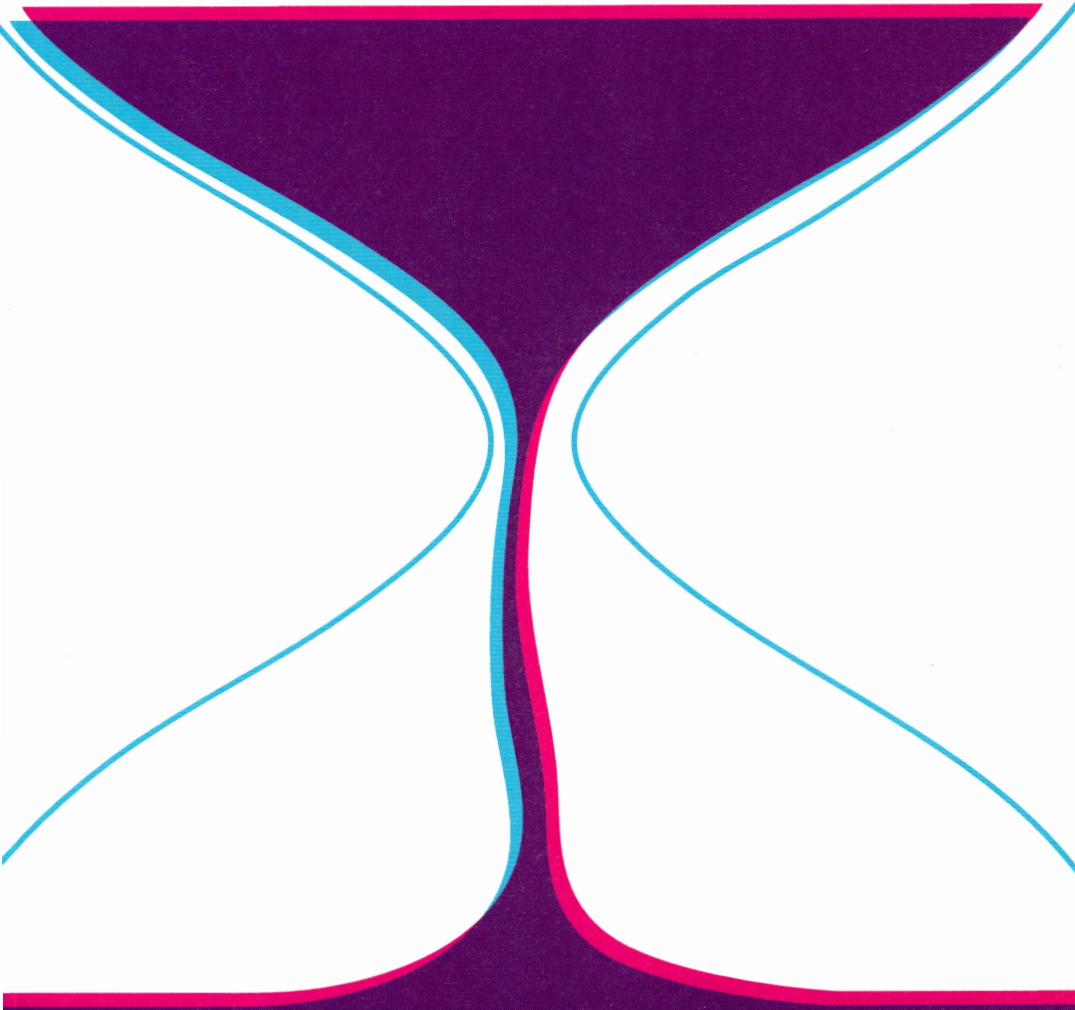


Harbinger

2018



negative space

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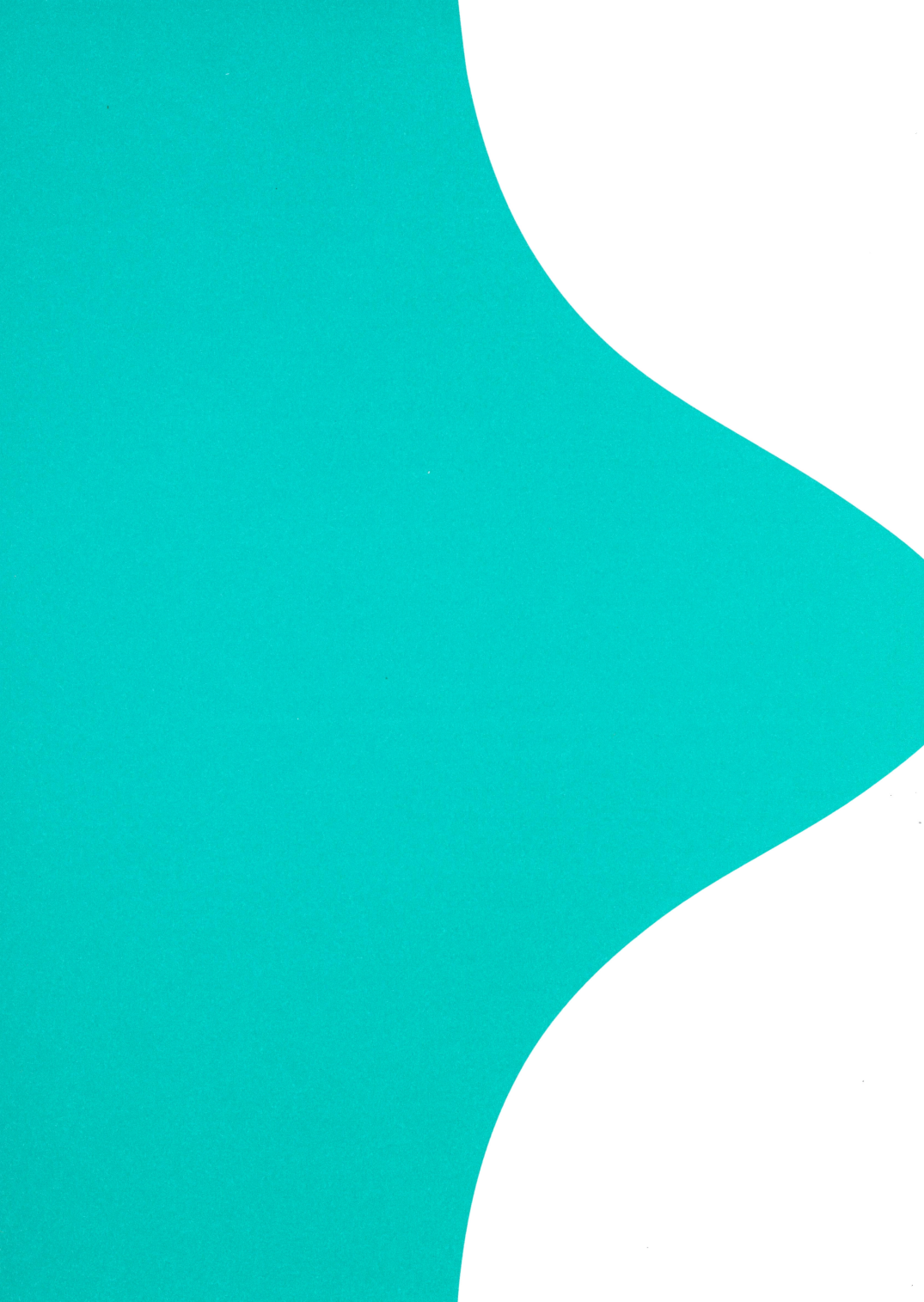
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Negative Space

n. har•bin•ger [här•bin•jər]

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



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Negative Space

The Importance of What is Left Out

As a writer, I am intrigued by artistic concepts that are employed in other mediums and how they might relate to my own discipline. The concept of negative space as used by artists and graphic designers is defined as the empty or open space around an image that helps form its unique, original shape. Put more simply, negative space creates the “real” subject of a picture through the use of absence, gaps, what designers call “breathing room.” Designs that are too crowded leave very little to the imagination. Negative space requires the eye to fill in the story and interpret the image.

So how does negative space relate to literature? If one thinks about the literary movement of minimalism, the idea becomes clear. Ernest Hemingway redefined prose and launched minimalism when he articulated his idea of the iceberg. According to the author, only a small portion of reality floats above water; the more important supporting structure remains out of sight. Hemingway was a firm believer that “if a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them.” This theory grounds the idea of the use of negative space in this year’s issue. The prose and poetry presented here requires active participation as readers discover and create for themselves what the author has left off the page.

Harbinger 2018’s theme “Negative Space” is also inspired by the ways the authors use memory in their pieces to hint out larger, more complex narratives. The notion of negative space in literature shares with art and graphic design the importance of what is either not included or what is left unsaid. A successful minimalistic writer knows the importance of subtext, skillfully veiling and unveiling elements of story as needed. It also plays with narrative structures and wisely withholds easy answers, leaving plenty of negative space around the tale being told.

Harbinger 2018 is rich in creative non-fiction that embodies many of the wonderful qualities of negative space. In Ana Chan’s short piece “Coffee,” two former lovers turned friends reunite at a coffee shop after not seeing each other for a long time. The power of the story lies in the subtext: what exists between the

lines of dialogue. Raina Johnson's non-fiction piece "Chevrolet Silverado 3500" follows the life of a truck as it hauls Johnson family, friends, and animals. The surface story tells a long, complicated tale of the life of the truck when what we are really learning about is the father and his close relationship with his family. Sara Barfknecht's "A Barfknecht Family Romcom" repeats family lore, yet from whose point of view? While the story of a marriage proposal feels familiar—will she; won't she—it maintains an element of surprise until the last paragraph.

Victoria Patrick's poem "Several Tender Moments" leaves a melancholy ache in the heart as it explores the tragedy of unrequited love. Though a familiar and relatable subject, Patrick's spare yet powerful lines—"Every night / I floss my teeth / and all my / unspoken / I love yous / fall into the sink"—leaves room for every thwarted lover to see her experience in the poem's poignant moments. Cai Santee's "Scare" also explores strong emotions; in this case it is the fear of an unwanted pregnancy. Santee's poem runs the scale of extreme feelings from anger to hatred to uncertainty. Mary Pena's poems capture the surprising rawness and pain of girlhood and womanhood. "Girlhood" follows the speaker's rocky road from girl to woman while "Mother Knows Best" uses indirection to reveal the horrors of rape. "Should I Have a Daughter" expresses what many women must feel when considering having children and what exactly women have to face in this world once they become mothers. Pena's poetry series creates a complicated, surprising portrait of womanhood as she touches on milestone moments without filling in the whole picture. Raina Johnson's "The Noble Out of His Time" captures the magical yet inexplicable spirit of her horse, of all horses. The poem conveys a mystical almost medieval feeling as it transports the reader to a far-away land.

Harbinger 2018 is rich with prose, poetry, artwork and interviews that remind us of the power of negative space in art and literature. We invite you to explore the world envisioned here. And remember that what is left to the imagination is often more powerful than what is shown and told.

M.A.

Several Tender Emotions

by Victoria Patrick

I

My mouth is full
of my swallowed words.
Every night,
I floss my teeth
and all my unspoken
I love yous
fall into the sink.

II

You say that you like my shade
of lipstick.
Do you know that I wear it
to cover up your name
tattooed on my lips?

I have memorized
the way my tongue dances
when I say your name.
And the way that your's curls
when you say mine.

Now you know
why I bite my lip
when you smile.
Why I swallow
when you say my name.

III

A possessiveness,
a protectiveness,

a kiss
on her wrist,

I witness her existence.

I spike her drinks with my tears.
I whisper pleas
into her ears
while she's sleeping.

I whisper please
into her ears
when she comes.

IV

Down on our hands and knees,
we are hiding.
The table presses our faces down.
I can taste you on my tongue,
I can feel your hand
on my thigh.

Our lives hang in the balance
of winning hide-and-go-seek.
Before our fate is sealed,
before the tablecloth is ripped aside,
you kiss me.

Not
on the lips,
we are too young.

But your strawberry sweet lips
press hard into my cheek
and leave a sticky pink mark.

V

Age thirteen:
A friend,
who saw me as an
experiment
at best.

At sixteen,
a winged girl
who I tried to tame,
but she flew away
into the night.

Nineteen,
my best friend for five years.
I told her the truth in the dark.
She pretended
she didn't hear me.

Twenty-one years old,
a lionhearted girl.
On the inside, she was afraid.
I still don't know which one of us
walked away first.

VI

In one year,
I won't forget the curl of your tongue
as you sound out
my name,
or the echoes of your laughter,
in a smoke-filled car,
late at night.

In five years,
I will not forget
the warmth of your skin
against mine,

or the way your fingers
pressed
into my back, leaving
scorch marks
on my shoulder blades.

The texture
of your hair and
the taste
of your breath and
the disdain
in your eyes.

It has been two months.
All of this
I have already forgotten.

A Barfknecht Family Romcom

by Sara Barfknecht

His knee was shaking, bouncing up and down with anxious energy as he waited for her to finish changing out of her scrubs. He became interested in the texture of the plaid futon, the way the apartment smelled, and the sound of Missy purring next to him, focusing on anything but the small black box in his pocket.

There were things he noticed in the apartment he never paid attention to before. *Were the walls supposed to be piss yellow? Who designed the kitchen to be that small? Why is the apartment layout so long? What was taking her so long? Does she know?*

“Jon?”

He forced his knee to stop moving. They’d been dating for two years; she’d know if he was acting funny.

“He heard that was the way you were supposed to do it: on one knee at a nice restaurant.”

“In the living room,” he replied too loud.

“You don’t have to yell.” Lisa laughed, coming into view from the hallway, hands at one earlobe while she put on her second earring.

“Sorry,” Jon said, trying to hide his fidgety nervousness.

He stood up before she could see the jewelry-box shape in his pants pocket. “Where do you want to go for dinner?”

He heard that was the way you were supposed to do it: on one knee at a nice restaurant, right as the dessert was coming out.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she replied, walking over to join him in front of the futon. She scratched Missy behind her brown tabby ears. “I don’t want to put you out.”

Jon couldn’t help smiling. She was amazing.

“Your pick.”

Lisa thought for a moment. “Taco John’s maybe?”

Jon almost choked out loud. He knew she was only saying this because he wasn’t making much money; working at Long John Silver’s did not exactly pay the bills. He appreciated that she was so considerate, but *I’m not getting engaged at Taco John’s.*

He had a backup plan, though, and he didn’t want to rouse suspicion. “Okay,” he said, “Taco John’s it is.”

Arguably, they were too dressed up. After days of wearing only scrubs, Lisa was glad to dress up even for a modest outing, and Jon was lucky he didn’t have to ask her to look nice. She would’ve been suspicious.

They probably looked an odd pair, walking into a Tex-Mex fast food place all dressed up. Lisa was wearing a red polka dot dress that tied in the back at the waist

so it accentuated her curves. It was short and sleeveless: perfect for Iowa's spring weather. Jon was wearing his standard khakis and a button-up polo; he felt more like a professional than a man taking someone on a date. He was sweating, but not from the weather, despite the cool evening with the sun still peeking through the clouds. His anxiety was affecting him physically.

It was easy to forget the intention behind the evening date as Jon and Lisa sat down at their regular booth, the one near the corner with the large window to watch the world go by, because they always became so wrapped up in each other when they were together. But, as they were throwing their trash into the bins behind sticky swinging doors, the weight of the jewelry box in Jon's right pocket seemed even heavier than when the night started.

"Want to get a drink?" Jon asked, holding the restaurant door open for his date as they walked back to his car. His heart was in his throat. *Plan B.*

"Sure." Lisa smiled.

It was good Lisa was ahead of him, so she didn't hear the soft sigh of relief huff from Jon's lips.

"Looks like it might rain," Lisa said, her eyes taking in the sky.

Jon looked up too. The soft gray clouds weren't ominous. "I think you're right," he said.

Sluggers was strangely busy for a Monday night, especially when the semester was in session. Because they were just getting drinks, they didn't mind sitting at the bar rather than waiting for a table. The restaurant was dimly lit, soft rock music playing in the background, and the scent of burgers and fries wafting through the air.

"You can order," Jon told Lisa, having to speak closely into her ear from the noise around them. "I'm going to go to the bathroom."

Once he weaved his way through the crowd and made it to the bathroom, Jon stared at himself in the mirror. His face was red from anxiety.

"You can do this," he told himself. "You love her, she loves you, just get married already."

"I believe in you." A drunken pep talk came from the toilet stall next to him.

"Uh . . . Thank you?"

He didn't wait for the bathroom stall to reply. He couldn't afford the distraction, so he left the bathroom, making a hollow tap on the box in his pocket.

When Jon arrived at the bar, their drinks were waiting. Lisa had something frozen and pink in a tall margarita glass that she was sipping through a straw. Jon's dark beer was untouched. As he stood beside Lisa, who was not yet aware of his presence, he realized two very important things. One, he definitely forgot to put on deodorant. Two, with her so high up on a barstool, if he got down on one knee he would be

looking at *her* knee.

So, he sat next to her. They drank. They left.

As they left the bar, Jon was glad he had made a backup plan for his backup plan.

“Do you want to stop by Dane’s?”

The week before, Jon and his friend Tom had devised his third and final plan. Tom worked at the local ice cream shop, a little walk-up place with outside seating, and it just so happened to be a place Jon and Lisa frequented on their dates. Tom and Jon created a cardboard cutout that would fit perfectly at the bottom of the paper cups the ice cream came in. Lisa would order first, then Jon, who would pay and slip Tom the ring to hide in the cardboard cutout. Lisa would eat the ice cream, find the ring and . . .

“No, I don’t really feel like ice cream tonight.”

Jon just about coughed up a lung. “What?”

“I’m not too hungry anymore,” Lisa said, taking Jon’s hand as they returned to the car. “We could go visit Scott at the mall. He’s working tonight, right?”

Jon couldn’t tell you what he said next. All he heard in his ears was a constant ringing, his mouth felt muffled with cotton, everything seemed to be moving past his eyes in slow motion, and his heart had sunk into his stomach.

But they ended up at the mall anyway.

Time passed by quickly, but somehow not quick enough. *“His heart was in his throat.”*
Jon was trapped in his own head. *How did I let this happen? What am I going to do? Do I just do it now? Right here? In front of a bunch of strangers and . . . Scott?*

In his tunnel of selective hearing, Jon heard Lisa say, “So they’re finally engaged after five years.”

What’s romantic about the Sycamore Mall? It’s spontaneous, sure, but is it romantic?

“Jon?”

Lisa pulled him out of his daze, and he vaguely remembered hearing about Lori and Corey getting engaged. “That’s fine,” he said, still searching his brain for the perfect time and place to get on his knee.

“Oh,” Lisa said, the tone in her voice giving off that his answer was unsatisfactory. “We can go.”

What did I do now? How am I screwing this up more?

Jon followed Lisa back the way they came. His eyes were trained on his feet, observing the brown tiles below him, lost in thought as Lisa stalked her way in front of him.

He suddenly realized that perhaps Lisa thought he meant dating for five years was the perfect amount of time before marriage. But if he told her it was quite the opposite and that he was so lost in thought about how to propose to her that he just didn’t know what was coming out of his mouth, that wouldn’t be very romantic either.

He had to think of something.

Fast.

When they got to the parking lot, Lisa was proven right: it had rained and was raining. The street lights had turned on, their fluorescence reflecting off the wet pavement gave the whole earth a sort of glow that encircled them.

Lisa was always ahead of him, her irritation toward him quickening her gait, and Jon had to almost jog to catch up. He reached the car at the same time as she did, making sure to end up on her side so he could open the car door for her (as gentlemen do). She sat, swinging her legs inside, and just before he would've closed the door, in a split-second decision that registered physically before mentally, in the parking lot of Sycamore Mall, in the rain, Jon got down on one knee.

"Will you marry me?"

Even though it wasn't sunny, Jon was squinting to prevent rain droplets from irritating his eyes.

"Are you serious?"

"Wha—. . . Yes?" Jon sputtered. "Will you marry me?" he asked again, as if she hadn't heard him the first time.

