

Restoration
Harbinger
2009



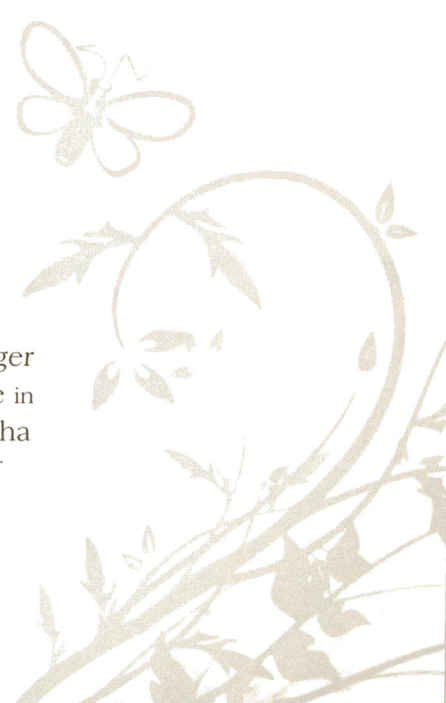


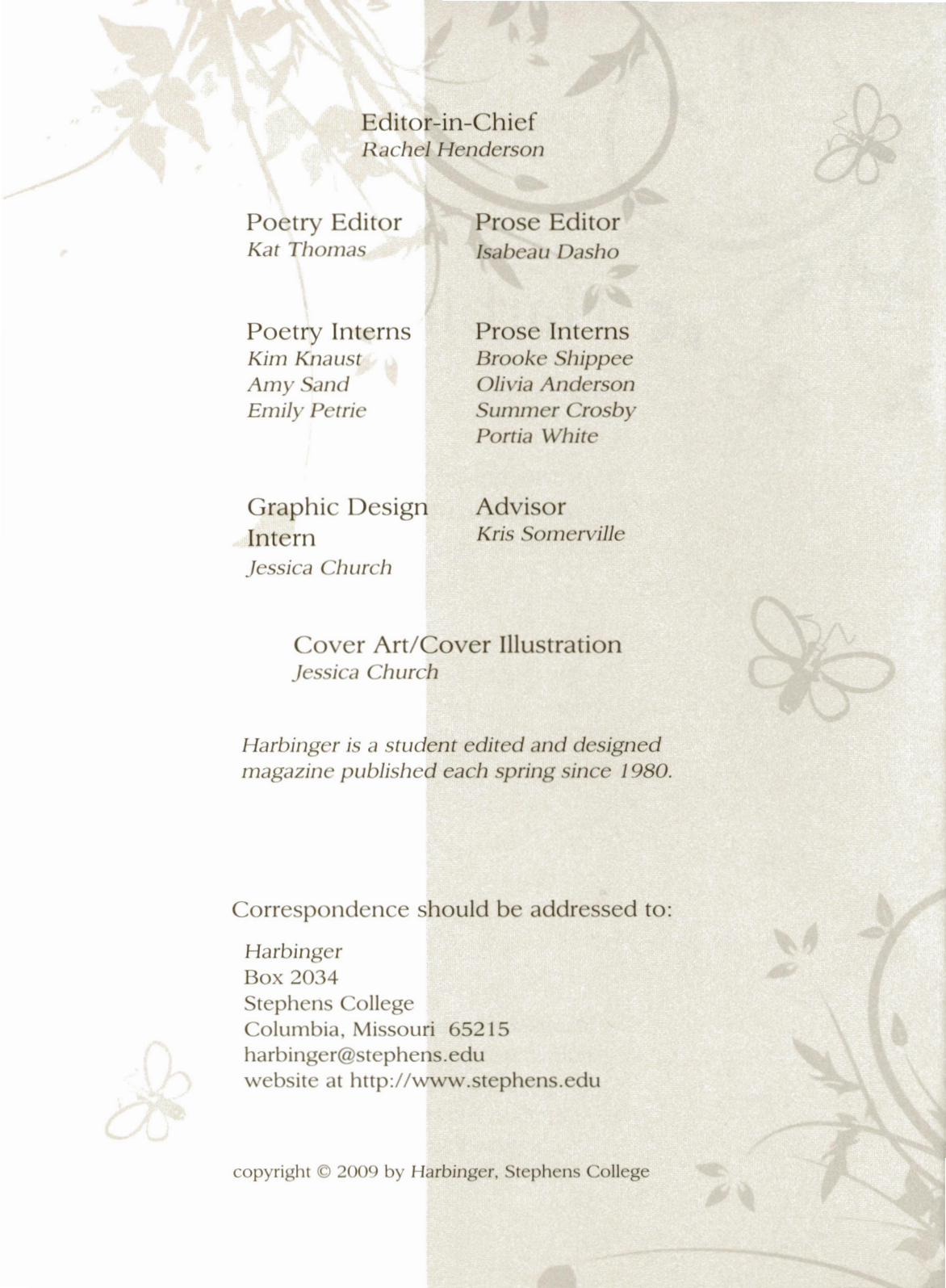
Harbinger

2009

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

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Contents

Fiction: The Towers *Lydia Lane*..... 10
 Burning Fingertips *Summer Crosby*...51

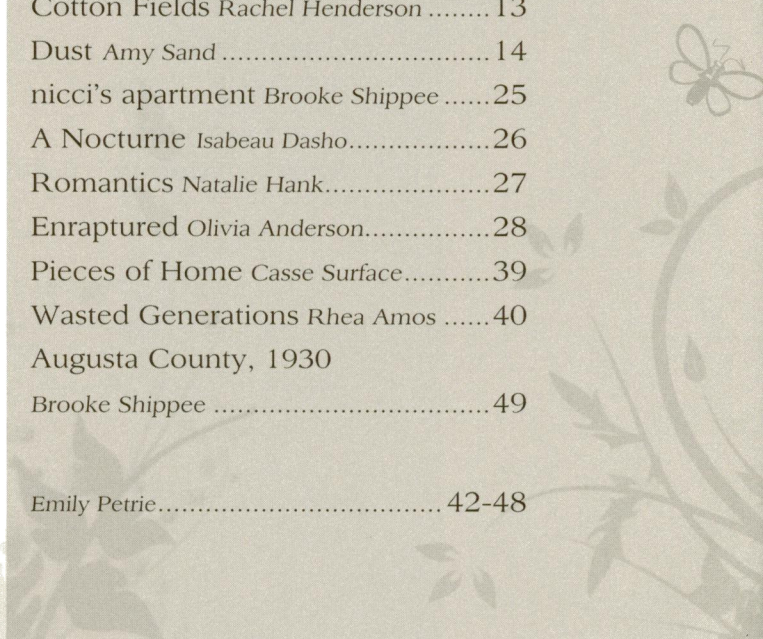
Nonfiction: Lying, Still *Isabeau Dasho* 16
 Blur *Amy Sand*29

Performance Writing: Ode to FARC *Kat Thomas*5
 Eating Dust *Kat Thomas*63

Poetry: Ode to the Eye of Cygnus
 Maggie Tripp 1
 Gypsies *Ciara McCormack* 2
 To Be a Savior *Rachel Henderson*..... 3
 More than Corn *Amy Sand*..... 12
 Cotton Fields *Rachel Henderson* 13
 Dust *Amy Sand* 14
 nicci's apartment *Brooke Shippee*25
 A Nocturne *Isabeau Dasho*.....26
 Romantics *Natalie Hank*.....27
 Enraptured *Olivia Anderson*.....28
 Pieces of Home *Casse Surface*.....39
 Wasted Generations *Rhea Amos*40
 Augusta County, 1930
 Brooke Shippee49



Photography: *Emily Petrie*..... 42-48





Foreword

Restoration: Reassembling the Past

A recent *New Yorker* cartoon depicts a young girl sitting in a bay window with a cup of tea, writing a letter home that reads: “Dear Mom and Dad: Thanks for the happy childhood. You’ve destroyed any chance I had of becoming a writer.”

As I reflect on my own past, I realize that I am doubly cursed in my struggle to become a writer. I had a happy childhood, and I was the “golden girl” of Trinity Christian Academy—star basketball player, cheerleader, homecoming court representative, and good little church girl. The stereotypes suggest that in order to be a writer, one cannot have a pleasant life or heaven forbid, have been popular in high school. But I was. In fact, I was what some might call a *nouveau yuppie*.



Four years ago, I would have resented the label, but today I simply laugh and

agree. Truthfully, the life of a yuppie isn't all it's cracked up to be. Too often, yuppies simply seek to fit in. I listened to music that I didn't like because it was popular. I suppressed an affinity for literature because it was considered strange. I even hung out in parking lots and messed around with cute guys to be a part of the in-crowd.

