she a looker?

VEGA

Don't talk.

LYRA

So quiet.

Vega shushes her. They close their eyes and enjoy the quiet.

End.

Drama

65

Kobler

Never Let Me Go

By Nicole Barth

The seaweed of my morning hair lay splayed out in your direction.
Buried under layers of wool and tattered cotton,
polished skin dreamt of your embrace.

Your muffled breathing kept the day at arm's length.
The static from your arms coursed through me,
humming in my veins as I breathed you in.

I was born in a city of flashing lights and discord.
I screamed out love songs from the ends of my fingertips.

And you can call this what you want . . .
Your song is never ending.

Time cannot lessen the calm in your voice,
the confessions in your lips or the child hiding in your laughter.

I cannot be returned.
So I'll keep listening to the pulse of this Sunday afternoon.

The heart is hard to translate.
I'm going to lose my mind between the pages of a journal,
every gesture recorded in a trail of fascination.

Seamless

By Nicole Barth

I woke up whispering the sound of your dreams,
a compromise between the sweetness of last night's kisses
and this morning's embrace.

I reflected the breaths that grazed my skin.
Sonorous sighs trailed from me to you
in a quiet stream of acknowledgement.

Like a carnival of peace,
I moved from satin strands of hair
to the scar on your right knuckle.
A cartographer, retracing the familiar nuances of you and I.

Lower Coastal Plain Proverbs

By Grace Pittman

Poetry

68

Pittman

1.

If you crush pokeberry for red war paint,
no one will see your anger,
only your beauty under the pines,
and applaud your resourcefulness.

2.

Here is the call of the Cooper's hawk.
Here is her nest and her mate,
death and life huddled together
in a basket of leaves.

3.

The raptor does what he must.
Rabbit in the pine; warm flesh in his claw.

4.

The armadillo eats fire ants
and does not complain
about his bitten tongue.

5.

The 1900 blight felled all chestnuts.
Pay them homage.
They are the angels of the forests.

6.

The cougar's stalk
will always be stronger than yours,
shoulder blades stronger than yours.

7.

In 1915, Florida heard its last red wolf's howl.

Be as the diamond back
who lives with the gopher tortoise.

8.

Sumac feeds the songbirds.

Songbirds feed your ears.

9.

Trace your name in the sand.

Pick up the limestone fossil at your boot.

Notice the prints of shells and sea.

Call this fate.

10.

The deer's heart beats furiously as yours.

You both circle the sun.

11.

In spring,

the air is heavy with the sweet musk
of scuppernongs.

Smell the season age with you.

12.

Salamanders drift lazily atop puddles,
metamorphosing,
taking their time.

13.

The largemouth bass

and his green scales

glint like emeralds on the dock.

14.

Why knock the red clay from your boots?
You carry your home with you—
dandelion seeds caught
in the cotton threads of your shirt.

15.

When your grandfather was young,
he did not know the Cattle Egret,
all can move from one sky
to another.

16.

The circling vulture can decipher
life and death from high.

17.

Blazing star, purple and hidden
beneath huckleberry,
envies the indigo snake's dark hue
and hiss.

18.

Grow lily pads.
The green frog enjoys croaking from a chair.

19.

Water oaks are not crying,
though their leaves are shaped like tears.

20.

Sometimes,
the smallest summer thrush
can flap hard enough,
sing loud enough,
to impress the hawk.

21.

Spiders creep up your shirt
as you step on ant beds.
Spear jellyfish with sticks.

22.

The mockingbird may trill,
but fish understand water.

23.

The place for sighting birds
is the corner of your eye.

24.

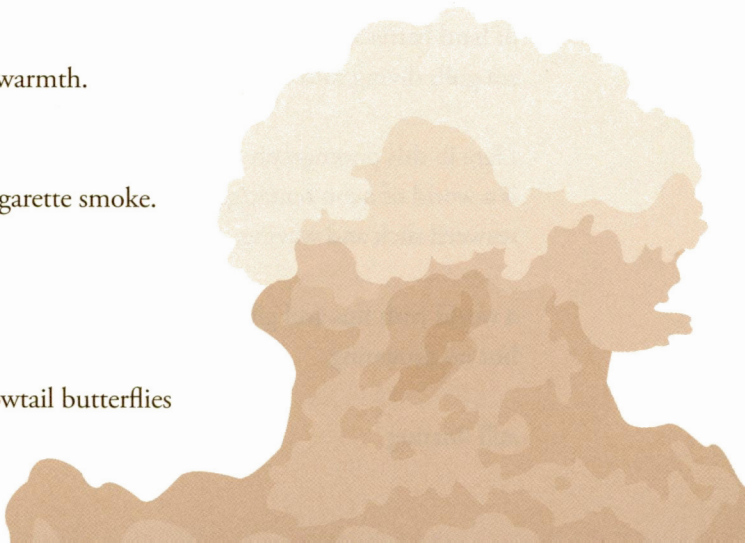
Milkweed at six a.m.
is pocket-sized green warmth.

25.

A moth thrashes in cigarette smoke.
Air is for wings.

26.

Only speak words
that flutter like swallowtail butterflies
above your tongue.



Beach Photo

By Grace Pittman

You took our photo at the beach
and here it is on my kitchen counter,
unframed and demanding attention.

Each time I see your face next to mine
a tidal wave of sea urchins
rushes in my skull, lapping salt against my brain.

I want to tear the photo,
perfect between our two faces.
You are a whale's skeleton lumbering in my kitchen,

messing with my pots and pans,
and my shadow behind you stands,
beach sand still stuck to my calves.

Our friendship was a seascape
of hard barnacles on a pillar of wood,
sea gulls diving into white foamed waves.

Here in this photograph
is a world of neon tentacles,
seaweed slick and waving,

a world with fins and gills
but no drowning,

still floating

After our Talk at the Rawls Hotel ...

By Grace Pittman

After walking the train tracks,
after confessing all our secrets,
pent up for the last five years,
and because I could not speak straight,
and the air smelled of peanuts
though it would be months till harvest,
and piano music tumbled from the lobby,
I put on my boots and drive out to the tree farm.
Trees don't demand answers,
and the only creature that will cry
is a summer thrush guarding her nest.