Jon was suddenly glad he hadn't done this in a restaurant or in Slugger's or at Dane's Dairy or in the mall because this was a little traumatizing.

"Yes, I'll marry you."

Jon couldn't help his eyebrows furrowing together. He could admit this was not how he expected it to go. "You will?"

"Yeah."

Lisa put her hand out, allowing Jon to slide the ring on her finger. She smiled at him as she pulled him toward her face, leaning him awkwardly halfway into the car, and they kissed. When they separated, Jon could've lifted the whole car he was so filled with adrenaline. Then—

A hard smack landed on his shoulder.

"Now we have to tell our friends we got engaged in a parking lot!"

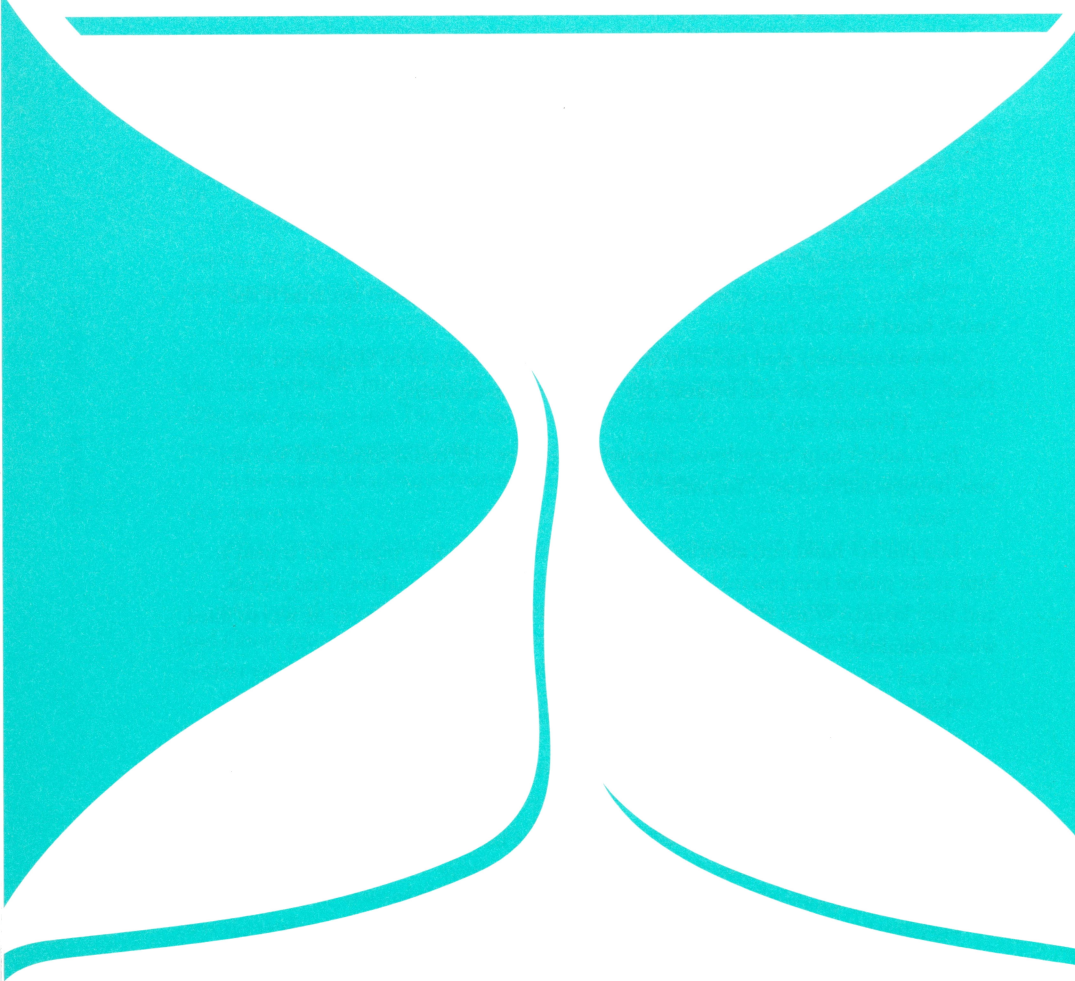
"And who's fault is that?"

Fast forward through 26 years of marriage, three houses, two children, four cats, and two dogs, and he still tells the story like it was yesterday.

"Hey, Dad? Can you tell me your engagement story again?"

He sits forward, making the old recliner creak as he folds his hands together to crack his knuckles. "It was a dark and stormy night . . ."

"It was a dark and stormy night . . ."



All the Things You Are¹

by Ana Chan

We are sitting in the front row of seats nearest the stage, which is raised four feet above the floor of the ballroom. Above our heads stands the setup of a jazz drum set, the legs of four horn players, a grand piano on stage left, an upright bass on stage right, and a dark-haired, tan-skinned guitarist in the middle. The lobby is filled with the sounds of an up-tempo swing—a groove established by the drummer’s pattern of swung quarter and dotted eighth notes on the cymbal (otherwise referred to as the “ride”); complementary chordal ideas played by the pianist (a technique called “comping”); and a steady, four-beat pulse on the bass (a pattern called “walking bass”). The guitarist is dressed in a nicely fitted, long-sleeved, white, collared shirt with a darkly patterned tie. As he bites his lower lip, two deeply set dimples can be seen on both sides of his otherwise smooth cheeks. He squeezes his eyes tightly, causing his round, black eyebrows to furrow.

A guitar solo ensues. From the strings of his guitar is heard a neat execution of swung eighth and quarter notes playing G G A G 8_{va} G A B B C B A G. This is a trademark lick he stole from his idol Joe Pass, a legendary jazz guitarist of the twentieth century. I turn to face my mom sitting on my left. She is holding an iPhone up close to her face, recording every second the guitarist plays. Pressing her fingers on the screen when he takes his solo, she zooms the camera in for a close-up. I turn to face my dad on my right. His eyes are squinting, studying the hands of the guitarist, and his right leg bumps up and down in tempo. He smiles in immense joy over the progress of his son’s musicianship.

“It is times like these that convince me William’s favorite thing to make fun of, other than mainstream music, is himself.”

My brother started playing guitar when he was in the sixth grade. There is a photo we have of William. A thin boy is holding a brand-new Epiphone Les Paul electric jazz guitar. The guitar strap, almost as thick as his shoulder, hugs the left side of his chest; he is wearing a white shirt patterned with black music notes and a drawing of a guitar. His eyes are twinkling and a smile beaming.

“I picked up learning guitar because I needed to do something with my pathetic life,” William joked when I asked him over the phone about the beginning of his music career. “So I could impress girls with my sick guitar skills, I guess.”

It is times like these that convince me William’s favorite thing to make fun of, other than mainstream music, is himself.

“Seriously, William! Why did you start playing guitar?”

¹ A jazz standard that appears in Joe Pass’ 1973 album *Virtuoso*.

"I don't know, Ana! Why did you start playing the drums?"

"Because Papa got me my first drum set at five. That's why."

"Yeah, and why did he do that? Because you loved Dave Weckl."

"True." I laughed. Dave Weckl is the iconic jazz fusion drummer of the 1980s, who made his debut playing with big guys like Chick Corea and Mike Stern. "You know, I used to have a crush on him."

"Me, too," William jocularly intimated, raising his naturally baritone voice to an unnaturally soprano one. "I guess I started playing the guitar for similar reasons. I think I did it because of Aerosmith. I loved Aerosmith growing up, and I picked guitar because . . . I don't know! Because I had always wanted to play guitar. So, I just picked it up."

William was born on the cusp of the century, 1999. He grew up in the suburbs of Sacramento, California, with four sisters, one brother, a father, and an overly doting mother—and he was the baby of the family. As if he were a life-sized doll, his sisters would dress him up to fit their playtime agenda. One memory my mom retells is the time when all the sisters were playing outside, pretending to be princesses. This was a popular game for us. The children would put on a mock competition on top of the grass mound in front of our house, competing to win "best sung Disney Princess song." The mound was the remains of a large tree our grandpa had cut down—a tragedy for our parents, who took pride in having the biggest tree on the block. Yet, the result of this amputation was a wonderfully raised surface: perfect for an outdoor stage. Apparently, we had made four-year-old William join our game. Sometime during the game, William came running into the house, excitedly telling Mom, "Look, look! I'm a princess!" It was not uncommon for William to enjoy playing with his sisters. Whether it was a game of dolls, dressing up for mock photoshoots, or playing Barbie games on the computer, William's participation was unquestioned.

There is another treasured photo of the two of us. A five-year-old Ana is holding a three-year-old William, and both are smiling. During the school years, it was the four of us children: William, Rebekah, Moriah, and me. Summers, though, when Rebekah and Moriah lived with their dad and our other half-siblings, it was just William and me. Before we moved to a new house when William was nine, his typical summer day with me looked something like this:

In the morning, we scurried to the kitchen for breakfast. First, we ate the cereal Mom poured us—something healthy, like Wheaties. Then, it was time for something good: Cap'n Crunch. Next, we washed our dishes and left them to dry. Then, it was game time. With Mom in the yard gardening, Papa at work, and our sisters out of the

state for the summer, the five-bedroom, single-story house was our playground.

“Oh, Mario!” I said to William, mimicking the Princess Peach voice I had heard many times on Nintendo 64. “We need to do something! We must rescue those people from Bowser!”

“Yes, Peach,” William replied in a reassuring tone, mimicking the voice of the video game’s Italian, mustached plumber-hero. “We must. Let’s gather everyone together, now. Kirby?”

“Here!” I shouted, conjuring a different voice.

“Good. Fox?”

“You know it.”

“Good. Samus?”

“Yep.”

“All right, gang. Bowser’s on the loose again, and we have to come up with a plan to defeat him.”

“I’ve got the perfect idea,” I said in my Samus voice. Our roles seldom varied. William was always the protagonist; I was always the sidekick, the love-interest, the villain, the comic relief, and the random, old, wise man.

Then, Mom called us into the kitchen for lunch. After making us take our vitamins, she prepared peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

“You two wanna go on a bike ride with Mommy?” she asked. Nodding our heads, we followed her with anticipation out the side door of the kitchen and into the driveway, where a bicycle and trailer were waiting for us. One by one, Mom strapped us into the trailer connected to the back of her bike; and soon, we were on the asphalt road and had front row views of East Sacramento through the transparent net of our stroller. The sun was blazing, and the air was clear: a brilliant summer day in California’s City of Trees. “AHHHHH,” William and I screamed at the top of our lungs when a car came behind us, pretending it was heading straight for us.

After our bike ride, William and I watched a movie. Going through two packs of CD cases, I chose the top five movies I wanted to watch, while he chose his. After setting both our choices down on the ground, we eliminated each CD one by one, until we found a movie we both agreed on. We put in *Barbie as Rapunzel*. Before we knew it, dinner was ready, and then it was our favorite part of the day: bath time.

Imagining the bath water as the Pacific Ocean, we pretended we were discovering the mysteries of the sea, often making up a plotline as we bathed: “Introducing the most exciting tale, starring William as the brave mariner, exploring the waters of the deep blue, and Ana, the exotic mermaid with black silk for hair.”

There is one memory of us taking a bath together that I will never forget.

“The sun was blazing, and the air was clear: a brilliant summer day in California’s City of Trees.”

“Grab the Spider-Man bath colors, Ana!” William said to me as we washed our bodies in the tub. After watching the 2002 *Spider-Man* with Tobey Maguire, William had everything Spider-Man themed: Spidey bed sheets, Spidey shirts, Spidey puzzles, Spidey action figures, and even Spidey moves. We have photos of William squeezed between doorways above the ground after he had scooped his body upwards with his hands and legs. Uncanny dexterity for a six-year-old. Consequently, he also owned Spider-Man colored bath bombs. I rose out of the tub and went to the sink, picking up a plastic container.

“Which one do you want, Wilby? Red or blue?”

“Red.” His favorite color.

Unfortunately, I was holding the container over the tub, and as I was handing the red bomb to him, my other hand, slippery from the bath water, clumsily dropped the container, spilling all the Spidey-colored bath bombs. “MOMMMYY.” My shrill scream reverberated through the house.

“What’s wrong, Ana?” Mom asked as she ran into the bathroom.

Sobbing, I confessed, “I dropped Wilby’s colors into the baaaaath.”

My mom looked at the bath water, which had turned muddy brown, and saw William calmly sitting there, who was perhaps more confused by my crying than about his spilled colors.

“It’s okay, Ana,” she said, almost laughing. “It’ll be okay.” At hearing this, my chorus of cries only increased in volume. “Shhh, shhh. I’m going to buy him new colors, okay? How does that sound?” I nodded my head, still whimpering. Soon, the brown water was drained, our bodies dried, and we were tucked in bed.

“Good night, Wilby,” I said to William, who slept in the same bed as me.

“Good night, Ana.”

“I love you. Sorry about your colors.”

“It’s okay. I don’t care. I love you, too.”

“Well, Rebekah and Moriah were definitely really close growing up,” my mom said to the family in the front seat of the car as we were driving home from Monterey Bay this summer. “But, Ana and William. Man, they were absolute pals. I mean, like *this*.” She motioned her hand so that we could see her cross her middle finger over her forefinger. “Those two would just play all day. I hardly ever saw them fight.”

For the most part this was true. However, when we moved to a new neighborhood in West Sacramento, I entered the chaos of middle school and thought my little brother might be weird.

“Ana, why shouldn’t he play Barbies with us?” my friend asked me when she and

her sister were sleeping over. William was crying in another room after I told him he couldn't play with us.

"Because you guys are *my* friends."

"We wouldn't mind if he played with us."

"But William is weird! You don't understand. He would ruin the game."

In the sixth grade, I also started calling him "stupid" whenever I didn't agree with him. One day, this habit got a little too old for my mom.

"Just be quiet, stupid," I said one morning before leaving for school.

"Ana!" my mom shouted. "You need to stop calling your brother stupid."

"But he is stu—"

"Uh, uh. If I have to hear that word come out of your mouth one more time, you are grounded."

"Fine." I turned to look at William. "You are just a . . . poop. A big poop." And voilà: "poop" became a synonym for "stupid," which was good enough for my mom.

"Ana," William asked me in the car another morning as our dad drove us to school. "Why aren't you weird anymore?"

I looked at him and wanted to shout, *Because I don't want to be weird! Because my friends wouldn't like me if I were weird!* Instead, I looked at him with a blank face.

"What do you mean, William?"

"You don't hang out with me the way you used to. You're not weird anymore."

"That's not true. I hang out with you!"

"Not really." He folded his arms, and turned his small head away from me. I followed his gaze, which looked out the window frosted from the winter morning. I thought about the times when the car windows were fogged with the cold air, and we'd press our little fingers on the glass from the inside, writing: "A + W = root beer." A&W; Ana and William. I turned to face the other window.

After this turbulent period of puberty, I began to realize William was undertaking a different kind of metamorphosis. A year, maybe, into playing guitar, William became interested in playing jazz with my dad and me. We had started performing around Sacramento as the jazz duo, "Ana and the Papa." It was during one of our nightly jam sessions in the living room when William's change was made clear to both my dad and me. I was maybe a junior in high school—making William a freshman, perhaps. After going through the melody of the song, it came time for everyone to take a solo. Our playing was hot. Papa, our keyboardist, took the first solo, outlining a solid example of what a jazz solo should sound like. I took the second solo on the drums, trying with great difficulty to keep time and express something original. Then, William took the

last solo. However, during his solo, a musical idea was hardly finished, resulting in a lot of silent space, and I thought I could see tears in his eyes.

“William?” my dad asked, still comping on his keyboard, “You okay?”

“Poop?” I asked. At this point of our relationship, I was striving to become pals with William like old times. “Poop” had recently morphed into a term of endearment. “Poop?” I asked again. At this, William got up and emphatically put down his guitar.

“I can’t play. I’m not good at guitar.” Then he ran upstairs to his room.

“William!” Papa shouted. After realizing William wasn’t coming back, my dad closed his eyes and shook his head, continuing the song. We finished playing, and then got up for water.

“William needs to stop saying those things,” Papa said. “If he ever wants to get better and start gigging out with us, he can’t do what he did tonight. He’s already very good. He has a natural talent that’s uncommon.”

I nodded. “I think he’s just insecure right now.”

*“Well, Will is Will,
you know.”*

“That will only hold him back. William needs to understand how to push through, even if he is scared of what might come out.” After finishing his water, Papa said, “He needs to play *something*.”

Nights like these happened until William’s senior year of high school, furthering Papa’s frustration with him, who didn’t realize the extent to which my brother was cultivating self-deprecation. While I was in Missouri for my first semester of college, William stormed out of another jam session one night, and it evidently culminated in a loud banging noise from his room. He was a junior in high school by then. When I came home for spring break, I noticed his door was missing and that there was a cavernous hole in his wall.

After school was out for the day, William would sit at his computer for hours, his ears desperately pressed up against the speakers, studying the styles of guitarists like Django Reinhardt and Wes Montgomery. I have a memory of hearing William from my room replaying on YouTube this same chordal progression: he was replicating on his guitar the sound of Joe Pass in quality, rhythm, and tone—it was the progression of Fmi7, Bbmi7, Eb7, AbMA7, DbMA7, Dmi7, G7, CMA7, and CMA7. The section utilized the circle of fifths.

That following summer, I came home from college and noticed something different about William’s playing. My dad, William, and I were playing the music for our sister’s wedding, and when it came time for a guitar solo, a nice, refined, jazz sound resonated from his guitar. I looked to my dad and mouthed, “What the heck?” My dad mouthed back, smiling, “I *know*.”

“William, you did amazing back there,” I told him as we got up to get some food.

“Eh, it was all right. You did amazing, Poop.” At this point, we started using “Poop” as a pet name for both of us. “You’re the one who can just sit in at the drums after not playing for a year and still sound good. ‘Oh, I haven’t practiced drums in months, but look!’” he said, mocking me by using his mousy, high voice. “I can still play the drums and deliver this awesome solo!”

“Oh my gosh, William. Thank you. But, anyway, you performed really well.” Pointing my finger, I said, “And I don’t want to hear otherwise.”

William’s performance at the wedding was a glimpse of things to come. As William finished his senior year of high school, a series of accolades came flooding in while he snagged awards like the Santa Cruz Jazz Festival “Guitarist/Composer Award” and the “Outstanding Musicianship Award” from his high school band director. William had even been offered a half-time scholarship to attend the Santa Cruz’s jazz conservatory—an offer he ultimately chose to decline in favor of going into Sacramento State’s Music Program on scholarship.

That summer after graduating high school, he attended, as he did every summer, Sacramento Traditional Jazz Society’s Youth Band Camp in Sly Park; and this time, I went to camp with him. The second day of band camp, William and I ran up to the list posted on the bulletin board outside the cafeteria, which detailed each musician’s placement in a band. The camp had a total of ten bands ranked from one to ten based on the musician’s technical skill and familiarity with the genre of jazz—band one constituting the least experienced musicians, and band ten, the most. For the third camp in a row, William snagged the guitar slot in band ten.

“I’m fine with what placement I got, I think,” one of the other guitarists said to me while we waited in line for lunch. “I figured I’d get something like seven or eight, because there was at least one guitarist who was better than me.”

“What about Will?” another camper said, referring to William.

“Oh, huh,” laughed the guitarist. “Well, Will is *Will*, you know. He was Band Ten material before he even auditioned.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty talented,” I remarked.

“Of course, he is,” the guitarist replied. “You Chans are both talented.”

“Wait!” exclaimed the other camper. “William is your brother? William Chan?”

“Yes.” I closed my eyes, nodding my head. “Believe it or not, he is.”

As the guitar solo concluded, the audience in the ballroom joined in applause for the soloist. My mom continued to record William with her iPhone; and my dad shouted passionately, “Yes!” clapping his hands slowly and loudly. Band Ten finished

out their set and exited the stage of the ballroom, and the band camp recital came to an end.

A couple of months after camp, William and I were on the phone while I was in Missouri for school.