Now it's out there; I'm not perfect. So what? We've all made mistakes, and we all have pasts that have left us broken, distorted, and unable to recognize our reflection in the mirror. Several times in high school, I found myself looking in the mirror and crying because I didn't know who I was or what I was supposed to be. For a long time, I refused to reflect on the past. It wasn't until my sophomore year at Stephens, when my composition teacher convinced me to change my major from journalism to creative writing that I began to think about the past and analyze it for what it could teach me. By ignoring where I had come from, I was denying myself the freedom to move on.

A professor once told me that writing is a self-reflective art. In the writer's hands, the past undergoes a type of restoration as we reflect in order to polish and refurbish our pasts. The authors presented in this issue speak with wisdom and candor as they seek to reassemble the pieces of their short pasts. Their friends, their music, and their education are the nuts and bolts needed to restore each to a complete individual with a better understanding of the past and present.





The prose pieces in this issue address the ways in which the past manifests itself in the present and how it continues to affect the future. In her personal essay “Blur,” Amy Sand revisits a month of her life lost in a medicated coma of pain and misdiagnosis. Her struggle to reclaim her existence speaks to the experience that we all share of repression, forgetting, and ultimately the battle to restore ourselves. “The Towers,” a hard hitting short-short by Lydia Lane, examines our nation’s reaction to 9/11 and asks the question of whether we’ve recovered. “Ode to FARC, by Kat Thomas is an off-the-wall performance piece that demonstrates the ironies facing the millennial generation. It asks us to move forward while not begging forgiveness for the past.

Much of the poetry in this issue also explores the theme of restoration. In Maggie Tripp’s ethereal “Ode to the Eye of Cygnus,” the earth is destroyed and an astronaut struggles to regain equilibrium. In a simple, detailed scene Rhea Amos’ poem “Wasted Generation” dramatizes a few of life’s familiar challenges. Olivia Anderson’s “Enraptured” strikes a lighter note as it shows the power of music to evoke memory. And Brooke Shippee’s “Augusta County, 1930” depicts a family fractured after the death of one of its own. The poem bravely contends that no matter how much one longs for the simplicity of the past it can never be fully restored.

Harbinger has also undergone a type of



restoration this year in terms of a complete redesign. We changed the size and format and welcomed to our staff graphic designer Jessica Church. We hope that these changes help our magazine embody the meaning of the word harbinger: a sign of things to come and, in our case, the bright future of the literary magazine.

As you read this issue of *Harbinger*, I hope that you will take a moment to reflect on your past, laugh at it, and be thankful that you've moved on.

Happy reading!

R.H.



Ode to the Eye of Cygnus

Maggie Tripp

I am the astronaut high above the Earth,
spinning across the galaxy, floating balletic,
on my own Catherine wheel.
I've seen the mystery of stars,
explored Venus and Mars, and heard the
cold echo of alien voices across intergalactic
channels.

Orion's belt is a short walk, a skip and a hop,
while the rings of Saturn are best reserved for
ice skating and other winter sports.

I am the astronaut, the man in white,
simultaneous sinner and frostbitten saint.
Beneath my feet is the trail to Earth, the detritus
of space explorers and passing comets.
It was I who flicked the switch,
if you really want to know.
Hello, ladies and gentlemen, meet the man
who incinerated Earth, your lovely home planet
up until eighteen point five seconds ago.

I am the astronaut who murdered a planet,
a man without regret, doubt, or delight.
Floating is not so much weightlessness as it is
drowning—
drowning in a sea of stars, held under by ghosts.
There is a dreadful finality to dying in space—
no burial, cremation, or elaborate gravestone,
nothing but my suit and a comet's tail,
and perhaps, the collision of two dying stars.

poetry

1



tripp



Gypsies

Ciara McCormack

As a child,
my brown eyes perceived
only thrilling,
pulsating life in flashes of gold and
vibrant circle skirts.
The bare shoulders
of beautiful women
were seductive, bold mysteries.

Today, these deep, dark eyes
find unfulfilled corruption in
the restless sense of a windblown home.
Colors and eyes dull, with the change of seasons.
Cloaks of threadbare silk and wool are
a façade, a wild beautiful dream
lifted, teasing in the wind.





To Be a Savior

Rachel Henderson

Little boy,
you're crying
after the Jesus film
because you're
going home
to something that
Jesus can't save you from
right now.

"He has to go through the bush,"
your friend says.

Soldiers crouch
in the bush
like lions on the prowl,
cubs holding guns
too big for them.

Tiny fingers grip triggers
explosive enough
to shake a nation

poetry

3



henderson



but too quiet to
wake the world.