You heard only half of my words
because my roots clung to the safety
of abstractions, incoherence,
words lost in the tumult of other words.
When I dare tramp through a copse of trees
to glimpse a great blue heron fly,
its wings slow and determined,
from one side of the tree stand
to the other,
I feel nothing but the sweet prick
of a blackberry thorn in my thigh.

Poetry

73

Pittman

I lean back
against a thirty-year-old long leaf pine.
No one knows how long these trees can live.
An educated guess: they can withstand
five hundred years of erosion, rain, lightning,
shuddering under God's heavy hands,
but this one will be cut,
and turned into a telephone pole
to line a suburban street
in a state I've never been.

I watch a Gulf Fritillary,
orange and light winged,
lift from huckleberry, land on yaupon.
I would share this with you,
but we are not walking the train tracks,
no one plays the piano.
Chicken houses congest the air,
and the mourning dove sings her three notes.

Your absence shoots down my throat
like a hot rail spike.
I swallow again, pushing back
the flood of heat,
asking for the day to cool,
for the pine to stop growing,
remembering the gopher tortoise
who, on a visit to a neighboring burrow,
tried a short cut under the electric fence.
When I found him
the wire still popped—
pop, pop, pop—
upon his shelled, defeated back.

Night Storm

By Grace Pittman

Outside my bedroom window the oaks and pines grow heavy with rain.
 Their trunks sink deeper into the red clay.
 Droplets vein down the bark as the sky presses an angry fist
 into the chest of my backyard. My neighbor, Mr. Lee, died years ago.

Mrs. Lee no longer bakes her famous oatmeal chocolate chip cookies.
 The train tracks still slice through the center of town.
 The graffitied boxcars and iron rails still perfect for squashing pennies
 and keeping the “bad sort” off Main Street.

Kudzu drapes over abandoned shotgun houses.
 In the tropical humidity, we might as well be drowning in the Pea River,
 except the air smells sweet like pink magnolias
 and honeysuckle in spring.

In the fall, we ride a Ferris wheel at the Peanut Festival
 and eat turkey legs under a crisp sky.
 We can see every star. They go on for miles and miles,
 sucked deep into that absorbing mouth of space.

Looking up, turkey leg in hand, it’s easy to realize
 how we’re just a pinprick on the galaxy’s underbelly.
 The rain comes in sheets now.
 The clouds flash with heat lightning.

When the tornado came a few years ago,
 an oak crashed through my bedroom wall
 and split the room in two. A crack still runs behind my bed frame
 from poor fixing. Cuts, down the street, still serves

Poetry

75

Pittman

the best hot dogs in the world.

Flies still buzz over the food and land on the turnip greens
and fried green tomatoes. How did it all get this way?

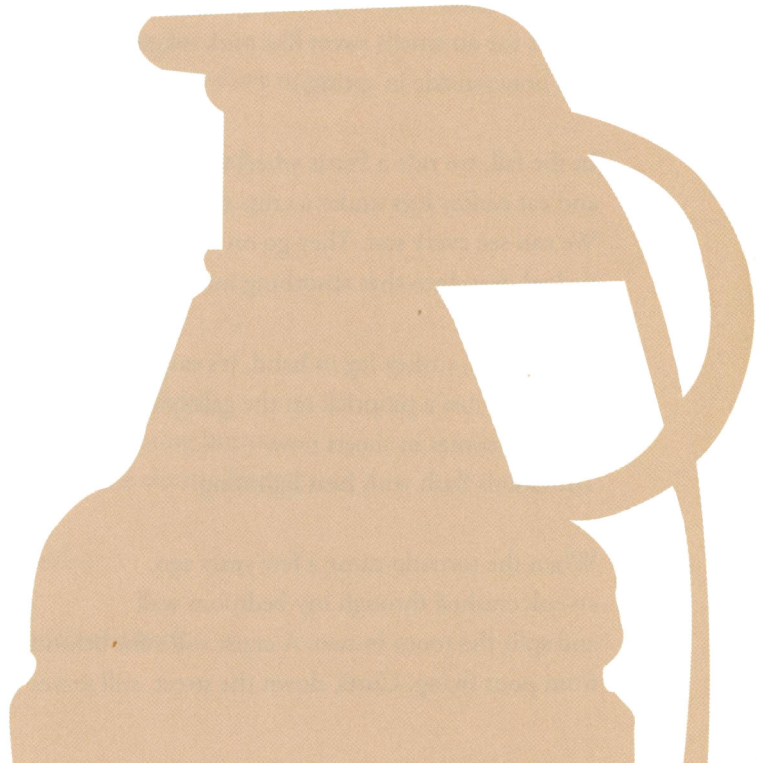
Why don't I sneak onto the roof anymore when my father is asleep?

How did I forget that we once had a chicken named Henrietta
who was carried away by a hawk, wings flapping and screaming?
Now my room has been dismantled.

All the posters removed and clothes given to my younger cousins.

I look out the window at Sylvan Drive.

Watch the storm drag its heavy foot through my town,
stealing tree limbs, waking crawdads,
giving us all a needed scare.



The Rule of Bodies

By Grace Pittman

This night under the fan blades
you, usually immobile, mountainous,
become malleable desert sand
billowing in a high wind,
passionate for creating new hills,
admiring soft curves,
releasing onto me in tornadic rushes
your body's dream.
You build heavy dunes
atop my naked chest.
For you, you whisper.

Your face hovers over mine,
a sun burning,
and your hands brush my thighs
like altering wind.
Your hair gleams,
and when I grip the back of your head,
sand catches
between my fingers.

You are only passing, leaving traces.

In the morning I stare at your legacy
in the mirror, hot gold glimmering in glass.
Heat ripples off my chest.
Grit burns in the deep hollows of my ears.
I will always remember
the wind's roar blowing from your open mouth.