“You got any gigs lined up this semester?” I asked. “I heard from Papa you played with Parker and the Weis Guys the other night?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“How was that? Was that fun?”

“Yeah, of course.”

“That’s awesome. Well, I’m really excited for you, William. I feel like your first semester at Sac State is going really well, so far.”

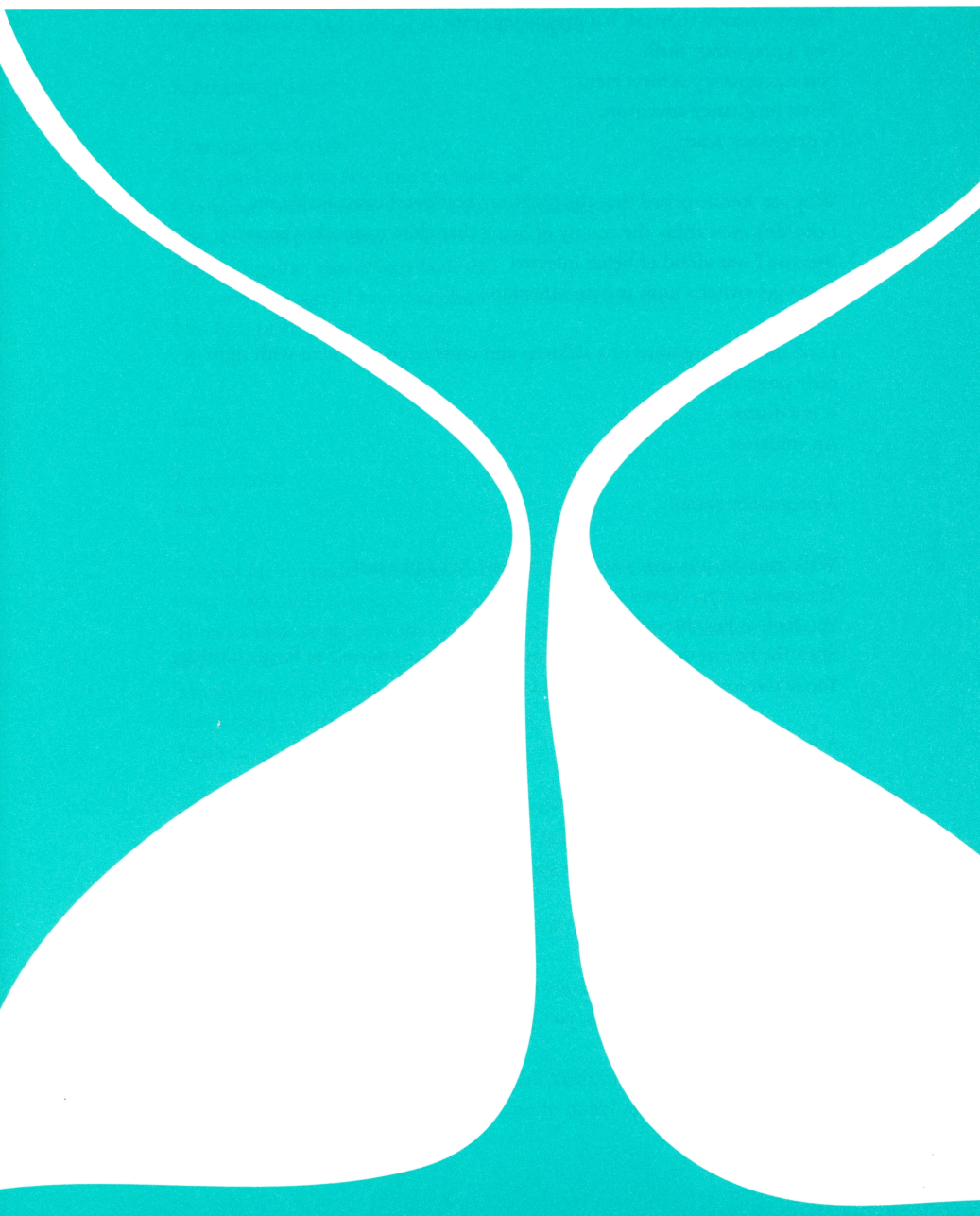
“Yeah, it is. I’m excited, also. And, I guess I’m excited for Christmas break, too.”

“Why?” I laughed. “Because you’re on break?”

“Sure, that too. But that’s not what I meant.”

“What did you mean?”

On the other end of the phone, William voiced a sentiment I could feel was spoken with a smile. “Because that’s when I get to see Poop.”



Scare

by Cai Santee

There's a reason they call it a pregnancy scare
 Not a pregnancy thrill
 Not a pregnancy achievement
 Not a pregnancy adventure
 A pregnancy scare

Why are you surprised that the night my boyfriend came inside me
 I couldn't even enjoy the ecstasy of being that close to another person
 Because I was afraid of being infected
 Don't get twitchy now, it is an infection

Look up the symptoms of a sickness and cross reference them with signs of
 early pregnancy
 It is a disease
 An epidemic

A pregnancy scare

Walk into the pharmacy and pick up NyQuil and a test
 The cashier says, "Good luck"
 You look at her through tears
 Stick the box in the glove compartment and force yourself to forget it's there
 You're too scared of what it has to say

A pregnancy scare

My mother doesn't understand why I want to scream when she says,
 "You'll change your mind one day."
 No. No I will not and do you want to know why?
 I am not fit to do it
 The sound of a child's laughter makes me cringe
 Babies are ugly and loud
 Birth is a biological punishment to vaginas for their very existence
 I just really fucking hate kids, you know, why is this so hard for you to comprehend
 The concept of fertility within all things is dead
 It died with the overpopulation of earth and thrived when the religious

right infiltrated high school abstinence programs

A pregnancy scare

Counting back days

“Do you know the last time we had sex?”

Cinnamon and vitamin C can induce miscarriage

The abortion pill is about \$400 with insurance

Sell your guitar, this is your fault too

I'm sorry, I'm sorry I love you please don't leave right now

Not now of all times

I'm

Scared

A pregnancy

Scare

I stayed up last night writing baby names on the soft skin between my
inner thigh and pussy lips

There's a disgusting, primitively fucking disgusting part of me that thinks I
can do it

That having a kid would be cool

Like having a puppy that kinda looks like you

That's the ape speaking, honey

A pregnancy scare

I call him in the middle of the night because there's blood in my panties

I am weeping with sickening joy

A pregnancy scare

Hallmark doesn't have a

“Congrats on the period”

Section

So I squat above the toilet

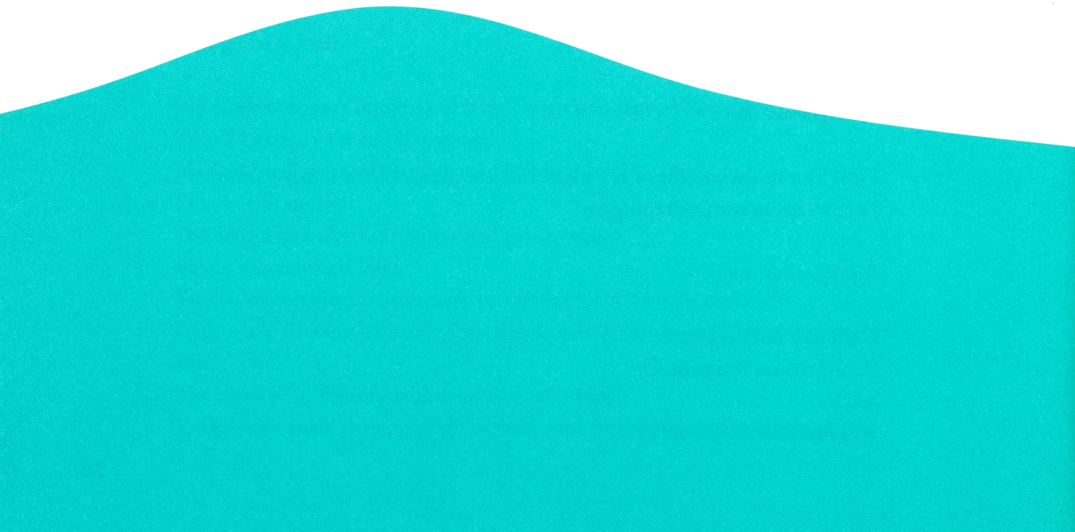
hands sticky red
And scream profanities to all those beautiful pagan symbols of fertility
Tell them to shove it
And wallow in my own blood and relief

A pregnancy avoidance

Don't think I'm blind to the hypocrisy of this
It's horrible, my thoughts through it all
There are couples out there who would give everything they have for a baby
For something to love
I should feel compassion, understanding
But instead my most intrusive thought wants to tell them to
Just buy a goldfish and shut the fuck up
Kids are a useless burden, capitalist drones, nuclear family residue bullshit
This is genuine
I feel this

The names on my thighs are washed away by the blood

A pregnancy scare



Anna

by Cai Santee

“My name backwards is my name.”
These are the first words she ever said to me,
sitting on a swing, blue jeans muddy.
She jumped off, landing knees first,
digging her fingers in the dirt and showing me
A-N-N-A
backwards is
A-N-N-A
and then she said,
“Cool right? We should be best friends.”
So we were
for years
until yesterday when the sky parted:
“It’s not natural, you know?”
“We’re friends, how did I not see this coming?”
Her jeans still had mud on them,
her name backwards was still her name,
but I was no longer her best friend.
Anna.
Wiping my lip gloss from her chin
and digging her fingers into the space
around the doorknob,
best friends don’t fall in love like this,
best friends spelled backwards has never been “I love you too.”

Interview with screenwriter Rebecca Fjelland Davis

by Ana Chan

Rebecca Fjelland Davis is the author of numerous young adult novels and children's books. She has adapted one of her novels into a Stephens Film Institute production, *Chasing Alliecat*. She has a fondness for storytelling and writes about her many passions: bicycling, dogs, family, farm life and friendship. Davis compares writing to painting a picture in which each word is a brush stroke. Her latest novel, *Slider's Son*, is a mystery set in small-town North Dakota during the Great Depression. The story follows 13-year-old Grant O'Grady as he helps his father, the town's sheriff, find a killer.

When she's not writing, Davis is an avid cyclist and a teacher at South Central College in Mankato, Minnesota, where she lives with her husband and her Newfoundland dog, Freya.



Ana Chan: What sparked the idea for this novel, *Chasing Alliecat*?

Rebecca Fjelland Davis: I was out riding my mountain bike one day with friends. I am not a fearless mountain biker, but I admire people who are. That day when I got home, I wrote a few pages about a female cyclist who is not only fearless but athletically gifted. As I wrote, the passage ended up being the final moments of a mountain bike race, and the girl's name was Allie. I'm not sure where that came from, but she was clearly Allie. I wrote it from the point of view of another cyclist watching, full of admiration. Then I tried writing it in first person, but that didn't work. When you're riding, especially a difficult section of trail trying to go fast, you can't be self-conscious enough to put what you're doing into words. Watching Allie allowed me to do that. "Being Allie" didn't. I needed another character's point of view, so that character could admire her abilities. So, Sadie was right there from the very first moment of the book. Now I had two characters: Allie the expert mountain biker and her friend Sadie who admires and sort of envies her abilities.

A few months later, I was walking my dog down by the river outside of Mankato, near probably what is the most-run-down section of the entire town. I came across several acres of woods that were trashed. Literally. There was so much junk I could walk on trash like stepping stones for almost a mile. I went past a ravine where someone had thrown out the remains of an entire kitchen: stove, pots, pans, glasses, silverware, refrigerator. I thought, "You could hide a body here and nobody would ever find it." Then it occurred to me: a mountain biker might ride through these trails. Those girls I have brewing as characters in my computer could find the body! And the kernel of the story was born.

AC: How is this YA novel different from other published work, like *Jake Riley: Irreparably Damaged*?

RFD: One of the ways that it's different is that although the characters are entirely fabricated, as is the plot of the story, I still used pieces of life from my writer's notebook. I collect weird things I see—weird names, ideas, events—anything that might work its way into a story. My friend Roger Hart calls those things we collect "crooked pictures." They are bits of life that are odd or need fixing that we can't help but notice. So I used many of those crooked pictures I had collected to create this book.

AC: Does *Chasing Alliecat* have any personal significance to you?

RFD: So far, none of my novels have much autobiographical plot in them. The stories are fabricated. However, since this one is peopled with cyclists, it's near and dear to my cyclist heart. I also set the story in Mankato, my town, so it feels personal, even if every single bit of it is made up. I took bits of interesting fodder I've collected in my everlasting "writer's notebooks" over the years, though. Some of them include a friend

who actually shot a Civil War cannon and blew up a neighbor's building. Another friend's German Shepherd had an experience like Siren has toward the end of the book. I actually saw a tagboard sign in the "junk woods" exactly like the one Sadie sees (I changed the name and phone number!). I have friends who, while riding their bikes, have been chased off the road by trucks. A body appeared in the real "Junk Woods" after I had written this story. And most of the places in Mankato are real. The list is too long to enumerate. You can see that there are many roots in reality even though the story is fabricated. But that's the joy and treasure of keeping a notebook. If you write down interesting bits of life, you have lots of fodder when you want to make a story. It was lots of fun to recreate these real people and places and weave them into Sadie, Allie, and Joe's story. So, all of those things are significant to me as a person who is a writer. And last of all, an author always puts herself into her characters. Therefore, of course, there's a lot of me in Sadie.

AC: To demystify the experience for young writers, what was the writing process like?

RFD: When constructing this novel, once I knew the mountain bikers would find a body in the woods, more surprises kept showing up. When the body was uncovered, it was a priest. And he was still alive. I couldn't shake that idea, and I didn't plan that. Seriously. It was a priest, so then I had to figure out how the priest could be linked to one or more of the kids, and it had to be Allie. So then I needed to figure out all of Allie's back story. I actually cut 80 pages of story, much of which is the texture of Allie's life, and more of her background.

I think of first and second drafts as "throwing up on the page." Just get the story out. I tend to overwrite, so my subsequent drafts involve a lot of cutting and streamlining so the story moves quickly. However, I keep my notebook in my lap for all edits. When I see something that needs to be consistent all the way through, I put it in my notebook. Here's an example: There was not dog in Allie's life in the first half of the first draft. A little past halfway through the first draft, Siren showed up. Pow. He worked, and he seemed like an important powerful addition. So he went into the rest of the first draft and into my notebook, so he could be woven in from the beginning during my next draft. Rewriting is like combing through the whole story carefully.

AC: When did you first start writing? What was this first piece of writing like?

RFD: I started writing as soon as I could write a sentence. I wrote a story in first grade, and I never really quit. I wanted to make stories before I learned to read. I loved stories so much that I remember narrating a play in third person when I was four years old. When I decided I'd better get serious about writing if I was really going to write, I was married, with two little kids, and I realized this was my life. Nobody was going to give me time to write or a writing life. I had to carve out time to do it.

The first thing I published was a poem in the school literary magazine at St. Cloud State in Minnesota. The first thing I sold was also a poem to *Farm Wife News* about the countryside. Also the first novel I wrote—yes, an entire novel—will forever stay in my drawer. The editor who published *Jake Riley* read it and said that he thought writing that novel was “warming up my writing muscles.” It’s important for young writers to realize that writing is like working out. Nothing is wasted; everything you write makes you a better writer.

AC: Who or what are your influences?

RFD: All the writers I’ve read in my life have influenced me. William Styron, Thomas Wolfe, and Stephen King have all said something to the effect that you have to read everything, good and bad, so you know what you like and what you don’t—whom you want to emulate and whom you don’t. I believe in that. My favorite books are *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Caddie Woodlawn* by Carol Ryrie Brink, *The Power of One* by Bryce Courtenay, *The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver, *Goodnight, Mr. Wodehouse* by Faith Sullivan, and *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren. And you know what? Whoever I’m reading right now is also an influence. I hope I never stop learning about what makes good writing from reading good stories.

AC: How have you evolved as a writer?

RFD: It boils down to this: It takes a long time to develop confidence as a writer. Even when you are met with success, you hit giant bumps in the road. Being a writer is *never* a smooth path. The most important thing about evolving as a writer is to believe in your own stories, in your own characters, and to keep writing, no matter what happens. Now I actually know that I can do it, and that I *can* take a story idea and work it until it works in the world, not just for me. I certainly never used to be confident.



AC: What's the best thing about being a writer?

RFD: Sitting at my desk and being lost with a character that I love in a situation—a story—that consumes me. Also, I love doing final drafts. You change and shape and edit a story, and when you know you've finally got it right is among the most satisfying feelings in the world.

AC: What's the worst?

RFD: Feeling like you nailed a story—like your book is a good thing in the world—and having hardly anyone notice or read it. And having it get trashed by reviewers.

AC: What are your responses to these reviews?

RFD: I've had a wide variety of responses. I got some rave reviews, and won a couple of awards, like the Junior Library Guild and the Blue Ribbon Book for Young Readers. But I've also gotten trashed by some reviewers. Critics' words can destroy a writer's confidence—or at least destroy your day. Or make your day. Developing tough skin is part of getting published. I've had my day made, and I've been destroyed a few times. However, now if I get disappointed by a response to my work, I try to focus on something else that I *can* control instead of stewing.

AC: What was the process like from novel to 12-page screenplay?

RFD: Oh, holy cow. First, I had to back off from the book and think about the primary, most immediate elements that drive the story. What is the biggest conflict for the characters? It's hard to reduce a novel-length story to the bare bones of plot. To get to the bare bones, you really have to “kill your darlings,” and that means eliminating elements that seem so intrinsic to the book, such as characters, events, places, images, language. No dogs, no Scout, no rednecks, no trailer court, not really any junk woods. But there has to be a body. There has to be a link between Allie and the body. Even the budding romance between Sadie and Joe, that certainly drives the book along, has to be only subtly introduced in a short film. There's no room for romance if we're going to solve some sort of mystery in 12 pages! It was tough, and we did multiple drafts. Lots of people helped. It's also not a solitary effort like writing a book. It has to be more of a collaboration so that the vision for the visual story on the big screen works from the director's point of view as well. I wrote and rewrote and finally gave it to Steph Borklund. It was a crazy amazing process, I'll tell you. She and I went through several drafts, cutting, tightening. Then she took the draft to her students who had not yet read the book. The students saw elements that weren't connecting because they didn't know the fabric of the whole story. They had some great ideas for making the short version much tighter. Altogether, the 12-page screenplay went through at least sixteen drafts. I saved at least 14 of these drafts.

AC: How has this collaboration with filmmakers affected your career as a writer?

RFD: I didn't know how much fun it would be to collaborate on a film. Working with Steph has been one of the best work experiences of my whole life. Writing a novel is mostly solitary work. Writing in collaboration and talking through tough scenes or bits of dialogue, and tweaking them with Steph is so different from being solely responsible for the entire outcome of a story. I have discovered that I like that a lot. I've always written visually. By that I mean that I sort of watch a movie of the book I'm writing in my head while I write. This filmmaking experience, however, has not only increased that, but I know I'd love to try to keep writing screenplays, too.

AC: What has it been like to see your characters on the page come to life on screen?

RFD: That has been unbelievable. When I actually saw Sadie and Allie and Joe on the big screen, I felt tears running down my cheeks. Hearing them saying words I wrote was weird and absolutely wonderful.

Goober Gals

by Erika Westhoff



Has a fiendish delight for peanuts, pills, Pats, and fire drills.

The Missouri Digital Heritage Archive has Stephens College yearbooks from 1900 to 1965. As a student at the small historic women's college, I had decided to read them from the beginning and was now lost among the curly, sleek bobs of the 1920s when a quote that belonged to Fullerton, Margaret (Peg) of Lawton, Oklahoma, caught my eye. Her frizzed bangs offset her otherwise smooth bob with a slight bottom curl. She was not particularly pretty. In the black-and-white photo, dark shadows obscured her eyes. It was the loose line of her mouth and emotionless face that intrigued me more than her physical appearance. It didn't make sense that such a mysterious quote would belong to such an unextraordinary looking girl.