Little boy,
you look to me to save you—
me, Mzungoo.

You smile because
my skin is lighter,
and you think
my money greener,
house bigger,
food more fattening,
life better than yours.

But I can't save you,
little boy,
because my voice is not
loud enough,
and when I go home,
all these things will
make me forget.



Ode to FARC

Kat Thomas

I am in love with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, also known as FARC.

My obsession with my South American lover began in high school when FARC kidnapped Americans and other tourists in order to raise funds for their operations.

I poured over newspapers and watched multiple networks trying to ignore all the coverage of Al Qaeda, Iraq, Afghanistan, and death tolls rising everyday, rising.


I was looking for the tell-tale story of guerilla tactics, cocaine, and anti-government actions. I was looking for my darling's sweat in the jungles of Colombia, for its blood or the blood of someone it had embraced.

Then, inbetween the virtual folds of the online *New York Times*, information unfolded before me. My wise lover tortured and cut off the ears of some of their detainees, and then sent flaps of useless skin to the U.S. government as a sign of what they were willing to do for the ransom.




March 1999: Killing of Three U.S. Missionaries Working in Colombia





I suppose FARC is more into bondage and sado-masochism than I am, but still, I find that there is a strange connection between us.




I am in awe of the longevity of FARC: forty-four years and counting. I mean, what girl wouldn't want a lover who lasts?

As one of the oldest operations in the Americas, my leftist, Marxist-loving baby was conceived around forty years ago (I only date older) by Jacobo Arenas and Manuel Marulanda. Ridding Colombia of American influence and equalizing the distribution of wealth between the classes was their intent. A guerilla operation, FARC continues to fight against the government sanctioned military forces, hell-bent on eradicating all traces of the operation.



October 2001: Kidnapping and Assassination of the Former Colombian Minister of Culture

My lover was born during a time called "La Volencia" following the murder of Jorge Eliecir Gaitan. See, it's hard to understand FARC sometimes because it has only known violence, weapons, refusal to surrender arms, and military abuses.



FARC attracts other people besides me: disenfranchised, idealistic youths willing to live out their days in the jungle. Men and women as young as their teens, girls and boys depending on how you see them. Girls are required to either take birth control or have abortions if they become pregnant, so that they can devote their lives to the

cause. But promotions, duties, and responsibilities are fairly gender-blind.

My lover is all about equal opportunity.



February 2002: Kidnapping of Female Colombian Presidential Candidate Ingrid Betancourt

Now, the Colombian government, along with Canada, the European Union, and the United States State Department labels FARC as a terrorist organization.

Terrorists. Terrorists alongside Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, and the Taliban. FARC stands right beside Hamas, the Basques of Spain, and the Earth and Animal Liberation Fronts, together a family of enemies.



February 2002: Hijacking of a Domestic Commercial Flight, Resulting in Kidnapping of Colombian Senator

And, what of my country? What of our war on terrorism? What of the collateral damage due to our sure-fire guns and quick-on-the-trigger methods, fighting my lover and its kind, in our own holy, ideological war, whose name is Democracy?

My country in fighting the terrorists became a terrorist. We are blind to the irony; we label my lover, my FARC, as a terrorist drug trafficker with a disregard for civilian losses (collateral damage remember) and a fondness for torture.





November 2005: Sixty Hostages Held until the
Colombian Government Releases FARC Prisoners

Slicing ears, holding people for years, yes, my FARC has a nasty temper. Ask recently rescued Ingrid Betancourt. She spent six years with my lover—a political statement, a platonic relationship. Six years in a jungle, living and sweating, dying with my lover under the green of plantain trees and the powdered haze of coke. Harsh. But what about my country? At Guantanamo Bay the U.S. government is all about water boarding prisoners.

Yes, FARC loves BDSM, but I'm pretty sure it is not alone. The U.S. forces others to play submissive, to play the bitch. The U.S. puts a chokehold on the organizations and countries which oppose its presence, forcing those people to take it anywhere and everywhere, cutting off resources and oxygen flow to the brain. Sometimes the U.S. forgets to let go.



January 2008: Kidnapping of Six Tourists in
Choco, Colombia

So which is worse?

Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela refuse to label FARC as a terrorist group, not that it means anything to the U.S. if Venezuela's Chavez tells us to go to hell once again. It's his anthem:

Go to Hell. Go to Hell U.S.A.
You are not the way, no way.



To Hell. Go to Hell.
All the way, all the way U.S.A.
To Hell.