Poetry

77

Pittman

In the Realm of Dreams

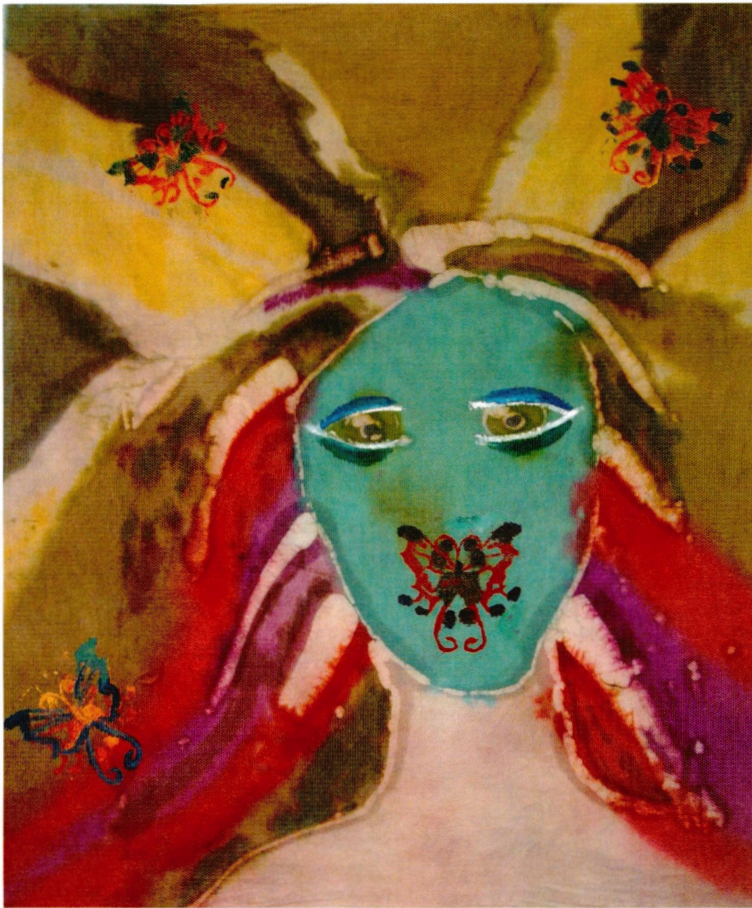
By Amber Surdam

My artwork portrays a fragile yet balanced atmosphere. I begin with an idea or take inspiration from dreams, fairy tales or myths and then transform these impressions into artwork. I attempt to convey a sense of serenity, solitariness, and sometimes anguish—all emotions that I hope resonate with the viewer.

When I paint, I usually begin with a limited palette: black, white, red ochre, and golden yellow. As I move further into the painting's composition, I branch out and add other primary and secondary colors on top of the basic color scheme. I paint heavy; I change or add characters, furniture or additional colors frequently. The painting ends up with multiple layers.

Part of my process includes dyeing my own fabric. I cover certain areas in wax and then bleach the rest. I use block printing, sun dyeing, and paint to perfect my batiks.

I learned over the past couple of years that I have a need to paint, draw and dye fabric to feel healthy. The desire to create images builds up until my ideas are released as daydreams or nightmares. I must create art; art has not only become part of me it has become something I cannot live without.



Silence, batik, 37 x 35 ½ in, 2011.

Artwork

80

Surdam



Midnight Dance of the Butterflies, batik, 24 x 21 ¼ in, 2011.