Her involvement with organizations on campus went on for three lines. Some were self-explanatory, such as the Oklahoma Club and Literary Club, while others were unusual, namely Hi Beta Steppo and Fire Chief. Hi Beta Steppo sounded like a sorority or honors society, but it was spelled out. This was unusual because all the other sororities and societies on campus were designated by their Greek letters. The title of Fire Chief posed new questions while also partially explaining Peg's "fiendish delight" for fire drills. My casual scanning turned into a search for answers.

I located the Stephens College Fire Department on page 95. The dormitory fire departments were made up of students selected by their dormitory's dean to act as first responders to a residential fire and ensure everyone made it out safely. In the department photo, a majority of the girls dressed in black were hanging off of the Columbia, Missouri, fire truck. Peg stood in front, her arms crossed, a borrowed Columbia Fire Chief helmet perched on her head, and her white coat billowing out around her calves. Peg Fullerton was the fire chief for the main dorm. She also oversaw student firefighter training.



On the very next page was the Eta Pill Chapter of Hi Beta Steppo. The group photo had the largest number of girls of any other listed organization. Every girl has their left hand raised, thumbs in their ears, and other fingers spread out. Hi Beta Steppo was a mock sorority founded in 1916 by a spurned pledge to protest against organized snobbery. Anyone could join and all that was required to be in good standing was to remain true, sure-enough, and a good sport. The officer's positions were named after different pseudo-medicines, the purpose of which was to cure those in low spirits. "Cartus Little Liver" Fullerton was the acting treasurer.

These pages answered a few things, but quotes from other students along the way provided a whole new area of investigation, Peanut Alley to be exact.

Opal Simmons was "nutty-gee, of course 'cause she's a peanut."

Nell Jones listed herself as "a Peanut Alley product."

Ada Dee Steward claimed to be "half the noise of Peanut Alley--my roomie is the other half."

There was an entire picture collage page dedicated to "Life on Peanut Alley," but no actual explanation as to what that meant. The sources needed to decipher the mystery of Miss Margaret "Peg" Fullerton and Peanut Alley would not surface until I began volunteering at the Stephens College archive a year later.

To strengthen my resume for archival graduate programs, I had begun volunteering in the archive toward the end of my junior year. One day I opened the metal cabinet doors to the scrapbook shelves and found a box labeled Margaret Frost nee Fullerton 1942 Letter and Peanut Alley Memory Book (VERY FRAGILE). The acid-free blue box took two hands and a bit of effort to lift off the shelf. Upon cracking the box open, the smell of decaying leather, musky yet bitter like vinegar, hit me. The first layer of documents inside were the pages of Margaret's letters sheathed in plastic, addressed from Arcata, California, and dated May 19, 1942.

Dear 1942 Residents of PEANUT ALLEY:

I suddenly realized this week that Stephens Commencement is at hand and I must get a letter off to you if I am to grant your request for some former Peanut to tell you about the Peanut Alley Memory Book you found. The reason why I have not written sooner is strangely similar to the reason that the Memory Book was started: a war is responsible for each.

America entered WWI on April 6th, 1917. The war would end a little less than a year later on November 11th, 1918, during Peg's first year of college. That same fall semester Missouri was the second state in America to have recorded cases of the Spanish Influenza. When Peg arrived on campus, the city issued a quarantine advisory. The girls were not permitted to leave their small square campus plot until winter break. By the end of the year, over 200 people had died from the flu in Columbia alone. There would be more casualties from the influenza pandemic than from WWI.

Margaret admits she does not know how she would have dealt with it all if it had not been for her rooming assignment in the east wing hallway of the main dorm's third floor.

I entered Stephens in September 1918 and was assigned to room 144. This, I soon learned, was . . .

Her words drew me back to 1918 as I reimagined her experience.

"Peanut Alley?"

"It's what they call this part of the building. No clue why, though it's been called that since at least the 1880s."

"A mystery then. How exciting."

"Only up until the answer is discovered."

"Of course, one should always allow an unanswered mystery to remain elusive."

"Agreed. Oh, but where are my manners. How do you do, my name is Margaret Smith."

“Margaret Fullerton, pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“We are either going to be the best of friends or the worst of enemies.”

“Why limit ourselves to just one?”

“You slay me, name stealer!”

“You can call me Peg.”

“I go by Pat, Pats, or Pattie. Pick your poison.”

“All right, Pats. Should we tell our instructors?”

“No, let’s let them figure it out.”

. . . We did everything within our power to keep up morale by making each event into a gala occasion, otherwise we would indeed have been a gloomy crowd.

Pats and Peg become blurred in written accounts. They complimented each other so well they became a single character in the minds of their instructors and peers. Under their direction, Peanut Alley went from being the name of a dormitory hallway to a not-so-secret secret organization. Using their combined charisma, they gathered their hallmates to pen a pledge and charter detailing their ultimate goal of spreading entertainment and humor across campus. Pats was voted in as the first president with Peg as her vice president. When Pats graduated in 1919, Peg became the Grand Old Peanut. Even after graduating, Pats stayed in Columbia and was included in all things salted and roasted.

Peg was a writer. She wrote ghost letters for other girls with soldier beaux overseas, plays for the Nuts, fiction for the campus literary magazine, and made an entry every single day in both her personal journal and the community book that the Peanuts created. A golden peanut with a green question mark in the center, the official insignia of Peanut Alley, welcomes readers on the first page of the Memory Book. Scattered throughout the pages are several posters advertising for Peg’s plays performed by the Nuts. A story was included alongside one poster for “The Freckled Beauty of Hell’s Flat” detailing how the administration made them issue an apology for an advertisement that used the word hell. The girls posted their apology under the remaining posters that had been folded up to hide the “Hell’s Flat” part.

The Dean thinks that it is rowdy to advertise our play under its full name, so we have agreed to let the line “Hell’s Flat” remain out of sight. Unabridged copies of the poster may be seen in Peanut Alley.

The Peanut’s playful defiance of the administration only increased over time. During the height of quarantine, the girls rented a horse and surrey to venture off campus for a picnic. The local farmer brought in produce every Saturday. He would

leave his horse tied up to a pole near the kitchen and go downtown before heading home. For the price of renting the horse and a decent mum sum, he agreed to bring his family into town with him and stay longer than normal. As he and his family walked downtown, the Damn family emerged from the main dorm wearing fake beards and wrinkle makeup. Once the group had driven far enough off campus, they began singing, “Father Damn, Mother Damn, two little Damns or three, I’ll be damned, you’ll be damned, the whole Damn family” to the tune of *Jingle Bells*.

On each page of the Memory Book the girls’ rambunctious actions build. Prankster Peg, Pats, and the other girls, egged each other on through the war, the influenza outbreak, panic attacks, and college. Margaret reflected upon one memory in particular with great fondness in her letter.

Does the Memory Book tell about the time that the Peanuts. . .

A crash followed by roaring laughter erupted from room 144. The sound reverberated down the hall as the Dean of the Main Dormitory came up the stairs. With the greatest authority one can possess while dressed in night clothes, she stopped in front of the offending room and rapped on the door with her knuckles.

“Fifteen minutes until curfew, girls. I trust you will all be in your *own* rooms by then.”

A short giggle silenced by a hiss initially answered her before the voices within crowded, “Yes, Miss.”

The Dean inhaled through her nose and tucked back a piece of hair that had escaped her night pins. The occupants of room 144 were the rowdiest among the residents of Peanut Alley. Nell was a quiet enough girl, but she was too easily swept up by the eccentricities of her roommate, Peg. The Dean had given up trying to correct their behavior after the first semester and, since they performed extremely well academically, had settled for regulating them until graduation.

At least I have a leave of absence to go to St. Louis next week, the Dean thought as she descended the stairs.

Inside room 144, Nell, Pats, and Peg lay in a pile of limbs under the window holding their silence. The other residents of Peanut Alley sat on the bare metal of Nell and Peg’s bed frames. Once the Dean’s footsteps were out of hearing range the group reanimated.

“Move your elbow, Pattie. It’s digging into my spleen.”

“That’s not my elbow. It’s Peg the Pest’s.”

“Phonus bolonus, Pats. Own up to your own limbs!”

After some maneuvering, the girls untangled themselves, smoothed their rumpled clothes and injured spleens, and regrouped to finish their preparations.

“Are you sure about this?” Ada Dee asked.

“Ab-so-lute-ly. The constitution of good ole Stephens does not allow students to sleep in each other’s rooms without permission,” Peg said, “but nothing was said about this being unlawful to do if anyone took a notion to do it.”

Ada Dee shared a glance of affirmation with her roommate.

“Well, my roomie and I are still going to hafta pass on this jaunt.”

“That’s your prerogative. Just be sure to make plenty of noise for the rest of us. We wouldn’t want the Dean to suspect quietness is indicative of something strange happening.”

The two girls agreed and, much to Peg’s amusement, wished the remaining fifteen Peanuts a good night’s rest.

“I for one don’t plan to sleep at all,” Peg said before folding in on herself and jumping out the open window.

It was a four foot drop from the third floor window of the dormitory to the roof of the auditorium breezeway below. The mattresses that they had shoved through the window helped to soften the short drop.

“Now lower down the picnic basket and then file out quick! We have about ten minutes until the night watchman makes his next round.”

A page in the Memory Book titled SPECIMEN FEEDS proudly boasts THE PEANUTS HAVE NEVER BEEN CAUGHT AT ONE YET and includes pictures of picnics and outings had without permission with captions that read “AH! WOMAN!! THAT NIGHT THAT 15 NUTS SLEPT ON THE ROOF” and “OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF HOW MUCH SLEEP WE DID.” A faded receipt written in pencil reads 35 cents for popcorn, \$1 for potato chips, 25 cents for pickles, 35 cents for buns, and 50 cents for a ham salad. The total came to \$2.45 to feed fifteen Nuts.

In her 1942 letter, Margaret acknowledges that the behavior of her and her fellow Nuts was probably a burden to the administration, but she would not change her youthful actions in any way. Everything she did was for a reason, and those reasons at their nucleus always had good intentions. The controversy surrounding “The Freckled Beauty of Hell’s Flat” brought in one of the largest crowds of Peanut play history and all proceeds were donated to the Red Cross. The night that the Nut’s had a gathering on the roof, they spent a good amount of time writing letters to the influenza patients in the College’s infirmary. The Peanut Alley girls were infamous on campus, but obscured behind the infamy and antics were actual lives.

All of the Peanut Alley girls of 1920 were seniors. No underclassmen had been assigned to the hall because the main dormitory was being converted into a Senior Hall. The Peanuts had a predicament: how were they going to preserve their legacy?

Before I graduated, a Committee of Peanuts wrapped the Peanut Memoirs in proper gift fashion, wrote appropriate presentation speeches, and took the book to the library. There we requested that each year it be checked out to the Peanut Alley girls with the understanding that they continue to record the glorious adventures of coming decades of Peanuts . . .

“What do you mean you don’t want our book?” Peg cried, holding it tight to her chest.

“It seems a very silly idea.” The librarian looked over her glasses at the gathering of Peanuts and sniffed. “A shame that you have made a record which might be interpreted to mean that all Stephens College girls do is to act funny.”

“It’s an official record of our collective college years and organization!” Nell said and shifted closer to Peg when the librarian’s gaze fell on her.

“An organization not formally recognized by the College.”

The librarian’s audience had no response to this quip. She waited a few more beats before continuing. “In addition, that book is too big to fit on our shelves and would be a general nuisance along with its contents.”

This statement was true. The library was located in a building that had been converted from a residential home to accommodate the growing collection. Originally the library had been in one of the main dormitory rooms. The shelves were narrow and the Memory Book would require three times the length to fit across them standing up.

“Now, if that is all?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The girls filtered out of the building and back to their dorm room to hold a tearful mourning session. There they distributed among themselves the supplements which were meant to accompany the Memory Book. Once they had done that, the only piece left was the book itself.

. . . We could think of nothing better to do with it, so later we smuggled it into the library and placed it on a high shelf and put a note with it addressed, “To Whom It May Concern.” We requested the finder not burn it because someone might want it someday.

The Memory Book was discovered by the library and chucked into a box. It would remain there, shuffling along with the rest of the library’s collection as it moved locations, until a student discovered the box in 1942. She drafted a letter to Margaret

Frost nee Fullerton introducing herself as a fellow Peanut. The student was living on the third floor, east wing of Senior Hall. She asked Margaret for advice on how to keep up morale during war and for more information on the Peanut Alley girls of yesteryears. Several months after the student posted her initial letter, she received back an eight page response.

During WWII, Margaret's Civilian Defense activities created a list longer than her 1920 college organization involvement. Her primary duty was as the Block Captain for her neighborhood. Margaret gathered information for the Defense Council and made sure that each house was prepared in case of evacuation. As a Pacific coastal city, Arcata was considered a high-risk zone for attack. She assigned herself the additional task of keeping up her block's morale. Turning her back porch into a venue, Margaret and her children formed a family band and held mini-concerts for the community. Along with her Block Captain duties, Margaret took up a regular shift at the Aircraft Observation Post, knit hats and gloves for those overseas, taught standard and advanced first aid courses, and ran her community's first aid station alongside her husband.

Charles Frost had been injured while serving in WWI. He was transferred from the Western Front to the States and put into long-term hospital care paid for by his Army Invalidity Pension. The hospital was understaffed and would soon become overwhelmed by the emerging influenza pandemic. Among the din and doom of the ward, he struck up polite conversation with a spritely volunteer nurse preparing for her first year of college. Their conversation spanned across seven years of correspondence and meetings. The two married in the fall of 1925. Charles' injury, however, was as lasting as his marriage. It made him ineligible for active military duty, though he still attempted to register for the draft multiple times.

None of the members of Margaret's immediate family served in WWII. Her three sons were all too young to be drafted and her daughter was too young to volunteer for service. She highly encouraged her daughter to consider attending college before enlisting, specifically Stephens, if the war carried on past her high school graduation. Margaret believed that while college was not the end all be all of life's knowledge, it had helped her acquire the will to overcome problems instead of letting them overcome her. Stephens College had been her prison during quarantine, her secondary home, and a source of empowerment long after she left.

I would be ever so happy to hear from some of you when your present exciting week is over. What did you do with the Memory Book? How is Peanut Alley furnished at present, and who lives where? I hope that those of you who come back next year will write and tell me what you do. I correspond with several of the 1918-20 Peanuts, and they too would be delighted to hear what is going on. It might be fun to compile some "follow-up" stories about some of the Peanuts and add them to the Memory Book.

Ever sincerely,
MARGARET "PEG" FULLERTON
(MRS. C.W. FROST)

After our one-sided introduction via the scrapbook and letter, I did not meet Peg again until her death. I claimed I was related to her on Ancestry.com to gain access to her digitized documents and was directed to her death certificate. Margaret passed away on April 6th, 1995. She had died four days and seven months before I was born. I felt cheated. Our lifespans had never overlapped.

Margaret had lived through almost every major event of the 20th century and written about only a small portion of them. Her series "Small Girl in a New Town," about her childhood in Lawton, Oklahoma, gained her a place in the Museum of the Great Plains. The digital section of the Museum showcases photographs from her childhood that all resemble the same dead, dark-eyed stare of her senior yearbook photo. None of these images do her justice.

In the Peanut Alley Memory Book, there is a picture from Pats' birthday picnic. It is one of the same images pasted to the Life on Peanut Alley page in the yearbook titled A Nut Club Sandwich, but the Book identifies the girls. Peg is sprawled on top of Nell with Pats squished to the bottom of the pile. It is an action shot. Her arm is thrown up in the air in an attempt to remain balanced on top as another girl tries to push her off. Peg's face is slightly blurred from laughter, and her eyes are closed in the yellowed image, but she is perfectly clear.



Geen Chute in
The Flu Days



Community
Housecleaning



Inmates
of the nut
apartment



Official
Hi-Sign



The Peanuts have
a picnic.

LIFE ON



A water
million
Feed.

PEANUT ALLEY



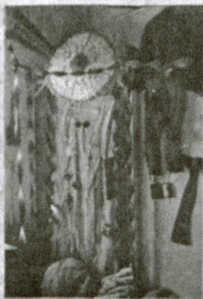
Over the EATS



A NUT CLUB
SANDWICH



Assorted
Nuts



Relics in our Museum.



Fresh
peanuts

A Noble Out of His Time

by Raina Johnson

his breath is a fog in the dim, cold
light of the stall
his ears flick back and forth
noble, curved, poised

he lifts his head
his neck a fine curve
even in this light he belongs in
fairy tales, myths, dreams

I slide the heavy stall door open
with considerable effort
and with age and neglect it
groans, squeaks, labors

a soft nicker in greeting
or recognition
rumbles from his chest
low, sweet, loving

his eyes are round
a soft brown
like the bark of pine
kind, wise, generous

he moves to me
a mere two steps
to cross the space
steady, strong, sure

he examines me
his nostrils flare
as they graze my palm
wide, dark, smooth

he nibbles at the carrot
in my outstretched palm

and takes it with a
crunch, chomping, munching

his soft silvery coat
is dull in the dim light
I slip on his halter and he follows
trusting, willing, steady

we walk down the aisle
between the stalls
and outside. There his coat
glitters, glints, glows

the sunlight
plays on his coat
in the breeze his mane and tail
dance, flit, float

the snow around him
blends with his hair
he is the winter
white, pure, quiet

his breath spirals in the air
he trots at my side, the crisp
morning setting a spark in his soul
anxious, eager, inquisitive

we reach his pasture
I unclip his lead
to let him free and he
kicks, bucks, prances

he is a lord on parade
this winter morning
a noble out of his time
poised, groomed, beautiful

Mage

by Raina Johnson

some days her fur flows in wind
 like the grass on a prairie
ears flop in movement
 her own flightless wings
sometimes burrs cling in her fur
 as she crashes through the wilds
she lives her life to the fullest
 taking each day in stride
nose held to the wind
 her beacon of attention
she frolics, dances: carefree
 this sweet dog of mine

My Dream Lover

by Raina Johnson

She was freedom, a native of a land wild and untamed.
Her eyes were dark pools and her body lean and toned.
Her skin was fine copper and her hair held the depths of the Milky Way.
Together we had been among the steady horses since dawn.
I did not know her name though it perched, tip of tongue.
She struck me as someone I had known through lifetimes.
Her lips were on mine and there was no person I had ever wanted more.

It was long and sweet and then erotic, this dream of her.

She was mine and only mine to love and embrace.

I have never felt lonelier than when I woke, alone.

This mysterious girl shall forever haunt me.

I await her in my dreamscape, hopeful.

And I am left to wonder, always.

In a past life was she really mine?

BOOK OF WITCHES

by Kylie Naumann

As an artist and writer, I have a personal bias toward illustration, particularly of the old and aged variety. Over the past semester and the summer prior, I spent a good deal of my time exploring the older conventions of the art form and was taken in by the understated intricacy of many illustrators. The most enticing illustrations depicted scenes from fairy tales and folklore. While working on a story idea, mired in its backstory, I thought it would be useful to visually contextualize some of the world's larger elements. It was a helpful exercise. From that point, I played with the idea of a series of illustrated short stories, each revolving around a character that would in some way embody the narrative events of the piece. Furthermore, I wanted to use my character illustrations as a personal exploratory project as I experimented with older, traditional illustrative styles. In the process I wanted to experiment with varied poses, a limited color palette, and new methods of applying and presenting those colors.



Lamia

2017, pencil undersketch, digital lines and color



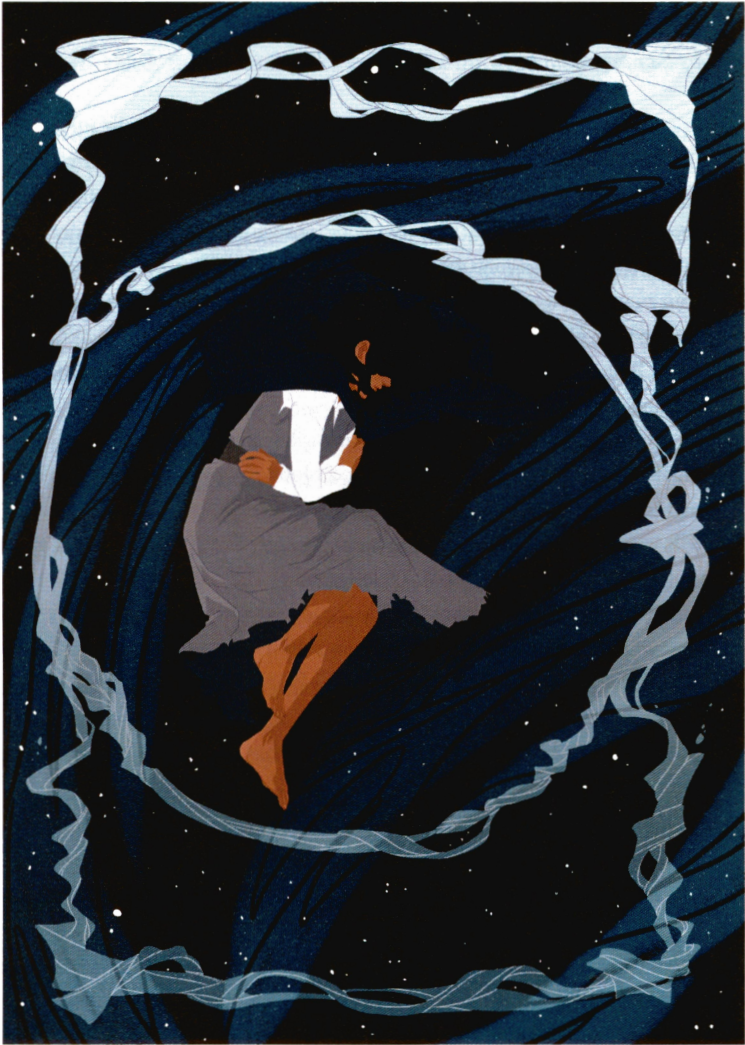
Leyanette

2017, pencil undersketch, digital lines and color



Rielle

2017, pencil undersketch, digital lines and color



Shael

2017, pencil undersketch, digital lines and color

Teaching the Kid About Death

by *Cai Santee*

Being alone gives you the power to talk to animals. From the moment parents teach their toddlers the meaning of the N-word and the pride of southeast Texas, your powers begin to grow. It really shows when the cutest blonde girl in class has a birthday in September. She hands out glittery invitations with little bags of gummy candy wrapped in ribbons, and everyone gets one but you. At first, you see this as a mistake, so you ask your mom if you can go anyway. She tells you no, that's dangerous, and asks three times for the little girl's last name.

"Oh, honey," your mother says, kissing your brown forehead with her brown lips. "I hope you never grow up."

This will continue. Different girls with different candy and not a single invitation. Finally, at recess one day in November, a blonde boy with eyes that gave you a nightmare once, who picked you first in touch football for your height and big feet, tells you he wants to invite you to his super cool WWE-themed birthday party, but his daddy says he can't bring 'round no niggers.

The rest of recess you hold a huge cicada shell in your hands and ask it over and over what a "nigger" is and how you can stop being one so you can go to this super cool WWE-themed birthday party. It whispers for you to ask the teacher.

That afternoon in the car rider line, you do just that.

You tug on her horrid denim dress. She looks down with that blank expression most teachers have.

"Yes?"

"Miss, what's a nigger?"

This is the wrong thing to say. The teacher gasps and sends you to the principal's office, and you get in-school suspension for swearing. Your mother spansks you. Whatever a nigger is, it must be awful, and you're more determined than ever to figure out what on earth it is.

That weekend, after three days of solitude and nasty bread and peanut butter for lunch, you sit outside and talk to your dog that your brother doesn't want to take care of. He leaves him here to roam around the farm.

You ask him what nigger means, too—the dog, not your brother—and he tells you to watch the news.

And so you do, and you cry the entire time. People who look like your father are criminals and thugs, people who look like your mother are animals and leeches, kids who look like you are killed. You still don't fully know what the word means, but you fear it.

Junior high rolls around and your social circle consists of your cat, some stray cats that your mom tells you to stop feeding yet buys more cat food every time you ask, and a stuffed cat you got from a trip to the second-hand store with your grandma. You tell them everything. About the girl you write poems to, about dropping out of advanced classes because the counselor said you were just going to fall behind if you tried, about growing pains and hip fat, period stains and the Playboy catalogue that you found in the mail once, and about that huge hurricane in the east that brought hundreds of people just like you to the town. You're no longer singled out. Now you're finally a part of something. Something you still don't quite fit into, but something nonetheless.

February comes and there's a documentary about slavery shown in history class. The word "negro" sounds like nigger and the kids around you giggle every time it is said. But you and the three black kids from Louisiana with thick accents who wrote essays about dirty water and spongy wood don't get the joke. You tell your cat you think the word might mean death. He agrees. Some fear it and some dive feet first out of an airplane to claim it and some just die, never fully comprehending what they're experiencing until it has ended.

In high school you hear the word in music. In high school you hear the word in poetry. In high school you hear the word when a boy is murdered for looking just like you. In high school you get suspended when you punch a football player for calling you a nigger during a class discussion on Ferguson.

The day after graduation your cat dies. He was old, at least 16, and couldn't make it to the litter box anymore. The day before graduation you cut off all your hair and listen to your grandmother tell you about growing up as the daughter of a slave and how much better it would be if you would just go to the negro school up the road instead of some old crackertown in Missouri. The week before you leave for college your father buys you pepper spray and your mother cries every day.

You say goodbye to the stray cats and your brother's dog, and sometimes you cry when white hoods march in the streets and when you hear a sorority girl call her sister her "nigga," but you still jump out of planes every day, and you still greet every cat that crosses your path.

Teaching the Kid How to Hurt

by Cai Santee

This is a mistake that you're making. One could say that it began with you walking out of a therapist's office, one could say it started at childhood with your mother's low self esteem, one could subscribe to essentialism and say that your DNA was written for you to do this, but either way, you're making a mistake.

He parks his shitty car and unlocks the shitty door, and you step out into air filled with water and the smell of something Texan. He doesn't wait to see if you're following him; he just begins walking toward the swing set. The hill is so empty at this time of night. The only illumination is the big spotlight shining on the flagpole keeping an eye over the town that you swore you'd never return to.

You sit in the swing next to him, watching gravity pull and push him into the air. You think he's taller than last year. Thinner, at least. Something has been taken from him.

You thought maybe you could refuse to say something first, but, after minutes ticked by, you finally decided to break through a layer of something thick in your throat.

"Why did you bring me here?"

He stops swinging, dragging his feet in the dirt. You notice then he's wearing those hideous cowboy boots again. Tacky false authenticity. He hasn't changed much.

"I wanted to see if you missed me."

You stare up at the sky. "I don't."

Footsteps. "If you didn't you wouldn't have answered the phone."

A match ignites in your chest, hissing and spitting and burning your nostrils. You stand and start walking toward the hill. He is wrong. You don't miss him. Who would? Who would miss waking up in the middle of the night with sweat and blood covering the sheets, who would miss screaming into digital devices and breaking everything in sight, who on earth would miss the violence that comes from hateful obsession disguised as love between two pathetic beings desperately afraid of being alone?

"Why can't you just admit that you cared about me? Or that you never did?"

He's following you up the hill, and you can't answer that.

There's a railing guarding the flat concrete top of the hill from a sharp drop. You walk up to it and look down, letting the hard metal press deep into your gut. Your heart

is racing and you can't decide if it's the steepness of the walk up the hill or a fear that you haven't felt since last August.

He's standing next to you now. He's not out of breath. He works out. But really, it's because he doesn't breathe. At least that's how it seems to you. Everything is still again.

"Sometimes I still love you,"

God, what does that mean?

"And sometimes you disgust me."

Your elbows are on the railing and your hands are covering your mouth and you wonder if you're biting back a scream or a heave.

For the first time in years, he touches you. Softly on the shoulder, but the contact solidifies your worry; you really do want to vomit. You turn your back to the town, but still refuse to look at him. The swings are still swaying—maybe from wind, maybe from people being on them, maybe from evil spirits watching and laughing at you from down below. He steps in front of you and leans down, trying to make you look at him, but you just fucking can't.

He says something here, but your ears begin to ring. It is probably something about the past, or the future, or the mistakes the two of you are making, you don't really know, but he presses his mouth to yours and you refuse to close your eyes.

After, you will wish you could say there was a moment when you had second thoughts, when you realized where you were and turned around, but you just don't.

You lock eyes with the swing set and count the sways while he finds his closure for the pain he has caused and the mistakes he has made. You don't know what makes him believe your mouth is a confessional, but when his sins are fully repented he steps back and hugs you. You think he says something else, but the swing set is morphing into a multitude of shapes and colors before your eyes, and you don't want to listen to whatever bullshit is pouring out of his black hole of a face and finally you leave. You walk down the hill, pass the swing set, get in his shitty car, and he drives you home.

Teaching the Kid About God

by *Cai Santee*

The first time you go to church you sleep through the entire thing and wake up to a drool stain on your mother's slacks and your grandmother scowling at you. This continues for another ten years, until one day you decide to stay awake. Well, your grandmother pinches you every time your head bobs and makes you talk to people when the pastor in the fancy suit and gold watch tells everyone to walk around and say "peace" or whatever to one another.

That day you listen to a three-hour-long speech full of screaming and shouting and people in the crowd yelling "amen," and the entire time you feel your heart sinking because for some reason you think that everyone in that entire room has read your journal that you keep with you at all times, and they know about your sins of the flesh. Your hands are shaking, and suddenly you worry that every time you hugged your best friend that you secured your seat on the bus to hell.

After the performance, you walk up to the pastor guy while your grandmother is gossiping to her friends about something mean, and you ask him what it means to be a woman. He doesn't respond well. You then ask him why you have to marry a man. He says it's natural. You get angry at this, and you don't fully understand why yet, but you tell him you're going to marry your best friend, and then something happens here, you don't know what, but you never go back to that church again.

Things happen to get worse from here. Your best friend moves away. You reject religion completely and decide that atheism will keep you safe. The world is silent. The god you were forced to dream about is gone, and adolescence is not kind to you.

The gory details of the next few years are lost in bloody sheets and soggy pillows, but somewhere along the line you decide that an ending will be best for everyone. The best friend you were so in love with is the only person you have the urge to say goodbye to. You read online that a bottle of sleeping pills can do the job, but for fun you turn the carpet red one more time.

You wake up in a cop car driving you into the city. Not an ambulance, and there are zip ties around your wrists. The bleeding has stopped mostly, and now there's flakey dried blood all over your fingers. You've seen the cop driving you before. He's come by your grandmother's house. He is a part of the church, and he's lecturing you. You don't hear what he's saying, so you count the squares in the cage separating the front seats

from the back. There are a lot.

There's a period of time here when you are completely blacked out. Things pass as if you're watching them on an old fuzzy television. You get stitches, you get a prescription that you never take, and you go home. You get scars instead of wounds. It's cold. You spend Christmas locked in your room, and you're only allowed to use your laptop in front of your mother who is completely terrified of your breath.

A few days after Christmas, you are sitting in the kitchen with your mother. She's doing a puzzle, and you're on a quest for some kind of guidance. It's a chain reaction.

Google "how do i find my purpose"

Get spirituality 101 website.

Google "spirituality vs religion"

Get about.com article mentioning Wicca.

Click Wicca.

Google "Wiccan principles"

Feel the air leave your entire body as you read about a faith that you didn't know existed. There's more than those who deemed you unworthy of their god's love. There's more than you've been told, and it's old, and the gods you were introduced to as stories are as real as the trees you used to talk to when you were a kid.

You spend the rest of Christmas break browsing articles and blogs and research papers and absorbing centuries of information on all the religions you had been told were only real on movie screens. It's weird. You've never truly had to learn something before and now here you are, taking notes, highlighting, and actually absorbing the words that your eyes see.

There's a year of this. A year of study, a year of reading, a year of your mother walking up to you in the middle of the afternoon, asking if you're turning into a satanist because you two share an Amazon account. She sees everything you are buying. Honestly you're not too opposed to the idea, but traditional satanism is aesthetic and atheism has proven to have nothing good for you.

On a strangely sunny day in September, everything you learned you practice. You steal a glass bottle from the china cabinet and fill it with water, get an emergency candle and a bottle from the kitchen and one of your brother's lighters.

Beside the shed where the horse used to sleep before she died, there's a pecan tree that every season drops bright green nuts. You grab a brick from the abandoned house

"There's a period of time here when you are completely blacked out."

that costs too much to tear down and place it at the base of the tree, along with the glass bottle, bowl, and candle. The ground is moist and cool under your knees and there are fallen pecans pressing into your knees, but you don't notice much. The books mentioned a wand, so you grab a stick from the ground and close your eyes.

Draw up the energy. Imagine a white light burning from your center that flows up and through your fingertips into the space in front of you—north, earth, dirt, trees. You're incredibly aware of the dirt staining your old sweatpants. You let the white light flow to your right, east, air. You focus intensely on the breeze that's slightly too cold for your skin before letting it swing behind you, envisioning matches and wildfires and the end of things at a level of destruction that isn't humanly possible. Finally you come to the west, waters, drowning. You've never been a fan of deep pools after that time you couldn't feel your feet touch the ground, but the danger in and of itself is something to celebrate. After this comes the calling of the divine. This is the part you were worried about. The lingering fear of doing something wrong, leaving something out or pissing something off causes you to reread the words four more times before looking up to the sky and calling down the unnamed gods.

This is the part that you have never dared explain to anyone, out of fear of sounding like an absolute loon, but held dear enough to solidify your faith. There's a space inbetween atoms, a space so small it's inconceivable to the human mind like the endlessness of the stars, and within that space resides an energy that no one talks about and few acknowledge. This is where you find divinity, and this is where you find peace. You focus on it, pinpoint it and mentally hold onto it for dear life. You've been taught there are two sides to everything. Black and white, good and evil, man and woman, up and down, but within this space you find something new. Gray, morality, humanness and balance. This understanding has a name. It is a being (and later you find out it is many beings), but for now you decide not to think about that too hard.

There's no point.

After a few moments of feeling absolute terror and excitement, you return to your notes and continue the ritual. Now you state your intention clearly and carefully and barely above a whisper because you don't really have to shout for the gods to hear you.

"I dedicate myself to the earth."

You grab clumps of dirt and pack it in the bowl.

"I dedicate myself to the wind."

You pick up the bowl and blow into it.

“I dedicate myself to the flame.”

You light the candle and stick it in the dirt.

“I dedicate myself to the water.”

You dump the bottle of water into the bowl.

And with that it is complete.

You sit back and analyze all you did, trying your absolute hardest to deny that you feel different, militant, but most of all you feel reborn. The word used to make you recoil. How can someone be someone else just because of a religion?

But you rub your face and look down at your arms, and for the first time in a year you notice how faded your scars have become.

Backbone

by Gabrielle Dooley

“Here ya go, honey. Just remove all your clothes. You can leave your underwear on as long as it doesn’t have any metal buttons on it.”

“What about plastic buttons?” I was wearing my gray and green boxer shorts with tiny green buttons down the center. The thought of being completely naked horrified me.

“That’s fine. We only worry about metal.”

The nurse in sickly green scrubs and a name tag that read “Angie” held out a neatly folded hospital gown, white with light blue flowers. I looked from the nurse’s tired eyes to her small smile as I reached out to take it. Nodding, she turned to leave.

“Um, wait, where do I put my clothes?” I twisted the gown’s ties around my fingers and tugged, waiting for instructions. I was new to all of this. Being a patient was something I’d never done before.

“Oh, you can just leave them in here on the toilet lid. Nobody else will be using this bathroom.”

“Okay, thank you.”

The door shut, and then I was alone. But I still felt like I was being watched as I carefully slid off my jeans and shirt, folding them and setting them neatly on the toilet lid. The cold air of the hospital nipped at my skin, and goosebumps flared up like miniscule bubbles. I once asked my mom why they kept hospitals “so freakin’ cold,” and she explained that it was to stop bacteria from festering. The word *fester* scared me.

I looked in the mirror, my pale skin, sharp collar bones, and dark hair made startling by the fluorescent lighting. *I can put my clothes back on and go out to my mom. I don’t want to do this.* I turned around and twisted my head to catch a glimpse of my back in the mirror. It looked normal, aside from the unnatural way my shoulder blades stuck out. But that was because I was only 90 pounds and petite, not because of my spine.

A knock on the door made me jump, and my heart leapt into my throat.

“You doin’ okay, hon?”

“Uh, yeah! Almost done.” When I opened my eyes again, I could see my pale breast lightly pulsing to the beat of my racing heart. I was not ready to put on that hospital gown and officially be a patient. But I had to. I unfolded the garment and slipped my arms through, tying the waist to cover as much of my backside as possible.

It felt like I’d been in the bathroom for hours locked inside my head, but it had probably only been a few minutes. With a twist of the doorknob, the bathroom door

swung open and the monster CT Scan stood before me—churring and whirring in its enormity.

“All righty. Go on ahead and lie down. We’re going to have to tape your legs together, but it’s nothing to worry about. We just want to make sure your legs are the same length.”

“Okay.” I shuffled slowly up to the white monster, my bare feet making soft slapping noises on the chilly linoleum floor. The bed was hard, flat and cold beneath me and the bulk of the machine looked like a portal to another dimension. The opening was just big enough for the bed with me on it to pass through. I tried to even out my breathing, calm myself down, but the beeping and buzzing of the hospital was my greatest nightmare.

The summer after my 8th grade year my friend noticed the abnormal shape of my back. She made it obvious that it was crazy that a spine could look that way.

“Geez, Gabby. Do you have scoliosis?”

I had been reaching down to tie my shoe when she placed her hands on each set of ribs and pushed me farther forward. I could feel her running her hand down my back.

“What’s scoliosis?” I tried standing up straight, but Bailey wouldn’t allow it. She called for her mom, a short, kind woman who worked as a nurse.

“It means your spine is curved. Both me and my mom have mild cases, but yours . . . that’s insane. I’ve never seen scoliosis this bad.”

I licked my dry lips and sucked in a breath. Nothing terrified me more than illness. I am petrified of what I can’t control, of an infection seeping inside me without knowing it, destroying my body and taking over.

I tried to stand once more but new hands were pushing my body down and lifting my shirt. My breathing grew heavy and blood rushed to my head. Cold fingers pressed into my spine, following its path down my back.

“Yeah, you definitely have scoliosis. You can tell when you bend over. It makes a hunch.” Fingers found one of my shoulder blades. “Here.”

A loud ripping noise much like the sound Velcro makes brought me out of my thoughts and back onto the stiff mechanical bed. Latex-gloved hands pushed my legs together and a sticky strip of tape was applied to my ankles, binding me and preventing me from walking away. Oh, how I wanted to walk away.

“You’re doing great, sweetheart. I’m going to turn on the machine, and it’s going to make a knocking noise. Nothing to worry about.”

I nodded and looked up at the white ceiling tiles. Everything was clean, crisp, and white. White walls, white flooring, white machinery, white gowns.

I held my breath, listening to the two nurses in the room talk “hospital jargon” in

quiet voices that I had to strain to hear. The second nurse was short and round with a nice, pink face and a friendly smile. It was comforting to have such friendly nurses. Even better to have both women nurses. Being naked in front of male nurses would be as horrifying as illness.

“It’s going to push you through now. It’ll be real slow.”

My heart was pulsing through my chest, my fingers shaking in their military-esque position by my sides as the white slab of plastic lifted me up and slowly glided me through the portal feet first. I looked around the room and tried to distract myself, but it was hard with the loud hammering and the cool breeze rolling over my bare legs. There was a sticker on the top of the portal that read, “Warning: Do not look directly into laser beam.” I avoided the red light in my peripheral vision. *Maybe they should have mentioned that important fact.*

“Just a little while longer, and then we’ll get X-rays.” The short nurse, Harriet, smiled down at me from her place at the computer.