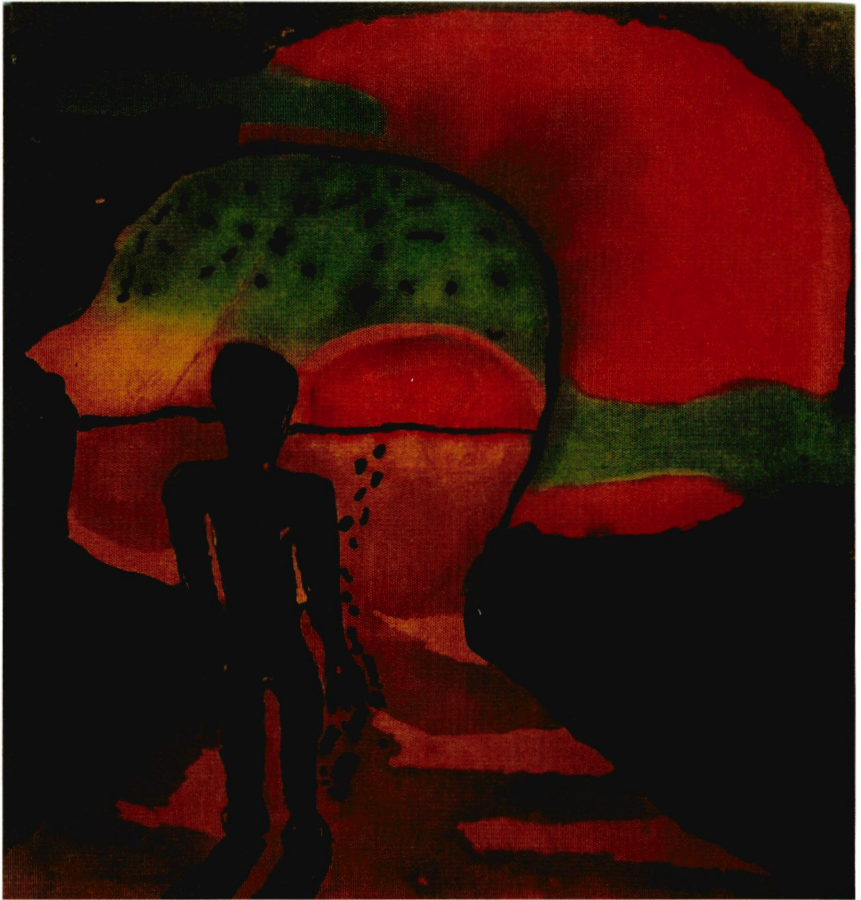


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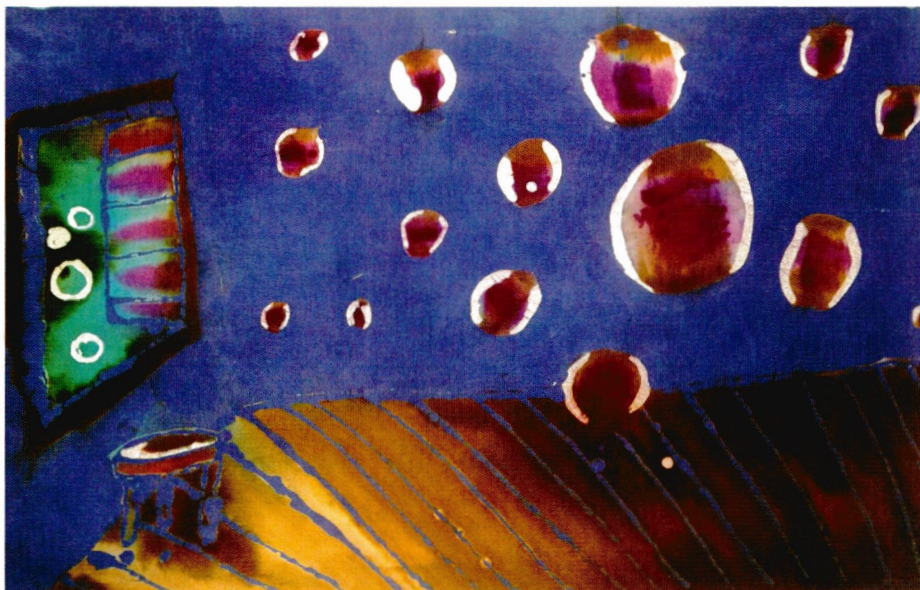
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Surdam

Cupid and Psyche, acrylic on vellum, 19 ¼ x 24 in, 2011.



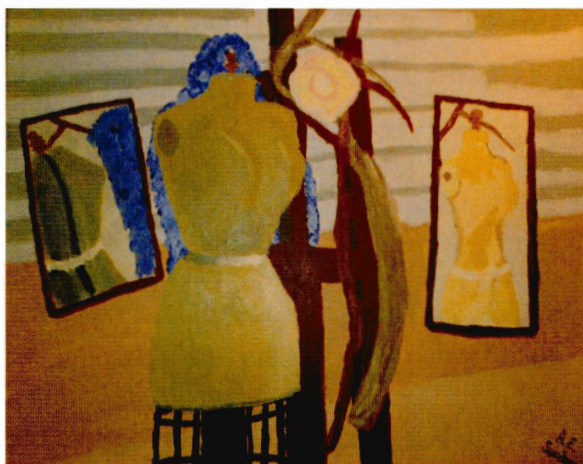
The Unconscious Mind, batik, 23 ¼ x 20 ¼ in, 2011.



A Room Full of Bubbles, batik, 32 x 22 in, 2011.

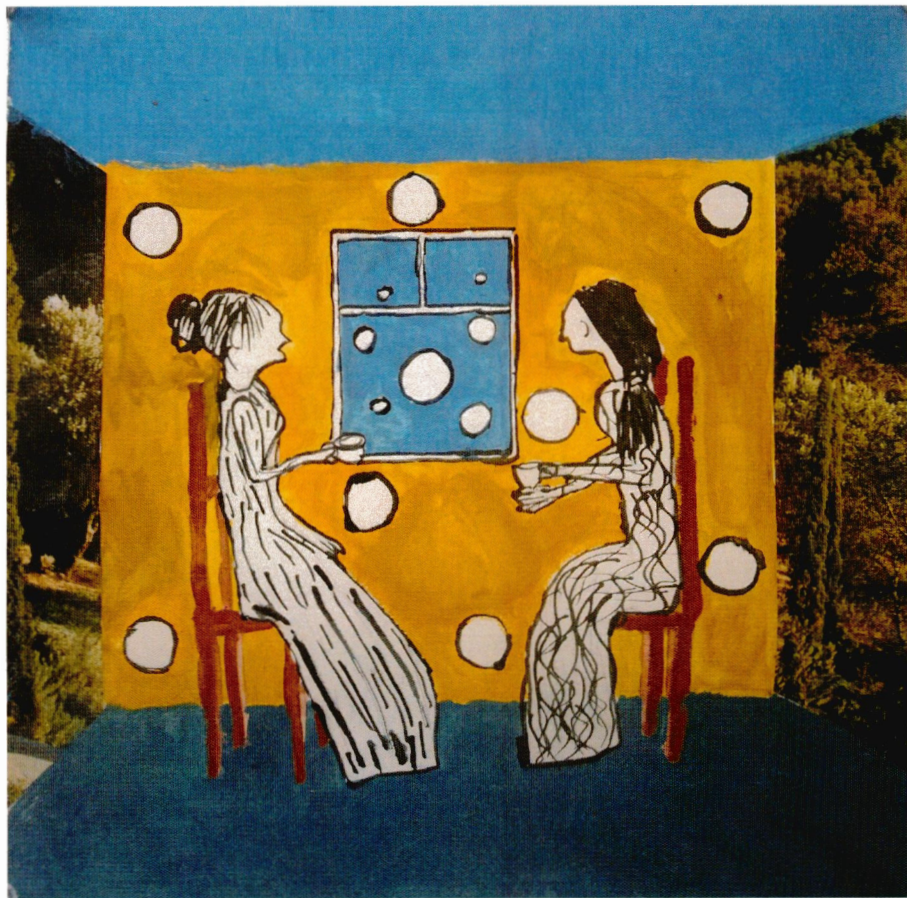
Artwork

83



A Mannequin Still Life, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 20 in, 2011.

Surdam



Tea on a Sunday Morning, acrylic on vellum, 9 ½ x 9 ¾ in, 2010.

A Conversation with Editor Andrew Leland

By Olivia Aguilar

Olivia Aguilar: Start by explaining your position and responsibilities at the *Believer*? How did you get started?

Andrew Leland: I am co-editor with Heidi Julavits, and she and I assign and edit the long-form essays in each issue of the *Believer*. We find writers we like who would be interesting to readers on a particular subject, and we also go through the slush pile, looking at submissions and then working with the writers to shape those into pieces that work for the magazine. There's also a lot of general editorial stuff, non-publication things like events, anthologies, special issues, and smaller pieces that aren't long-form essays. Just this month we launched a new monthly podcast, called the Organist that we created in collaboration with KCRW in Los Angeles. I started as managing editor of the *Believer*. It's only been about a year since I've been co-editor.

The *Believer* is published by *McSweeney's*, which is a literary journal but also the name for the whole San Francisco-based company. It's a small independent press that publishes a wide range of books and periodicals. I became interested in *McSweeney's* in high



school and interned there for a summer and then later a January term when I was in college. The *Believer* didn't exist at that point, but behind the scenes they were developing it, and they needed a managing editor. They offered me the job, so I immediately dropped out of college, moved to San Francisco and worked as the managing editor for eight years.

“We publish A-list writers doing things that other magazines wouldn't let them get away with . . .”

Aguilar: How does working online compare to having physical editorial meetings? Do you find it easier or harder?

Leland: Even though I was working in that office with a bunch of other people, most people that I was working with in San Francisco weren't working on the *Believer* directly. Even when I was in that office in San Francisco, the magazine mostly came together over email. All of the editors were living in different cities. So even though I'm no longer in that office, it's not much different. The magazine has always come together over email.

Aguilar: You started working at the *Believer* with the second issue of the magazine. How did the vision for the magazine begin and how was it brought to life?

Leland: In a lot of ways, the first issue of the magazine was created as a template for all subsequent issues to follow. From the beginning the creators of the magazine knew it would keep the overhead low by employing only one full-time salaried managing editor, so the magazine would have to be designed such that one person could bring it all together. So the same illustrator, Charles Burns, always draws the cover and the essays and interviews always have the same layout. The magazine still has the same editorial mission, as well: We publish long, in-depth, serious essays that keep their sense of humor, addressing subjects that aren't necessarily timely, by A-list writers doing things that other magazines wouldn't let

them get away with—whether it’s length or style—and then putting the words of those writers alongside work of younger or first-time writers.

We also publish long-form interviews with a wide range of subjects, such as an interview with a 1970s rock star alongside an interview with a moral philosopher. There’s also an attention to design, and seeing the magazine as an artifact and an object that’s worth people’s attention. The changes to the original template are more about refining and refreshing what that original template set out to do.

Aguilar: For those who are not familiar with the *Believer*, how would you describe the tone of the magazine?

Leland: As I was just describing, you have the rock star and the moral philosopher treated with the same interest: they’re both subjects that are worth listening to. I would say that encapsulates the magazine’s attitude. It’s important to understand philosophy, and

“There’s also an attention to design, and seeing the magazine as an artifact and an object that’s worth people’s attention.”

it’s just as important to understand your pleasures. Important art happens on every level of the culture, and in unexpected places. A lot of

intellectual magazines have a view of culture where there’s one place where you can find ideas worthy of investigation, and that is in the highest reaches of culture: the academy, lyric poetry, things like that. The *Believer’s* approach is that there’s also something to be said for daytime television, martial arts, people who believe in vampires. You can take a highbrow approach to those subjects and the result will be

interesting, and you can approach highbrow stuff with humor and casualness that's usually reserved for lowbrow subjects.

Aguilar: What's the editorial process like at the *Believer*? What is the *Believer's* editorial philosophy?

Leland: All of the editors live in different cities, so it all happens online. Submissions are mostly funneled out and then we have interns, a deputy editor, and other people who help out with the filtering process. In addition to unsolicited submissions, we'll also assign pieces to writers.

As for the editorial philosophy, each editor brings her own strengths and interests to the table. As managing editor for many years, I could look at different pieces and could tell you who edited them, because each editor has her own style and her own interests. Overall, our editorial philosophy is what I mentioned before, which is an approach to culture that embraces both ends of the high-low spectrum. There's also a commitment to humor and good writing, as well as a focus on the art of journalism, the art of criticism, the art of design.

Aguilar: In a 2005 article, *The New York Times* wrote that the *Believer* "puts out a welcome mat for pluralism and wide-eyed curiosity." Do you think this is true and how does the magazine convey that description?

Leland: I do think that's true. The wide-eyed curiosity is about that approach to culture we've been talking about. The *Believer* believes any subject is potentially worthy of discussion and consideration and is potential fodder for a worthwhile, wonderful piece of writing. Pluralism is the same idea; there isn't one formula for what we like or what we think is worth writing

about. Part of that mission has to do with writing itself. Writing shouldn't feel exclusionary, where if you're not fluent in an expert's lexicon of high-literary terms, then you're not going to know what the hell the writer is talking about. A lot of people in the academy do contribute to the magazine, and sometimes part of the editorial process includes demystifying a lot of that tortured academic prose. It's a popular magazine, not just for a rarefied audience. It's for people who love to read, but not just for those readers with PhDs who speak in baroque curlicues about the reification of post-capitalist subjectivity or whatever.

“It’s for people who love to read, but not just for those readers with PhDs . . .”

Aguilar: Do you think the *Believer's* fusion of lowbrow and highbrow topics has contributed to its success?

Leland: I think humor is a big part of its success. It's not a humor magazine, but the magazine keeps an awareness of humor even when it's addressing unfunny subjects like, say, climate change, 19th century Russian poetry, or nation building. Part of this has to do with the magazine's focus on literature, and even though we don't publish fiction we are a literary magazine. One thing I go to literature for is the way a book can be extremely funny while at the same time dark. This potential in literature is what allows the magazine to investigate a serious subject without sacrificing absurdity or comedy.

Aguilar: The *Believer* is known for its cover design and illustrations. Was that “look” the original vision of the staff? How did the staff decide to balance written content with illustration? Do

you think the design will change in the future?

Leland: Yes, the magazine's founders designed the magazine from scratch, selecting Charles Burns as the cover artist and setting the aesthetic tone for future issues. *McSweeney's* as a whole has a strong commitment to the idea that good writing deserves a form that's worthy of the content, and that you do a disservice to a work of literary art if its visual presentation is not up to its written standards. Another belief of the *Believer* is that writing's visual presentation is as important as its substance.

“I find that as long as there are interesting people who challenge and excite you, it doesn't really matter where you are.”

Aguilar: How easy/difficult is it to remain innovative in today's literary magazine industry?