After the day I found out that I may have scoliosis, my terror led me to my computer. Research was a way for me to cope with this uncontrollable diagnosis, a way for me to take back the reigns and completely understand what was happening to my body. I researched key terms like “scoliosis,” “curved spine,” and “back pain.”

I found out that scoliosis is a sideways curvature of the spine that usually occurs during the growth spurt right before puberty. The causes are unknown, although a lot of cases are due to muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy. The Mayo Clinic site explained that most cases are mild, but some are not. And those that are not can be severely disabling, reducing the amount of space in the chest, which prevents lungs from functioning properly and makes it harder for the heart to pump. But that’s not all. You’ll have un-level shoulders, prominent ribs, uneven hips, and a shift of the waist to the side. The real kicker? You will probably become self-conscious about your appearance.

There was a tug at my ankles before they were relieved of their constraints. “You can follow Harriet into the other room, and we’ll get X-rays of that back for ya.”

Relieved, I slid my legs up and over the edge of the bed, feet firmly planted on the tiled floor again. Half of the horror was over. I followed Harriet through a narrow hallway leading to a big, sea-foam green, metal door.

Caution: X-ray room. Do not enter when in use.

The room was small and white like the rest of the hospital, with a computer set up in the corner. Everything was bland, sterile and vague. There really wasn’t much to the

room. The X-ray machine, a computer, and lots of wires, lots of energy.

“I want you to stand right there in front of this wall.” Harriet positioned me in the exact spot she wanted me to stand and backed away to look at the X-ray machine.

I stayed still as Harriet took a few full-body X-rays. The whole day seemed to be moving in slow motion, though I hadn’t been there for more than an hour. Finally, after the thousandth X-ray, Harriet told me I could change back into my clothes and then she’d take me to my mother in the waiting room.

After everything was finished that day, we made another appointment to review the CT scan and X-rays, to find out what stage my scoliosis was in. I was relieved to finally leave the hospital but already feeling the burning in my chest that comes with anxiety at the thought of coming back again.

That day at the hospital made me more aware of my condition, the way my ribs stuck out when I laid flat on my back or how I couldn’t sit perfectly in a chair because my shoulder blades jutted unevenly from my back. If I leaned far enough over to my right side, the bottom of my ribs touched the top of my hip bone. I could point out every little thing about my body that was caused by my curved spine. It was a jigsaw puzzle with pieces shoved together that didn’t quite fit. My body had been assembled wrong, everything unaligned.

When the time came to go back to the medical center, my anxiety was eating me from the inside out, and I thought my life was about to be destroyed. My mom and I entered the hospital again, seeing the same green and blue 1970s carpet in the waiting room and the same clean, white walls. We checked in and took a seat in one of the many gray chairs.

“Don’t worry about it, Gabrielle. It won’t be as bad as you think. I promise.” My mom smiled at me, flipping through the pages of a magazine. I wasn’t so sure, as I looked around. I felt like the end was coming. The illness would consume me and take complete control. My spine would curl up and twist my organs, cutting off my breath and stopping my heart cold.

I watched as a patient passed by clinging to a walker, her back protruding and hunched over. She looked like she could barely walk. My stomach dropped and bile rose in my throat. I wanted to cry for that girl. It looked like her end had already come; her life was tormented by this condition. And then I wanted to cry for me.

“Gabrielle Dooley,” the receptionist called. She smiled when I stood up. “You can go on back.”

“Will you come with me, Mom?”

“Of course, I will.”

The room we entered was tiny, just enough room for an exam table, yet another computer, and some chairs—one with wheels and one with metal legs. I knew this routine well enough from doctors' check-ups over the years, so I stepped up on the platform in front of the exam table and took a seat, the wax paper crinkling loudly underneath me. I felt like I couldn't breathe properly. *Oh, God, is my spine already crushing my lungs . . . am I going to die right here on this exam table?*

I nervously played with my fingers, looking around the room and reading the posters. *Did you wash your hands? Washing your hands for 15-20 seconds reduces the spread of infectious diseases!* And of course, there was the poster with pictures of people with diseases like the mumps and the measles that always made my skin crawl and my stomach churn. Disease was horrifying.

"Stop, Gabrielle. I have it, your sister has it. It's not as bad as you think. There are things you can do to help. You'll be fine," my mom said, looking up from her phone.

"And what if I'm not fine?"

Before my mom could reassure me once more, the doctor came in, a man of medium height and a balding head. His glasses perched on the end of his skinny nose were wiry and small.

"Good morning, Miss Dooley. How are you today?"

"Fine."

"Good. Good. Let's get right to it and check those X-rays."

A few minutes of clicking computer keys and idle chit-chat between my mother and the doctor passed before a black-and-white image popped up on the screen. It's a weird thing, seeing your body without all of its muscle and skin, just the bare bones, the foundation of your entire being, displayed on a computer screen. Each notch of your spine is so bright it hurts your eyes.

"Okay, I'm going to have you stand up, and we'll measure the angles of your curvatures."

I slid off the exam table, the crackle of the wax paper echoing in the bland room. I did not want to be there. I leaned forward to allow him to "take a look" at my back. He had a tiny instrument in his hand that resembled a tool one used to measure the levelness of a wall or floor. I found it irritating that when I bent over I couldn't reach my toes.

"The top of your back has a larger angle of 31 degrees. And your lower back has an angle of 27 degrees. Not too bad. It could be worse. You can take a seat again while I put in the information."

A breath of relief escaped my lips, and my shirt fell into place as I straightened

out again. In geometry, the angle of 31 degrees really wasn't that big, so I was all right, right? More conversation between my mom and the doctor that I hardly remember took place, while we waited for the angles of my curvatures to show up on the X-ray.

"So, your scoliosis is severe but the growth plates here . . ." The doctor's finger pointed to a piece of white bone at the bottom of my spine. "They are closed, which means you are officially done growing. While that means your back won't get any worse, it also means you can't wear a back brace to straighten out your spine. The only other option to fix your spine would be surgery, and that's sometimes risky."

Oh, I knew all about the risks.

From my research, I found that spinal correction surgery is called a spinal fusion or, if you want to get really fancy, *spondylosyndesis*. Bone is taken either from your pelvis or a bone bank and used to make a bridge of sorts between vertebrae that are next to each other. The bone graft helps new bone grow. But that is only one of two ways a spinal fusion can be performed. They could also use metal implants that hold the vertebrae together until new bone grows. You're basically part robot. My resources also told me that there may be complications. Infection, blood clots, problems breathing, loss of blood, cardiovascular issues, muscle damage, nerve damage, and obstructive bowel dysfunction due to immobilization after the surgery are some of the potential risks of spinal surgery. Some. Not only are there complications, but the rate of complications ranges anywhere from 0-89% depending on the causes of the individual's condition, and there are a fair amount of failed spinal fusions, which leads to further surgery to correct that failure.

"Is surgery an option you would like to consider?"

"No."

"Okay. Well, your back won't get any worse. You will have some mild pain from day to day, but there are things you can do to help that pain. There are exercises specific to relieving tension in your back that you can read about in this pamphlet, and, of course, staying active is a good way to relieve some of that tension as well. But, really, your scoliosis is not a huge concern."

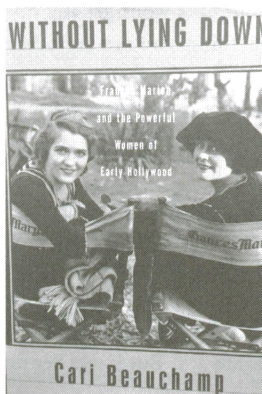
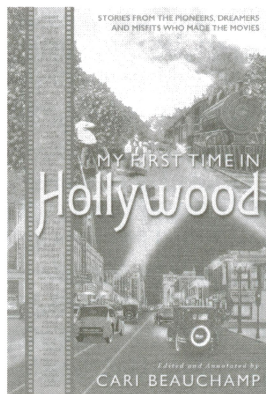
I left the hospital that day with a little less anxiety and a little more control, but I was still unsure of the condition. When we reached the car, I pulled out my phone and texted my friend Bailey. It seemed only fair to let her know my diagnosis, since she was the one who discovered my condition. I texted her something along the lines of, "Yep. I have severe scoliosis, and I'm stuck with it for the rest of my life. I am never wearing a swimsuit or dress again . . ." But it was her reply that really set my anxiety at ease.

I'm sorry, but you're still Gabrielle. Nothing changes that.

An Interview with Cari Beauchamp

by Janet Reinschmidt

Cari Beauchamp is a film historian and author of several books, including *Without Lying Down* about the work of Frances Marion and the close-knit community of women actors and filmmakers in silent era Hollywood. Her most recent book *My First Time in Hollywood* chronicles first impressions of Hollywood from actors, filmmakers, and even behind the scenes crew of the silent film era.



Janet Reinschmidt: Every film fan has a different story about the origin of their love of classic film. I've been interested in old Hollywood for most of my life. I'm curious what drew you to early Hollywood as a subject?

Cari Beauchamp: I always loved films, but I began loving older films, especially foreign and silents, in college. I went to art house cinemas and saw films like *His Girl Friday* at classic film theatres in New York. There was also a Fred and Ginger fest in Paris, I sat inside the cinema all day while I was in Paris of all places. As I got older I was really drawn more to older films because I was angry. I saw the need for people like Frances Marion and Adela Rogers St. Johns. When I researched women in Hollywood, I found very little info about them. Women didn't write their own histories, but there were dozens of women in early Hollywood behind the scenes. No info on them anywhere. I was pissed off! Frances Marion rose to the top of my research, both professionally and personally. It took years of excavating from many sources and became a difficult jigsaw puzzle piecing together the information on her.

JR: How did you find your information? What is your researching process? Did you do most of your research at the Academy Library or other libraries and archives in Los Angeles?

CB: I went everywhere. It's different now, but when I researched *Without Lying Down*, the Academy library had an index of *Photoplay* but not actual physical copies. They had quite a bit on microfilm but that was a pain. The Museum of Modern Art had hard copies of everything. I would bring huge baggies of dimes and nickels because it took a lot of change to xerox everything. Even though that was more time consuming than the microfilm, hard copies are actually easier because you can turn each page. As I did this, what I found was that these women writers were covered like stars. The fan magazines did huge spreads on Frances Marion with photos of her. It was wild that behind the scenes people were covered like that. The information was there, but it had to be excavated.

JR: I heard you were a private investigator for a while, and I was wondering how that investigative work informs your work as a biographer?

CB: It was perfect training, but who knew? I started working as a P.I. for a law firm while I was still in college. I did it for five or six years. It was great because I was able to take months off or work minimally while I did other important work like help with political campaigns for women. One of the cases I'm most proud of was a big desegregation case I worked on. They kept saying there were no maps of the bus routes, but I got a waiver and went into each and every bus because inside each bus there were maps of where they stopped. I could see where they deposited certain white kids at white schools; it was de facto segregation. We took it all the way to Supreme Court

and won. I knew those maps were there and with determination I was gonna find them. That logic totally transferred to researching, especially with these old Hollywood women. It was like okay, I know the information is there. I just gotta find it. Women didn't save their archives. They didn't write down their own histories. Frances threw away her work, and I only found it because the secretary took it out of the dumpster when they moved. The people who did save all their papers, like Selznick and DeMille, were jerks! I forgive these women, but you gotta save your own work.

JR: I visited the Stephens Screenwriting MFA program last summer at Charlie Chaplin/Jim Henson studios in Los Angeles and was blown away by the women in the program. How did you get involved in the Stephens program as a mentor?

CB: Ken reached out to me. I'd lectured at a lot of places, but quite frankly got irked with film students who hadn't seen a film before 1960 and didn't want to. I read Ken's description of the program in my writers guild magazine, and I thought 'oh my god this is fabulous.' The Stephens program spoke to me as absolutely the way to do it. As soon as I did get involved and met some of the students, I thought of Frances Marion's quote, 'To be good writers we have to live good lives.' The low residency aspect of the screenwriting program encourages people who are living their lives to get involved, people with real-life experience that have interesting stories to tell. As soon as you walk in, you get such a positive sense of community. Twenty to thirty people of different races and ages, but it feels immediately like a tight-knit community. The students are so great. I volunteer to help with their individual papers on women screenwriters.

JR: Why did you choose to look at actors' first time in Hollywood and what is the main message from those experiences?

CB: One thing I love is bottom up stories, and there were certain stories by Kay Thackery and people such as set decorators which would never appear anywhere else. My publishers wanted me to do something else entirely, but I told them I had to do this. One of the first articles was about Hobart Bosworth. He became a director, a studio owner, and was in almost 300 movies. I knew a bit about him because Frances worked at his studio. He had been a Broadway star, but had tuberculosis and came out to California thinking his days were over, but the dry sun might help. Then people asked him to be an extra for little movies. I found, maybe eight years ago, a speech he gave at USC about when he first came to California, and I fell in love with parts of it. The speech had never been published. Plus, I knew from reading these incredibly out-of-print biographies of stars that I always loved the portions about their arrival. I wrote about people who got really successful and other people who became lighting directors for a short time. The goal was to do up to the 1960s, but there were way too many stories. I focused on the silent era. Half of the stories are from women. Half from

people behind and half in front of the camera. I was really pleased to do it. There is a universality to the first-time story. Everyone has a ‘I came in thinking one thing, but came out thinking another thing’ moment.

JR: What do you think about the current state of women in Hollywood? Do you have hopes for the future?

CB: Honey, our work is just beginning. Men are still getting paid so much more for the same job. It’s inexcusable, but we have got to stand up for ourselves and say, ‘No, I’m not doing that.’ When they say, “What do you want?” don’t answer with a number just say, ‘What did you pay the last man?’ Yes this is a fabulous breakthrough, and could really reset time, but there is much more to do. We still have so many crews that are all white men. But there is an awareness about harassment now that there wasn’t before. Men wake up and are afraid they’ll be found out. Anytime you have a group that is so predominantly male with no one to tell them no, they think they’re above the rules and gradually that becomes the rule. Harvey knew what he was doing. It is a day of reckoning in every way, but I am still very troubled about workplace harassment and men in power.

JR: Is there a difference between the sexual harassment in old Hollywood and today?

CB: I’ve just finished interviews about this. They called me ‘the resident expert on the history of the casting couch.’ The main difference is that so many of the old films had female protagonists. The actresses had more power and strong roles. Female stars could open the movie and had star personas. People like Olivia de Havilland, Gloria Swanson, etc. Their characters were three dimensional. They played leading roles.

JR: Now for a fun question, if a little daunting. Do you have a favorite movie(s)?

CB: All of my favorites have female protagonists. The best movies are made about people I want to spend time with. *Red Headed Woman* is a great one. There are different films I love for different reasons. I love women who make me look demure. I love *Dance, Girl, Dance*. And I love *Gigi*. I realized I love it because it appreciates girls. I thought *Gigi* was the first movie I ever saw, but was told ‘No dear, it wasn’t the first movie you saw. It was the first movie you saw four times and frankly, I was getting a little concerned.’ I wondered why I would be so attached to this movie about girls being raised to be courtesans, but that didn’t matter to me. I just loved that they were appreciated. “Thank Heaven for Little Girls” made me feel validated as a kid! Then there’s *Casablanca*, which has maybe the best storytelling ever. It’s about the universality of a road not taken, the perfect arc of a story. So it’s either the universality of a story or a character that makes me look demure.

Treed

by Mary Arnold

There was nothing more eye-catching to me as a child than a tree with more limbs than I had fingers. Everywhere in South Carolina Lowcountry trees were as bountiful as fresh, coastal seafood. From dogwood to magnolia to laurel oak, these indigenous species invaded the geography nearly as much as the out-of-staters who invaded the cobblestone streets of downtown Charleston. So, what about trees held my interest at such a young age? Within their enticing web of branches, I found an opportunity to prove to myself and my siblings my strength and gain bragging rights as the first girl in my family to show-up my brothers' athleticism.

Through vigorous tree-climbing, I found personal achievement and success. As an aspiring six-year-old with hopes of one day becoming a Sonic employee, I was determined to make myself a hero in the eyes of my peers and the girl in the mirror. I climbed every tree bordering our property. I was on a mission to accomplish a task few—if any—at my age, and most importantly a girl, had achieved. One day, I would brag to my children how awesome their mom was during her youth.

School dismissed at 3:00, and I set out to find the two trees that had remained virgins to my touch: a seventy-two-foot palm tree and a forty-foot cherry tree. The palm tree took center stage in our front yard, knowing full well its superiority.

And then there was the cherry tree, which wasn't in fact a "cherry" tree. For some odd reason, we Lowcountry children had completely forgotten its true name. Its soft, baby-pink buds colored the limbs, adorning its white skeleton. It simply looked like a cherry tree.

Because of its height, the palm tree remained out of reach. Also, fear of my parents' punishment gave me pause. So I never tried to conquer it.

Stepping outside the house that was my schoolroom, I set off on my tree-climbing challenge. My older brother, Charley, sat on our front porch applying the final touches to a model rocket. He was a rocket enthusiast, a sports fanatic, and an artistically inclined individual with his own dreams of becoming a jack-of-all-trades. His enthusiasm for his hobbies was contagious. He got excited over these things, especially rockets.

"Charley, are you about to launch your rocket?" I asked, goosebumps on my twiggy arms. The launch reminded me of fireworks on the 4th of July.

"Yeah," he answered. "I wonder if the front yard is a good enough spot. Or maybe I can shoot it off in the middle of our road instead."

"Well, you could shoot it in the yard. If it gets stuck in one of the trees, I'll go up

and get it!" I smiled. I was an open book to my family. One look at me and they could decipher the text.

As he set up the launch, I found a place on the front porch to watch. He began his countdown. "10, 9, 8, 7 . . ." he shouted, followed by my voice. The seconds seemed to last forever. "6, 5, 4, 3 . . ." My heartbeat hummed "2, 1!" The rocket soared into the summer sky, leaving a white trail in its path.

Head back, looking high to the sky above, I sought out the rocket with its parachute that would bring it back to earth. After a minute or two, the fluttering of a dark speck began to descend. The rocket's parachute had not opened after its ejection. Falling, falling, falling . . . thud! At the top of the cherry tree, the rocket met its demise. A vibrant blue parachute connected to the rocket hung like a noose, announcing its death. Entwined amidst the delicate, pearlescent limbs of pink and white, the rocket taunted me.

"I can get it for you. You know I'm good at climbing," I said all too proudly, walking toward the tree. I calculated its pattern of limbs and created a mental plan on how I would navigate.

The tree was embedded on the slope of a hill, making it more dangerous than I realized. To be able to ascend the tree, I would have to tackle it from behind and hoist myself up its first branch. Unfortunately, the tree lacked a lower limb. So with bear-hugging skills, I ascended the first branch.

Branch after branch, I climbed within the beauty of this wicked tree. My delicate arms and calloused hands urged me to continue and reminded me why I sought out this type of warped fun. I was a girl. Girls in my family didn't do boyish activities. I was to live life as a lady, preparing for a future of marriage and family. None of which appealed to me. Why should boys get to have all the fun? I wanted to worry about girlish things later.

Twenty minutes into my climb, I had bested the tree and claimed victory. In my hand, I held my brother's rocket. Beyond the tree, I observed the world around me. From forty feet above the ground, I took in the horizon; toy cars on the road, unique-shaped houses scattered among nature, and the sun's rays illuminating Crystal Lake. The world outside my own appeared as a dreamlike state. I was lost in its regalness, and I wanted to stay in this moment forever.

I caught a glimpse of the world below my feet. My heart caught in my throat, and my hands began to sweat and shake. I was in a dangerous situation. I was too high off the ground. *What if my parents caught me?!* I panicked at this thought. All excitement and proudness vanished as I tried to descend the tree, I couldn't find footing on the branch below me. *Oh no!* I was stuck.

From the top of the tree, a crisp wind offered a strong welcome. The tree and wind conspired with each other and seemed to laugh at my expense. Hot tears threatened to erupt. On the ground below, Charley caught sight of me.

“Cate! What’s wrong?” Charley yelled. “Are you stuck?”

“Uh . . .” I began to lie but knew better than to make matters worse. “Yes, I am!” I answered. “I need help. I can’t get down”

“Stay right there! I’ll go get someone.” And Charley was gone.

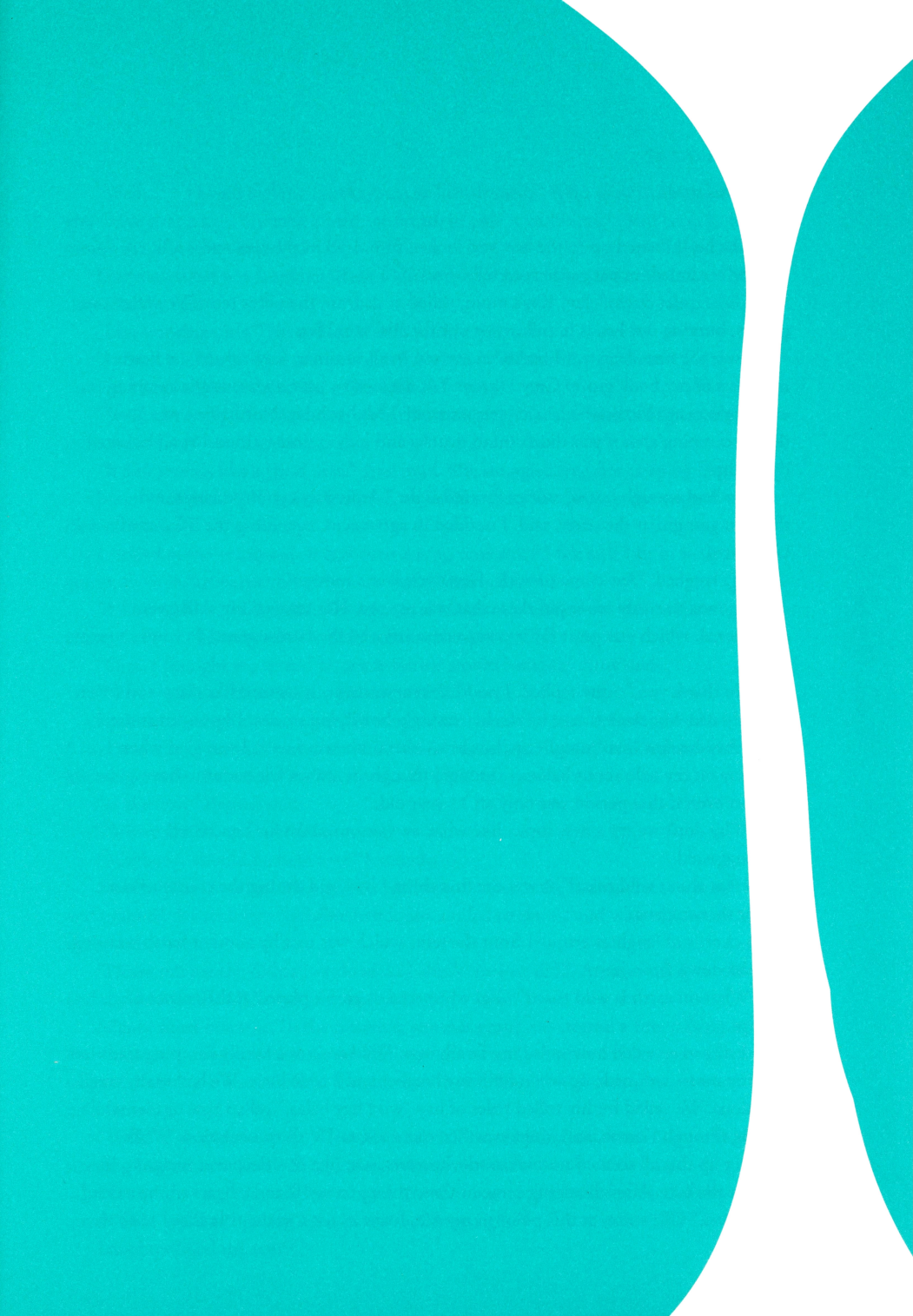
I dreaded who would come to my rescue because the lone individual I expected was the one I avoided when climbing trees. And sure enough, he entered the scene not even a minute after Charley left.

“What are you doing up there? You know better than that!” my dad yelled as he approached the tree.

All I could muster was a simple, “I’m sorry.”

Dad climbed the tree in half the time it took me to reach my point of no return. Just beneath where I stepped, he helped guide me and place my foot down on the branch below. We descended the tree together. When my feet returned to safe ground, I vowed never to climb another tree again.

My childhood moment of being treed taught me two things. One: girls are not to be underestimated; we are as capable as boys are in terms of proving our strength and abilities. And two don’t bark up a tree and have your dad come rescue you. His punishment is scarier than the top of a forty-foot tree.



Wild Toast

by Eliza Larson

“The head floated up to the boy and looked him dead in the eyes and . . .”

She screamed, causing others to follow suit.

“Girls, quiet down,” Jan, Kay’s mom, yelled at us from the other tent. We stifled our giggles, burying our heads in pillows or our friends’ shoulders.

It was the first sleepover I had been invited to all summer. Kay, one of the newer members of my book group Grey Havens YA, decided to have an overnight camping extravaganza at Northstone lake to celebrate her 12th birthday. Northstone was a decent camping spot if you didn’t mind drunks and kids running around at all hours of the night.

“I’ve had enough horror stories for one night,” Amy, Kay’s younger sister and the youngest girl at the party, said. I nodded in agreement, squeezing the life out of Gigi’s arm.

Gigi laughed. “Aw, come on girls. Don’t you want another?”

Gigi was the only other girl there that was my age. Her storytelling skills were exceptional, which was great for everyone who enjoyed the horror genre, but not so great for me.

“No thank you,” Amy replied. I nodded in agreement. It seemed like Amy and I were the only two who were scared by the increasingly horrifying stories. I was against them when the idea was first brought up, but I was outnumbered 4 to 1. I was glad when I got Amy on my side about halfway through, though. It always felt better to have some support even if that person was only an 11 year old.

“Why don’t we try a new topic, like what we want to make for breakfast?” Kay suggested.

“How about wild toast?” It was the first thing I had said during the course of our horror shenanigans.

A chorus of laughter erupted from the tent, which was met by another harsh warning to quiet down from Jan.

“What on earth is wild toast?” Gigi whispered. A smirk played at the corner of her lips.

I had just revealed how weird my family was. Wild toast is a family camping tradition that my mom had made up when both my brother and I were little. We had many small traditions. We called freshly rolled bales of hay “wild hay bales,” yelled cow or tree while driving through Kansas, and binge-watched our current TV show obsession. While growing up this all seemed normal to me; however, just like this sleepover incident, it was not the case. After divulging some of these things to my friends, I gained the title of “weird one.” Of course, at this point in my life, I was so used to the title that I took it in stride.

“Well . . .” I could feel my cheeks flush as I continued, “Wild toast is just toast that you make over a fire. You take a piece of bread, impale it with a stick, and cook it. My mom’s the one who named it.”

Everyone burst out laughing while I blushed, my cheeks growing even darker than they already were.

“Last warning girls,” Jan yelled. We all quickly quieted.

“I think it sounds like a fantastic idea,” Kay said. “My family has done it for a while now, but I never knew there was a name for it.”

“Well, not really.” I shifted, my bony elbow digging into the hard cool ground. “My mom named it. I just use the name.”

“It still sounds like a good idea,” Amy said. She snuggled into her sleeping bag.

Brenna laughed. “Of course you two would like that. You guys go camping so often it’s ridiculous.”

I smiled at the comment. It had been a long time since I felt as if I fit in with a group. Even if this particular group was full of horror lovers.

“A little girl . . .” Gigi said. Those two words quickly turned the warm, friendly atmosphere into black-and-white scene from a suspense film.

“Gigi, I thought we agreed no more horror stories tonight,” Amy said.

“No, seriously. There’s a little girl over there.”

I peeked through the mosquito netting that covered the tent. A little girl of 5 or 6 had just exited the public restroom. She had blonde pigtails and wore a dress with knee-high socks and sneakers. She stood still, looking around.

“Is she lost?” Brenna said.

“Where are her parents?” Kay asked.

“Maybe we should go help her?” I added.

Suddenly, as if we had been graced with horror magic, the little girl reached up and grabbed the air for an invisible hand. She smiled to the air and walked toward the woods.

“Please tell me she didn’t just do what I think she just did?” Amy asked, eyes wide and shoulders stiff. All I could do was nod.

Silence filled our tent. In the distance, another group sat around a fire, talking in low voices, spinning a series of bone-chilling sentences. I wondered if they would have stopped if they saw the girl. Was the girl even there? Was she a ghost? Or were we all hallucinating?

“Well,” Kay said abruptly, “Goodnight then.” She quickly laid down and pulled her sleeping bag over her head. Everyone else soon followed.

I lay on the cool ground, listening to the chirping crickets and the wind. “Hey guys? We’re still having wild toast in the morning, right?”

Laughter filled the tent.

Coffee

by Ana Chan

“Did you get shorter?!” he said as I held open the door for him to pass through. After ducking his head underneath the archway, he exited the café, and we trekked through the hot, bustling morning of downtown Columbia.

“Kuh—” I scoffed, “no. Did you get taller, *prick?*” A good foot distanced his face from mine, so his vantage point prevented him from catching my sardonic smirk.

“Whoa. That’s a new one.”

I trailed behind him, something that invariably occurred when we walked together. Our height difference struck me that day, too. Before he approached me at the table that morning, I’d nearly forgotten that feeling of smallness that occurs in his presence. When he took the seat across from me, I was already seated, so it saved me the embarrassment of standing up, thus accentuating the contrast between a friendly giant and his diminutive.

“Yeah, I think I’ve exhausted the use of ‘asinine,’ so I had to search for a new word.”

“That’s right, you did like to use that word.” After some time of leading the way, he added, “You know, you don’t have to follow me all the way home if you don’t want to. I just thought it’d be cool for you to see where I was staying.” The house he used to live in was a ten-minute drive from my apartment. The last time I was there—the last time he and I talked in person—was when I showed up at his house unexpectedly.

“Oh, hey!” his roommate had said when he opened the door. I told this roommate why I came and handed him a letter to deliver to its recipient.

“You can do it for yourself! He’s right here.” The roommate shouted out the name of my inquiry. “Someone’s here for you!”

A wave of crimson red flooded my face as I stood in the doorway in my silly red earmuffs in the middle of January, holding an envelope that contained an eight-page letter rampant with apology, a dramatic explanation for my decision to stay friends, and a sermon that would make a pastor yawn on the “*enormity of sexual relations outside marriage.*” Through the doorway I could see the living room and, farther back, a small part of the kitchen—the rest of the kitchen was hidden by the adjacent wall. A loud noise that sounded like a pot banging against the stove filled that moment of suspense.

He murmured from behind the wall, “Okay, I’ll be right out.”

As he stepped out from the kitchen, our eyes met.

“Oh!” he almost jumped and then froze in the middle of the room, staring at me. “It’s you,” he said, smiling.

“Yep, it’s me.”

He came toward me. “What are you doing here?” He leaned against the side of the doorway. “Oh, a letter? For me?” He took the envelope. Halfway into opening it, he

said with naivete, "Should I read it now?"

I told him he probably didn't want to.

"I'm glad you came. I've been thinking about you."

That was months ago. Now he lived only two blocks away from my apartment.

"Oh! Well, I mean, do you not want me to see your new place?" I answered, as we took a right turn on Sierra Boulevard [a fabricated title].

"I'm just saying, if you don't want to, you don't have to."

"Well, I want to."

"Okay then. It's pretty much right by your school. Well, I mean half-school, since only half the population attends."

"Oh my gosh, don't even start that. A women's college is not remotely a 'half-school.'"

"Sure it is. You're just a half-student who goes to a half-school."

I had a full bottle of water in my right hand with the cap screwed on tight, and thought a proper response to this school-boy taunt would be to act as equally juvenile.

"Ah!" He ducked when I feigned splashing water from my bottle onto his face.

On our right appeared a small building. "This is it! You gonna know how to get back home?"

"Of course! Hmm, Mojave Apartments," I read [another fabricated title].

"Interesting name."

"Yep." He turned toward me, his head blocking the sun's rays. As my eyes adjusted, they became fixed on his brown eyes. "Well, that was a fun coffee date."

"Yeah, haha . . ." A sound in the tenor of a question came out of my mouth. "I mean it was kind of unexpected?" I stood there in silence, hoping this would prompt him to explain what I thought he had been avoiding the whole morning.

"Yeah?" he said, folding his arms. "Why do you say that?"

"Because it came out of nowhere! Because the last time we saw each other . . . We just haven't talked in awhile and I couldn't understand why you asked to get coffee."

"I just wanted to see you," he said simply. "Is that bad that I wanted to see you?"

"No! No, not at all, I mean, I wanted to see you, too, of course. It was just a surprise, that's all."

A memory came flooding back. We were in my kitchen after Thanksgiving break. He was telling me about a coffee date his friend made him go on. Apparently, his date had an obnoxious voice and shrill laughter. He had this strange thing about judging people according to the way they laugh: he said that he gauges how much he likes them from how much he likes their laughter. After their date, she told him to text her. He

told her he would. He confided in me that he never did.

"Well, it was nice to see you. And maybe we can have another coffee date in the future."

"Maybe."

"I mean, I would like that, if we did."

"I would love that."

"Okay, then. Guess I'll see you around." He gave me one of those dreaded side hugs. I managed to produce a twitch of a smile in return and then turned around.

"Wait." I turned back to him. "Actually, I don't know how to get home."

"Oh no. Come on, Ana, it's so easy!"

"I know, I know—"

"I thought you said you come by this street all the time!"

"I do!" I laughed, shaking my head. "I'm just disoriented right now. If I get to a place, I'll know . . . Okay wait, okay yeah that's that street. Oh, I can go straight and take a left!"

"No, don't go that way. That'll take way longer."

I nodded my head with so much vigor it felt as if it might fall off my body.

"I'll tell you where to go," he continued. "But first, you have to do me a favor."

I sighed. "Okay, what is it."

"First, you have to say these words 'I. Go. To a half-school.'"

"Oh no. I am not saying that. It's fine. I'll just go my own way!"

"No, no, no." He wheeled me around to face him. "It's super easy. You just say those simple words, and I'll tell you where to go! It's really easy."

"Oh my." Looking directly into his eyes, I recited, "*I go to a half-school.*"

A grin spread across his face so delicate, so captivating, so titillating that I almost slapped him.

"Good." He pointed me in the direction we had come and to the street I was to take. "All you do is go straight, take a right, and then take a left at Linden" [the last fabricated title]. "Then your apartment will be on the right."

"Got it." I turned back around to face him for my last rebuttal. "By the way, I am also, technically, a student at Mizzou. So, who knows, that 'half-school' could be Mizzou, too!" I laughed victoriously as I turned toward home. "Have a good day!"

"Thanks," he replied from behind.

As I strolled down Linden, I couldn't help smiling.

"We talked about absolutely nothing," I remarked.



Chevrolet Silverado 3500

by Raina Johnson

Now:

It sits in the dark garage, collecting dust, useful years passed. Other vehicles have been bought, easier ones, better for the environment, like a Prius and a Highlander. The family has relocated to Telluride, where parking is hard to find, and driving it in the mountains doesn't make sense. Not great gas mileage, no reason to haul much—its purpose can't be fulfilled.

Once white, it is muddy and covered in a thin layer of dirt. Its sheer size compares to the orange tractor next to it in the garage. Every so often, keys jangling in hand, the father will climb in, start up the growling pickup truck engine, and take it for a spin. It's got a few dents now, and the ugly yellow ranch brand sticker on its bumper is peeling. Its tailgate is bent. It's seen better days, but it sits there, waiting to be used again. Still runs like a champ.

Partially forgotten: The Johnson rancher family's old white Chevrolet Silverado 3500. Paonia, Colorado.

"He has big dreams for it."

Introduction:

The father, Theron, leaves his kids with a sitter to go get the pickup truck he's just purchased. He's picked it out special. Smooth, black leather interior that would later be covered with woven, colorful seat covers. That new car smell. Pristine white, a truck to meet all his needs building his ranch, and a bit of a treat for himself. The ranch is still a work in progress; he has only owned it a short while. He has big dreams for it. It is his dream, really, ever since he was a little kid and he explored his grandparents' ranch in North Dakota. His daughter, Raina, is five. His son, Rider, is almost a year. It's 2002. His wife passed away not much earlier from brain cancer, and the ranch is good for him. So is this new pickup. It has that new car smell when he drives it back home, pulling onto the long dirt driveway that leads to the ranch house, kicking up dust. The kids rush out to see it; he's told them all about it, and they climb in what will become a caretaker and friend in the coming years. While the father will trade it in multiple times for a newer model, it will remain fundamentally the same truck for the family. The last time it is traded is in 2008, and that model remains with the family in 2017.

Today, just before or after Thanksgiving, the family piles all the Christmas and skiing supplies into the truck to take to their home in Telluride. There the supplies get put up and used, and the truck is taken back down to the ranch and parked in its usual spot

under the hay shed. When ski season is over, the stuff is piled back into the truck and returned to the ranch to be stored once more.

Kids:

At 6:00 am every weekday morning, Theron would pile his children into the pickup. He would usually warm up the truck 15 minutes before, to make it nice and warm and get the engine running at full force. It would roar to life on dark, cold mornings and sit at the front of the house, before the front door, ready to go. Theron would rouse his children, feed them, and herd them into the truck. The drive to the bus stop was 10 minutes. NPR would play on the radio as Theron would listen and the kids would talk or fight or play or sit in tired silence. They would idle, waiting for the long yellow bus. Theron would deposit the children for their long, winding bus ride from ranch to ranch to school. In the evening, the truck would be there to pick up Rider at 3:30. An hour later, it would be there for Raina after one of her many sports practices or after-school activities: Girl Scouts, basketball, and art classes.

It transported groups of little girls and little boys on the way to and from sleepovers and birthday parties. It hauled the children to and from grandparents' houses over breaks and holidays. And to and from the pool on hot summer days. There were also concerts and events, kids all dressed up and a proud father at the wheel.

On any given day, Raina and Rider would argue over what would blast from the radio.

"Rock and roll!" Rider would insist.

"No, country!" Raina would weigh in. It was often a mix of both. A lot of George Strait, Depeche Mode, The Cure, Imogen Heap, and many more played from the truck speakers.

When Theron's three older sons, Raina and Rider's half-brothers, would come for summers or other breaks, the truck would be filled with the laughter of all five children. Adventures were had.

"Fire Woman" by The Cult would come on the radio. When Theron turned it up, they would all build up to full-on head banging.

Over breaks, the kids would spend all of or part of their time with their grandparents. The truck would make the drive to airports and the four-hour trek to and from Denver. Theron would drop Raina off at numerous summer camps and Girl Scout events when she wasn't visiting grandparents or family.

Sometimes he would let Raina and Rider sit in the truck bed to and from doing chores around the ranch. They would sit on the tire risers which provided little seats for them. They would sit with the dogs and play pretend.

At one point, Raina was messing around near the open tailgate of the truck while it was in motion. They hit a bump or accelerated unexpectedly, and she fell out onto the gravel driveway, leaving her brother in the back alone. She sat there in the road with scraped knees and cried. Theron was way down the driveway when he realized what had happened. He turned around and went back to an upset daughter, told her to be more careful next time, and loaded her back in the truck. A “get back on that horse if it bucks you off” mentality was the way Theron raised his children.

When they were little, Theron would take the kids fishing at an old hatchery. They’d often sit in the bed of the truck and cast their lines, near the shore, or in the shade of the side of the pickup. With permission from the owner, they’d fill coolers with bass and sun fish and take them home to their five new ponds, introducing them to the water. Then they’d fish their own ponds from time to time.