Leland: It's not easy in general, but it is easier for *McSweeney's* to continue that track record of innovation due to its size and independence. It's a drawback that there's only one full-time person on the magazine, but the other side of the coin is that there aren't a lot of resources tied up in unnecessary positions, no editing by committee, no heinous marketing jam sessions—and so the resources can go to more interesting stuff. That's all a function of *McSweeney's* independence; its small and scrappy nature allows for flexibility in the work, and lot more energy than many more corporate settings.

Aguilar: How has working at the *Believer* influenced your own writing?

Leland: It's made me a better editor of my own writing, probably. Working closely with other people's writing encourages me to bring the same attention to detail, a desire to ferret out dead weight and fallacious arguments in my own work. Unfortunately, once I've ferreted out all the dead weight and fallacious arguments, there's nothing left – but then it's all for the best.

Aguilar: How have you found the transition from San Francisco to Columbia?

Leland: I love Columbia. My life has changed a lot during the move, but independent of geography: I left a job I had for eight years, got married, and now have a three-month-old baby. But I love the community here. I've gotten involved with KBIA, and I'm teaching a class at the J-School. I'm learning about writing and journalism from the students – it's the first time I've ever taught. People tend to remark that it must be a big change, moving from California to Missouri, and of course there are major cultural differences, but I find that as long as there are interesting people who challenge and excite you, it doesn't really matter where you are, and I've found plenty of people like that here in Columbia. I do miss the Mexican food, though.

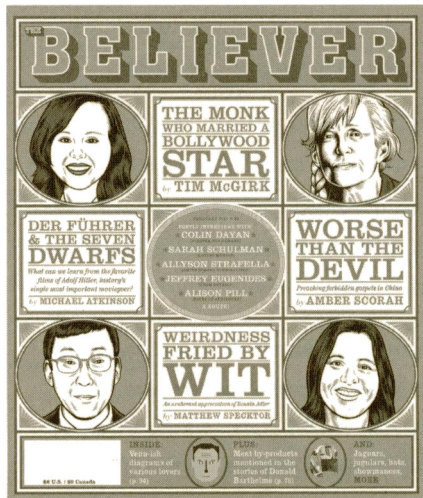
Aguilar: I visited San Francisco a couple of years ago and went to the famous City Lights Bookstore. Any other bookstores in San Francisco that you would recommend?

Leland: Across the street from the *Believer/McSweeney's* office is Dog Eared Books, which will forever have a special place in my heart. Green Apple Books is also world-class. Don't miss the glassed-in poetry case. I also love Modern Times, Alley Cat, and

Needles and Pens. It's worth taking BART to Berkeley to visit the legendary Moe's Books, while you're at it.

Aguilar: Any advice for young writers and graduates hoping to enter the publishing industry?

Leland: When I was at that stage in my life, all I knew was that I wanted to work for a magazine or work in publishing. I would have worked for *Cat Fancy* or, you know, *Dungeons and Pain Quarterly*, anything as long as it was print. I was insanely lucky to get to go straight to a magazine that I actually loved. And there is this cliché that you should (and can) do what you love – one aspect of this truism that surprised me is that not only is it obviously more pleasurable to do what you love, but you also tend to be better at it, and do a better job, since the hard work that's necessary to doing a good job doesn't feel like a chore.



Andrew Leland is co-editor of the *Believer* magazine and host of KCRW's *the Organist*. His writing has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Lifted Brow*, the *Oakland Standard*, and elsewhere. He teaches writing at the Missouri School of Journalism.

A Conversation with Novelist Anthony Doerr

By Grace Pittman

Grace Pittman: Are you currently working on a new project, and if so, would you tell us about it?

Anthony Doerr: Sure, I'm writing a novel right now, a big labyrinth of a book set during World War II, seven years of work, 800 pages, and still not completed. I've read probably 100 books and taken three trips to Europe, all in support of this project, and I'm finally in what I hope are the final months of drafting it. Lately, I've been working long days, often eight or nine-hour stints with only a single break to walk to Albertsons and stare dazedly at the produce for a minute like a caveman before purchasing a chocolate donut and eating it mindlessly while I walk back to my office.

Pittman: When did your love for history begin? What about WWII draws you in? Have you made any interesting discoveries after reading up on the subject?

Doerr: Ever since I've been a reader, I've loved history. We tend to believe history is about collective memory, about voiceovers and textbooks and black-and-white documentaries, but for me history is about individuals. The



glory and genius of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, for example, is in the ordinary, quotidian day-to-day detailing of the writing: the things they eat, the jokes they tell. The horror comes through because of

“Ultimately, a writer makes a community for herself out of the books she reads.”

the mundanity. I read that book when I was fourteen, the same age as Anne, and the lessons of that little diary have stayed with me ever since: first, that through books, the memories of the dead can live; and second, that the path

to the universal is through the individual. Only through the smallest details, through the sights and smells and sounds of one person's moment-by-moment experience, can a writer convey the immensity that is a human life.

Have I made any interesting discoveries during research? Dozens. I learned, for example, that during the invasion of France, Canadian paratroopers strapped fold-up bicycles onto their backs and leapt out of planes with them. They'd hit the ground, set up their bikes, and pedal away. (Or so they hoped). Crazy, no? Over the course of researching, you learn all sorts of things like this, spend days trying to write scenes about them, and then promptly realize they don't really belong in your novel.

Pittman: I know that this is a standard dinner party question, but if you could meet any author living or dead who would it be?

Doerr: I'd use a time machine to spend a day or two with Melville on a ship. And then, after a couple of days trying to sleep there, I'd probably be very excited to zoom back to our time with our nice toilet paper and filtered water and avocados and air conditioning.

Pittman: What would you want to glean from Melville as a writer?

Doerr: How to take risks. How to use humor. How to make every sentence inventive. How to use a narrator to charm your reader. How to harness your dazzlement for the world and translate it into prose.

Pittman: Whose literary career do you admire most from the past?

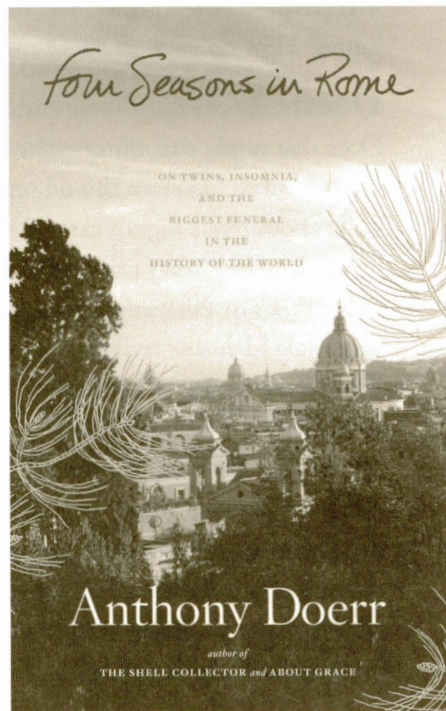
Doerr: Virginia Woolf. Except for the end, of course.

Pittman: What about Woolf's career do you admire?

Doerr: *Mrs. Dalloway* and Woolf's attempt in that book to more accurately and truthfully render the fragmentation of moment-to-moment experience of being a human.

Pittman: Woolf had a group of supportive writers in the Bloomsbury crew. How important do you think this is to a writer?

Doerr: I'm not sure. Obviously having someone there to help you keep going



when things get hard is supremely valuable, no matter what you're trying to do with your life. Ultimately, a writer makes a community for herself out of the books she reads. So I think a young writer can live on Baffin Island or in Brooklyn. In the end it's what you're reading, not whom you're hanging out with, that will determine the sort of writer you become.

Pittman: What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

Doerr: Read, read, read, read. And play with language. Write raps, poems, newspaper articles, blogs, and diary entries. Try to render the world in language.

Pittman: Many writers feel that they have to "write what they know." How do you feel about this as a fiction writer?

Doerr: As advice, it's true and false. Does that imply that thirty-eight-year-old bald male Idahoans should only write about thirty-eight-year-old bald male Idahoans? That's ridiculous. What do most thirty-eight-year-old bald male Idahoans really know about themselves anyway? I'd argue we write to learn what we don't know; we write toward the mysteries, the things we can't articulate but believe are there, feel are there. Maybe we start with what we know, but then we work in the opposite direction, away from the things that are comfortable, familiar, known. Otherwise we're not learning, and if we're not learning, why bother?

"Always in each project there is some moment when I have to overcome a failure of nerve and muscle through to the end."

Pittman: At what age did you start writing, and when did you know that you wanted to become a professional author?

Doerr: I started very young. Seven years old? Eight? I typed out stories about my toy pirates on my mother's typewriter. All through high school and college, I filled notebooks with writing, but it wasn't until after college, when I started learning how exhausting the repetitive nature of most jobs can be, that I realized I'd always regret it if I didn't seriously pursue writing as a vocation.

Pittman: From where do you draw inspiration?

Doerr: From my kids. From being outdoors. And from reading. Whenever I get down, I go back and read pages of some book I love—Rick Bass' *The Watch*, or Anne Carson's *The Autobiography of Red*, or Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*—and I remember why I wanted to do this thing in the first place.

Pittman: How do you begin working on a new project?

Doerr: By spinning out lots of paragraphs of junky prose.

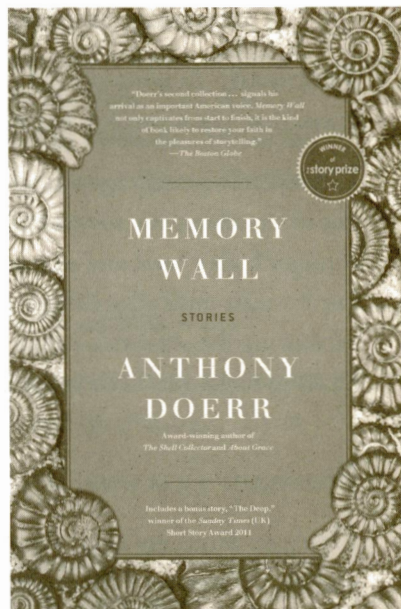
Pittman: Almost everyone has heard a writer express finding a blank page daunting. Do you experience the same fear when writing?

Doerr: Nope. For me the daunting part is being hundreds of hours into some project and wondering if the whole thing is fatally flawed, if the whole piece is about to cave in. Always in each project there is some moment when I have to overcome a failure of nerve

and muscle through to the end.

Pittman: What is your writing process like?

Doerr: I work in the mornings, and I wear a pair of chainsaw-operator's earmuffs. My office isn't particularly noisy or anything, but when I clamp those big muffs on, for some reason I can give myself permission to concentrate. Sometimes I've got them on for six or seven-hour stints and when I take them off I feel kind of dizzy and the world seems too loud.



Pittman: Do you remember the first story that you wrote? If so, what was it about?

Doerr: The very first story I wrote? It was about those toy pirates. I don't remember exactly what it was about, but I do remember being in love with the conventions of dialogue: that I could type a quotation mark and then suddenly the prose could be coming out of someone else's mouth. In this case, a two-inch tall plastic pirate.

Pittman: What's something that people would be surprised to learn about you?

Doerr: I play fantasy football.

Pittman: I know that I can be a pretty poor speller. Are there any words that you can never remember how to spell?

Doerr: Lay vs. lie still trips me up. Also gabardine. Gaberdine? Gabardines?

Pittman: What are your favorite and least favorite clichés?

Doerr: I have no favorite clichés, I don't think. My least favorites are the ones you can hear every sixty seconds on network news broadcasts. "In the wake of..." for example. Every six minutes somebody will say, "In the wake of..."

Pittman: If you could literally be anything other than a writer, what would you want to be?

Doerr: Captain of a research submarine?

Pittman: And last but not least, what is your favorite color?

Doerr: Blue. Blue blue blue.

Anthony Doerr is the author of four books: *Memory Wall*, *The Shell Collector*, *About Grace*, and *Four Seasons in Rome*. His fiction has won four O. Henry Prizes, three Pushcart Prizes, the Rome Prize, the New York Public Library's Young Lions Award, the National Magazine Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Story Prize, and the *Sunday Times* EFG Private Bank Short Story Award. His fifth book, a novel entitled *All the Light We Cannot See*, will be published some time next year.