Father:

After dropping the kids off at the school bus, Theron would usually go back to the ranch and park the truck in front. He worked from home when he could. Other times he would drive 20 minutes to his office, or he would travel out of town. Then the truck would sit in the airport parking lot, awaiting his return.

Sometimes when he stays at the ranch, Theron still drives the truck to and from the office. Or he’ll loan it to coworkers.

Cattle:

The Johnson family decided to try their hand at cattle. This is where the pickup performed the brunt of its work. Theron bought into part of a herd of Red Angus, a versatile breed, and so, several times a year, he would hook-up his 26-foot stock trailer and drive to Durango to let the cattle graze on ranch land.

Cattle on average weigh about 1,000+ pounds each. Heifers (young female cows) are what Theron mostly would take back (though he did a few bull loads of 2,000+ pounds each). He would pack 20 into the trailer, close quarters, and head off. The gooseneck trailer would be hooked in and 23,000 pounds of steel and beef would be on the move. The truck would roar and push on valiantly.

The road to Durango is a winding, strenuous drive for any vehicle. It’s scary even without a massive truck and trailer inches from huge drops as it travels through the mountain passes. The 3 ½-hour drive was four or more with the weight and steep climbs. This journey pushed the truck, and after the first one, it would fulfill an increasing number of tasks for the cattle.

For part of the year, the cattle would be taken up to the Johnson family cabin in the Electric Mountain Range, and later, the Grand Mesa Range on the family property to graze. These trips were notorious for their bumpy gravel and tight turns. At the experienced hands of Theron, the pickup took this drive with a precise ease.

During the winter when grazing was strained, 1,500-pound round bales of hay would be placed in the long bed with the old borrowed tractor. Twine would be cut. Theron would put the pickup in “4 low” and climb into the back while the truck bumped through the fields. He would stand in the bed with the hay, pitching it to the cattle. The cattle would gather and follow the truck as flakes of hay hit the snowy ground.

Every so often while doing this mistakes were made. *“Without the truck, his life would have been much harder.”*

One time, Theron was standing on the cab, and he didn’t notice that he was approaching a irrigation ditch. When the truck dipped, he did a flip and landed on the hood with his pitchfork still in his hands. The truck continued its slow crawl forward.

Another time, Theron accidentally put it on “4 high” and didn’t notice. He crept along like normal until the truck started downhill. He found himself running as fast as he could and jumping up onto the running boards, throwing the door open and climbing in to slam on the brakes. It stopped mere feet from the barbed-wire fence leading into the valley below. All this time, the kids were asleep in the ranch house.

He stood in the back again once, and while he was pushing the hay out along the bed, a cow flipped the tail gate up with its nose. The end of the pitchfork knocked the wind out of him and made him fall back into the round bale.

Sometimes he would use the truck to herd cows. He would drive behind them while they moved along slowly. One time, he thought he would bump one forward. When he did, it projectile pooped directly into the radiator and up over the hood and all over the windshield. Theron let loose a number of colorful words, a habit when things went wrong. The washer fluid did nothing but smear it around.

“I couldn’t see shit. . . or I guess that’s all I could see!” he would say later when retelling the incident. The next day, the radiator was so full of it, the truck overheated. “It was the gift that just kept on giving.”

During calving season, Theron would go out into the fields in the truck in the cold to check on the cattle. He would vaccinate the newborns. When one was born, he put the calf in the back of the pickup and headed up the fence line, thinking the mother cow would follow along. Before he knew it, she was bashing her head into the back bumper. When he stopped, she tried to jump into the bed of the pickup when he flung the calf out. It was a newborn that arrived in January in the middle of the night. It was the cow’s first calf. She went from “mad as hell” to softly mewling to her calf sprawled

out in the snow in “one millionth of a second.” She licked it while steam rose from its body. She didn’t care about Theron, but she hated that truck. To her, it was a monster that had tried to eat her baby.

The pickup hauled, fed, and cared for the cattle until 2010 when Theron sold them. The truck was an enemy and a friend to those cows, and one of Theron’s most important helpers in his tasks. Without the truck, his life would have been much harder.

Horses:

Theron had a love of horses that he passed on to his only daughter. All of his kids semi-enjoyed horses, but Raina was the one who was passionate. The truck worked hard at hauling horses as well. It took horses up to the cabin for hunting, where they’d graze and enjoyed mountain life. They packed Theron and his hunting buddies off to hunting campus in search of elk. Or they took Raina and Theron and other family members riding out around the cabin property.

Raina did horse 4-H, and the pickup hauled her and her horse Dobber to and from meetings once a week on Wednesdays after school for a year and a half.

When Raina graduated from high school, Theron hooked up the horse trailer and took her and two horses to Grand Junction, where they parked in the desert and rode out to see the wild horses on their reserve.

Now it takes Theron’s partner Michelle’s horse to and from clinics and up to summer boarding. From time to time, it still takes Raina and Michelle to and from trail rides.

Hunting:

The truck took the kids and Theron deer hunting on their property. After they sold their cattle, they got the majority of their meat each year from the deer they shot. They would often park and walk through the property in search of bucks. Raina would level her rifle barrel on the truck’s windowsill, take aim, and fire. The hit deer would run and then later drop.

They’d all pile in with the dogs and go bird hunting both on the property and at a hunting club 30 minutes away. The dogs included a couple of Drahthaars, a couple of yellow Labrador Retrievers, a Griffon, and a Spinone Italiano. There the truck would sit while they walked the fields, dogs’ tails wagging in excitement, searching for pheasants and chucker. *“In many ways, the truck and Theron are much the same.”*

Now, during fall archery season, Theron drives it up to his camp in search of elk. After a kill, he skins and guts the deer in the garage, hanging it from the ceiling. He uses the tractor to haul the deer into the truck bed. Streams of blood run down the side

of the truck as he drives to the butcher to have the meat processed. The pickup has transported many successful hunts, as it does every year during deer season.

The Knicks and Dents:

Deer are a huge problem on the western slope of Colorado. They can frequently be spotted on the side of the road during the day. Driving at night is a gamble. Dusk and dawn, especially so. Driving in bad lighting and having them jump in front of your vehicle, their eyes lighting up in bright headlights, can be a nightmare.

There are two dents on the pickup from deer: one toward the rear and one toward the front. One deer jumped out in front of the truck, and Theron didn't have time to react. The other, Theron spotted from a distance and slowed down to a whopping two miles per hour. It was running and didn't even hesitate, slamming its big buck body into the side of the pickup before scrambling off. One dent has been fixed, but the other is still there.

The fender is bent. Sam, one of Theron's eldest sons, drove it once when he was learning how to drive. He was asked to park it in the garage and hit the truck on something when he backed in. When he realized what happened, he backed out and broke the mirror off on the side. The mirror has since been replaced, but the dent remains.

In many ways, the truck and Theron are much the same.

Caretakers, givers, loved.

Girlhood

by Mary Pena

I thought that girlhood rested in the red dress that I wore at six years old,
my everyday wardrobe that slowly deteriorated with princess crowns and go-go boots.
Girlhood was too big for me and tended to slip off my shoulders
like the powder blue straps
of my first training bra.
I picture it lying dormant:
an expectation in the strappy sandals
that left blisters on my pinky toes.
Then, what started as a swan dive,
turned into perfume-choked lungs
and the legs cut by a nervous hand
with a brand new razor.
It tasted like bronchitis.
I soon wore it like a winter coat,
heavy with rain from my parade.
Girlhood bruised my chest with its brutal beatings of my heart,
the rabbit pact that expedited my blood flow
as I painted secret colors on my face—
a clandestine ritual with my sister's makeup.
It still likes to hide in cosmetic aisles.
Yet, girlhood had no reflection;
it avoided mirrors.
But girlhood left, and I've closed its door.
Now it's womanhood that I'm unprepared for.

Mother Knows Best

by Mary Pena

I didn't let him kiss me, Mom;
I remembered what you said.
He blew in my ear and called me "dear,"
but I didn't follow him to bed.
I trembled in trepidation, Mom,
because he made taffy of his phrases.
With his hand on my thigh—locked eye-to-eye—
I tried my best to keep your praises.
Did you ever shutter, Mom,
in situations such as this,
with a pounding head and visions of red
because a boy wants more than a kiss?
Please believe me, Mom, there was nothing I gave freely.
He clawed it away and gave me no say.
You were right, Mom;
all boys are greedy.

Should I Have a Daughter

by Mary Pena

I once tried different flavors of silence.
I baked the same muted tongue
and folded hands
of my grandmother's marriage.
I spit the crumbs into a napkin
and gagged at the aftertaste
of too-sweet-to-look-twice.
I then went to the sink
to purge myself
of the clumped, aged sugar.
I brushed my tongue
with the closed-eye smile
of my mother's youth.
I tasted her tears
and the dirt from her cheeks.
But I could not wipe my mouth
because I knew the back of my hand
would taste like his fingerprints
that I boiled off of my torso.
I would not again let my mouth catch fire
on the rug burn of his smothering hands—
never satisfied.
I know that drops of my skin
are still a stain spilled on your floor.
If you can hear me, listen:
I pray this taste will not wake my daughter.
Should she come from me—

from the body you tried to burn—
I will not cut out her tongue.
I will not starve her
as I tried to do to myself.
And should she ever ask me
why my kisses can be so acidic
and why your memory can collect
at the edges of my mouth—
dripping off of my chin,
puddling at her toes—
I will put honey on her tastebuds
and tell her to open her palette
to every word
and never know
the ravenousness of silence.

I Killed Kurt Cobain

by Mary Pena

A curve of a mouth,
“Who killed Kurt Cobain?”
I killed Kurt Cobain.
You killed Kurt Cobain.
The man two tables away
with the cooling black coffee
and the waitress with arthritis
both pulled the trigger.
Love killed Kurt Cobain.
Hate wiped away the fingerprints.
A head with a frail body
never saw trial for its murder.
Lincoln, Washington, and Franklin
escaped life behind bars.
The floor boards did not take the witness stand
in 94’s April showers
when the world heard the echo
of a deed all its own.

A Leaf of Fall

by Mary Pena

I hope I die like a leaf of fall
in the middle of a copper-colored sentence
still having more to say,
my tongue stained
with a, “hello,” “goodbye,” or “remember.”
And when you try to make sense of my mouth,
what it would have said
had it been given the chance to finish,
you will read me.
And I will be a Whitman whisked away by winter
or a Shakespeare of the shoe-tracked mud
before I crumple and crunch
into the sidewalk cracks.
How important I will be,
if even for a short while,
my absence will freeze the world
and leave it colorless and naked.

Vanilla Trees

by Erika Westhoff

Located 27 miles off of the ruinous Route 66 town of Grants, New Mexico, are the Ice Cave and Bandera Volcano. The last gas station before leaving town is located near the neon Los Alamos Motel sign advertising “No Vacancy” amidst a field of overgrown grass. Oil runs dry after that. There isn’t another station on the map for the next 70 miles. Red sand and signs warning “Low to No Visibility” due to dust devils welcome weary travelers as they turn off of the mother road and onto the cinder asphalt of scenic 53. As elevation increases, the devils are replaced by pines that grow along the crater chain. Lava fields stretch across the landscape, their porous black and red rock hosting an infestation of greenery. The Conquistadors dubbed this stretch of land El Malpais, the Badlands, and planted their flag on the volcano responsible for the field. Hidden in the lava, they discovered great tube structures that trapped cold air, creating freezers for ice formations, a natural wonder that the native Pueblo tribes utilized for hundreds of years. In the early 20th century, descendants of the Conquistadors bought the land from lumber and railroad companies and turned it into a tourist attraction after WWII. This family-owned tourist trap is how I found myself back in ponderosa pine country after a 12-year absence.

Since entering college, the land of fire and ice has been one of my many summer hunker-down homes. At the end of my freshman year, my youngest sister had two more years of school and a heady desire to light a match and burn the brick building down. So, my parents sold their house in Kansas quicker than a game of cornhole and made for the mountains. Gram Westhoff had been gifting tiny chunks of the family homestead in Colorado to them for years. The puzzle pieces of land had finally come together into a property sizable enough to build. Now, after two years in the purgatory of water and building rights, the house is taking shape. The past three summers I have only dared to stay with my parents once. Living arrangements included a camper bed that has slept four generations of Westhoffs, suitcases stacked into walkways, and shared quarters with my sisters. The next year, when a friend invited me to live with and work for their family, I packed up my car and headed to New Mexico.

At the base of the Bandera volcano is a log cabin. Extended on either side are additions painted dark green and decorated with treasured trash found in the lava. Over the door facing the tourist parking lot hangs a 1930s license plate. Next to the back door is a scatter of vintage glass bottles and tin cans from when the property boasted a dance hall and saloon. My room was located in the center of the house in the log cabin and came with its own closet and bathroom.

“Just let me know if you need anything. Feel free to make yourself at home.” That was the hospitality I got almost the entire summer from my friend’s mother, Debbie. Her maternal instincts always left me emotionally blindsided, but by the end of July I

was comfortable enough to add Babybel cheese to the weekly shopping list. The feeling of home is difficult to articulate, though its absence had felt obvious even before my parents sold the Kansas house that we had lived in for 10 years.

The ponderosa pine walls of my cabin room triggered memories of the last home I had known. The rough texture of the bark under my fingers reminded me of a seven year old's determination. An average ponderosa's branches are at least 25 feet above their base. The park near my half-remembered childhood home in Arizona was nestled in a towering grove. Climbing the 150 foot trees posed a challenge. I repeatedly attempted to gain purchase by gripping the bark and hoisting myself up, the same way rock climbers find divots in stone. This worked for a few moments before the bark shed from the trunk and into my hands. An afternoon of this left pine needles in my hair, bruises on my tailbone, and a desire to build a house up in those branches complete with a ladder.

My childhood enchantment with the trees came from more than my desire to climb them. It was the smell, the one that still permeated my cabin room even 70 years after the trees were felled. Ponderosa pines smell distinctly of vanilla, a fragrance similar to decaying paper. A reason, perhaps, for my fondness of old books. Scientists have tried to locate the cause of the tree's vanilla scent and have developed several theories with no answers. I conducted my own scientific investigations when I was five years old. I ascertained that while they may smell like vanilla, the olfactory experience does not carry over to the oral receptors. I found the woody taste to be just as agreeable and gave it a couple more licks. My mother took a picture to document my scientific success.

Sometime in mid-to-late July, Debbie took a picture of me in front of the Ice Cave and Bandera Volcano Trading Post. I can't remember if it was a marketing photo or one she took just because she could. She positioned me at the entrance between two wood statues of a prospector and an Indian. The pair had been carved sometime in the 1960s and never repainted. Dogs would always bark in fear at the prospector's peeling eyes and distorted smile as their owners dragged them down the trails.

The summer had gone by with a few completed goals and just as many empty boxes. Then it began to rain. The dry heat of New Mexico turned to wet cool with July's unpredictable and fleeting monsoon rains. The moisture was gone almost as soon as it fell. The immediate moments following the rain held the sweet smell of the ponderosa trees and the air carried the fragrance of the groves beyond the grounds where their roots twisted into the lava.

I kept my window open for the rest of July.

Negative Space

Fragments of the Whole

The concept of “Negative Space” has always been one of my personal design inspirations, so you can only imagine my excitement when the *Harbinger* staff revealed the theme for our 2018 issue.

Negative space tells a story within a story. In design, it creates a visual from the spaces between a graphic. With the content’s focus on memories, we wanted this year’s issue to highlight the negative space of time. This message was interpreted as the hourglass on the cover, to focus on both negative space and time. The graphic was broken down into fragmented images throughout each page, just as our memories are fragments of the whole story of our lives. Just like our memories, some of the images in this issue are bold and clear, while others are unclear and open to interpretation.

The cover and spot colors for *Harbinger* 2018 were inspired by two combinations that were popular during the 90’s. For many of us, the 90’s comprised a large part of our childhood. Many of our cherished memories shared in this issue still live and thrive there.

I am honored to have been selected to collaborate with this team to bring “Negative Space” to life. Reading and designing *Harbinger* 2018 has been an incredible journey. I hope you’re able to feel the emotions of these stories through the negative spaces on each page.

B. Stanfield

2018 *Graphic Designer*

Contributors' Notes



MARY ARNOLD

Mary Arnold, *Harbinger's* editor-in-chief and event coordinator of Sigma Tau Delta, is a junior creative writing major and music minor. In her free time, she reads romance novels, watches scary movies, listens to music, and works on her first romance novel. She looks forward to a future career in publishing, starting as an editorial assistant.



SARA BARFKNECHT

Sara Barfknecht, a junior majoring in creative writing, is a resident assistant with her cat, Loki. She is vice president of Sigma Tau Delta and prose editor for *Harbinger*. She plans to get an MFA in Fiction at the Iowa Writers' Workshop and also become an editor and a novelist. Her hobbies include reading, writing, photography, and using her parents' stories in her non-fiction.



ANA CHAN

Senior Ana Chan is graduating in 2018 with a BA in English and a minor in music. She enjoys modeling, volunteering for film and book festivals, and checking out the local music scene in Columbia. She played the lead in the short film *Chasing Alliecat*, which was shown at Stephens' Citizen Jane Film Festival. She is a member of the Mortar Board Athena Chapter, a campus honors society.



GABRIELLE DOOLEY

Gabrielle Dooley is a sophomore from Weston, Missouri, who is pursuing a BFA in creative writing with a minor in small business management. She is a member of the national honors society Alpha Lambda Delta and, in her spare time, enjoys reading and taking pictures. She plans to get a Master's in Library and Information Science.



RAINA JOHNSON

Raina Johnson, a BFA in creative writing, enjoys writing in all genres. Mage and Lincoln, her two dogs, live with her in her dorm room. She is from Colorado and has worked at several ski resorts. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta.



ELIZA LARSON

Eliza Larson is a sophomore majoring in creative writing and can often be found listening to music, watching a variety of geeky things on the internet, or daydreaming. She is originally from Colorado and has a deep love for nature and animals.



KYLIE NAUMANN

Kylie Naumann is a creative writing major. When not writing or drawing, she plays video games and talks too much about her pets. She enjoys banter, bad puns, and alliteration.

**VICTORIA PATRICK**

Victoria Patrick is a senior creative writing major. After graduation, Victoria will obtain a Master's in Library Science, which will allow her to bring diversity to children's programming. She has a cat-daughter named Rosie who likes jalapeño chips.

**MARY PENA**

Mary Pena, from Kansas City, Missouri, is majoring in English and plans to work for a publishing company after graduation. She is active in the local literary arts community and in on-campus organizations such as Stephens Scholars and Sigma Sigma Sigma sorority. She is a Sagittarius and breakfast advocate.

**JANET REINSCHMIDT**

Senior Janet Reinschmidt is studying English and film studies. Post-graduation, they plan to continue their studies in a moving image archive graduate program with the hope of becoming a film preservationist. Janet is an avid moviegoer, classic film fanatic, and Citizen Jane Film Festival social media volunteer.

**CAI SANTEE**

Cai Santee, a junior creative writing major and dedicated cat parent, is a former *Harbinger* intern, vice president of the Gender and Sexual Minorities Organization, social media chair of Poets of Infinity, and secretary of Sigma Tau Delta. They aspire to earn a Master's of Library Science and live out their life in the dusty depths of a Portland library.

**B. STANFIELD**

2018 *Harbinger* designer and Creative Ink creative director, B. Stanfield will graduate in May with a degree in Strategic Communication Design and a minor in small business management. She finds inspiration in TED talks, books, her irrationally large collection of rocks from around the world, and her dog, Charlsie.

**ERIKA WESTHOFF**

After graduation, senior English major Erika Westhoff will pursue a Master's in Archive Studies. Erika is a member of Alpha Lambda Delta, former president of Sigma Tau Delta, a current volunteer in the Stephens College archive, and has presented papers at several English and Humanities conferences. With Janet Reinschmidt, Erika created the "From the Archive" series.