Commonplace Book

*Inspired by *American Scholar*

Collected By: Alexi Scharbach

Bombshell

These words dropped into my childish mind as if you should accidentally drop a ring into a deep well. I did not think of them much at the time, but there came a day in my life when the ring was fished up out of the well, good as new.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Old Town Folks*, (1869).

Afterwards, when the bombshell of early motherhood first hit, I remember wondering how any woman could possibly entertain erotic thoughts while sleepwalking through the chaos of feeds, nappies, stress and fatigue. I assume my husband and I must have had sex at least a few times in that two-year period . . . but I must say I can't remember it happening. Perhaps I dozed through it, who knows.

Bettina Arndt, *Private Lives*, (1986).

There in the narrow,
mote-filled finger of light, is a blonde
so blonde, so blinding, she is a blizzard, a huge
spook, and lights up like the sun the audience
in its galoshes. She bulges like a deuce coupe.
When we see her we say good-bye to Kansas.

Lynn Emanuel, "Blonde Bombshell," (1992).

Self-realization sounds good. But what if only an enraged dwarf emerges?

Mason Cooley, (1987).

Nature, hating art and pains,
Baulks and baffles plotting brains;
Casualty and surprise
Are the apples of her eyes;
But she dearly loves the poor,
And, by marvel of her own,
Strikes the loud pretender down.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature I," (1867).

There are persons who, when they cease to shock us, cease to interest us.

F.H. (Francis Herbert) Bradley, (1930).

The Twist was a guided missile, launched from the ghetto into the very heart of suburbia. The Twist succeeded, as politics, religion, and law could never do, in writing in the heart and soul what the Supreme Court could only write on the books.

Eldridge Cleaver, "Convalescence," (1968).

And finally I twist my heart round again, so that the bad is on the outside and the good is on the inside, and keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be, and could be, if . . . there weren't any other people living in the world.

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, last words of last entry, Aug. 1, 1944, (1947, trans. 1952).

Artists Statement

By Emily Detloff

Artists Statement

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Detloff

The word and *Harbinger* 2013's title, "Bombshell," has so many connotations -- from terrorizing war to the smoldering eyes of an oversexed movie star. Allowing myself to contemplate the word and every line of the bold prose and poetry in these pages, the stripped-down feeling of "bombshell" sank in. A bombshell, in any form, shakes the ground you stand on. It sears right down to your core and changes your perceptions.

This year's *Harbinger* is darker, heavier, and wiser for wear. I was inspired by USSR propaganda posters through World War I and II; their bold, to-the-point illustrations that call for red soldiers and national allegiance have the power to make you feel a bit of the fire of that time. The crumpled paper doll chain is symbolic of the masses -- people keeping their heads down and just trying to get through the shaky world around them. The girl in newsprint is the person who looks around. She observes, thinks, feels, reads, and her mind is blown.

Life is full of bombshells that change our minds and send us in a million directions. The brave writers in this volume have shared a few of their explosive moments, and I'm honored to have the opportunity to frame their vivid, mind-blowing pictures.

E.D.



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES



Marketing, public relations and advertising major Nicole Barth loves to write poetry and post it on her blog. She organizes and runs the poetry reading event, Spoken Word Night. She attended the Berkeley Carroll School where her poetry won awards and her work appeared twice in their literary magazine. She can be found most evenings with friends, drinking tea at a coffee shop.



Heather Beger, a freshman majoring in creative writing with an emphasis in scriptwriting, is also minoring in filmmaking. She is a student in the Honors House Plan and is the secretary of a new Stephens' club, Women of the Earth. Her short play, "Snowman," won the 2012 Scriptwriting Competition and was performed in the New Play Showcase.



Emily Detloff is a senior graphic design major from Bloomington, Illinois. She is a creative representative for Creative Ink, a student-run marketing firm. Her past design work includes the 2012 Stephens College Student Fashion Show, Evolve.



Senior Emma Deutsch, a creative writing major, aspires to write children's books and teach English in South Korea. She enjoys working on sewing projects with her grandmother.



Arianne Kobler, a native of Alabama, is a senior creative writing major. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and attended the 2013 convention in Portland, Oregon where she read “Spaced,” an essay published in *Harbinger* 2012.



Kelsey Looney is a theatrical costume design major, a member of the Warehouse Theatre Company and the Alpha Lambda Delta honors society and a recipient of Stephens College Scholars scholarship. Her hobbies include travel and shopping for vintage clothes.



Emily Marchant, a sophomore integrated media major, is from Coos Bay, Oregon. She is a member of Campus Life Unleashed and Innovative Fashion Association and a staff writer for *Stephens Life*. She writes a blog about politics and foreign conflict.



Alabama native Grace Pittman is a senior creative writing major whose fiction and poetry have appeared in *Harbinger* and *Catfish Creek*. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and read her work at the 2013 convention in Portland, Oregon. She will work on her MFA fall 2013. Most of her free time is spent practicing with the Stephens tennis team.



Alexi Scharbach, *Harbinger's* fiction editor, is a junior English major from Mount Vernon, Missouri. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta. This is her second publication in *Harbinger*.



Amber Surdam, a junior creative writing major, has been painting since high school. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Student Ambassadors. Her web series "The Scientist" won the 2012 Scriptwriting Competition and was performed in the New Play Showcase. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.

MIND. BLOWN!

“Looks good, reads great. One of the best showcases of young talent I’ve seen.”

Speer Morgan, Editor

The Missouri Review

First place winner in the
2009, 2010 and 2011
Literary Arts Journal category.

Sigma Tau Delta
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“Working on *Harbinger* as a student at Stephens, I learned the fundamentals that would later inform my entire career. I look forward to seeing the new edition every year!”

Jen Woods, Editor

Typecast Publishing

“Imaginatively designed and packed with superb writing, *Harbinger* is always a pleasure to behold.”

Andrew Leland, Editor
the Believer

“Stephens College is bursting with engaged and interesting young writers, and *Harbinger* is an excellent vehicle for all of that talent.”

Gabriel Fried, Poetry Editor

Persea Books