Try as he might to spread his anthem, I think it's hard to take Hugo seriously when Valeros pop up throughout the U.S.

Denmark gives the world the finger, saying that FARC is no more a terrorist than the government it is fighting. Suddenly, I want to move to Denmark to see if it can introduce me to FARC, my terrorist of choice.



April 2008: Kidnapping of Cuban-American
Businessman, Whereabouts Unknown

I'll need to be tougher and stronger to stomach those serious BDSM games like the ones with the razors. My lover and I can live happily ever after as long as FARC thinks I'm not from the U.S. Maybe I am the long-lost granddaughter of Hugo Chavez or Cuba's unspoken mascot. Or perhaps, I am just a woman from a pissed off country like Denmark.



The Towers

Lydia Lane

fiction

10



lane

When the towers were hit, I had already smoked two joints. When the towers were hit, I was thinking about my girlfriend, Julie. She worked at Millie's Diner and got decent grades. Everyday after school I would walk down to the diner and watch her serve customers in her light blue uniform. I loved the fragrance of her perfume mixed with the fumes from my '67 Camaro. When the towers were hit, I smelled like flowers and gasoline.

It was early, I was sitting in my history class. The room was heavy with dread, and I was unable to fall asleep in the back. There was a knock on the door. The teacher opened it to reveal my girlfriend in tears. She told him to turn on the television and then ran back down the hall. That's all anyone talked about for the rest of the day. It was after school before I finally found my girlfriend sitting under the stairwell. Her eyes were red, and I took her in my arms.

"It was Saddam," Matt said, buckling his seat belt in the back of my car.

Julie put the passenger seat back in place and got in. "No, it was Bin Laden," she whispered.

"Let's not talk about it," I said, putting the car into gear and taking her hand in mine. We let the sounds of The Clash fill the car. They expressed the emotions that each of us were too afraid to feel.



For a week, Julie cried. She was so caring, so sensitive to those people. Every time I looked at her I couldn't help but think the terrorist had hurt the only person in the world that I cared about.

One day, instead of going to Millie's after school, I went to the Army Recruitment Office. The man who sat behind the desk took one look at me and sighed. "What do you want?"

The muscles in my body tensed as I answered, "I want to serve my country, sir."

His eyes widened, then narrowed. "Why?"

I didn't know how to explain my reason for wanting to sign away my life. I couldn't say I wanted to die because my girlfriend was sad, or because this great country had let me smoke pot every day since I was fourteen. I summed it all up by saying, "I want to give back to my country and the people I love."

He pulled out a piece of paper that explained in detail that I was likely signing my own death certificate. He handed me a pen. Without thinking twice, I signed the paper and left his office.

When I got to Millie's Diner, Julie was standing by the counter in her blue dress. She smiled at me when I entered, and I took her in my arms. I kissed her like I'd never done before.

I hugged her close to my body and whispered, "I miss you already."





More than Corn

Amy Sand



poetry

12



sand

Nebraska. Where Fred Astaire grew into tap shoes. The Heartland. Send mail to God at 1101 Westridge, Neighardt Park. Kool-Aid stirred up in Hastings. Birthed Malcolm X. 311. Johnny Carson. We have malls. A unicameral government. Alexander Payne spotted Chris Klein at Millard West High and threw him into *Election*. Closer to Chicago than Little Rock. Overalls are not a fashion statement. Country music isn't my favorite. "Then we'll go to Omaha to work and exploit the booming music scene and humility," Rilo Kiley sings. Texans wear more cowboy hats. Blair, Nebraska: more cops per capita than anywhere in the U.S. The Oracle of Omaha, Warren Buffet. Bright Eyes. Andy Roddick. More than telecommunications. Ted Kooser likes to write poems about Jim Flowers and the Woodmen Tower. Willa Cather. The Niobrara River. The Omaha Warriors song, "I shall vanish and be no more, but the land over which I now roam shall remain and change not." Skyscrapers. The Quest Center. Olympic Swim Trials 2008. My parents are not farmers. Nebraskafish. Why go to Stonehenge when you could go to Carhenge? The sandhills and cranes. Declared Arbor Day. Boys Town. Hilary Swank. How 'bout them Huskers? Iowa grows more corn.



Cotton Fields

Rachel Henderson

Driving home to Tennessee,
I'm reminded of your
fascination
with this early autumn snow—

bubbles on brown stems
like the fluffy froth
on the root beer floats
we will share.



poetry

13



henderson



Dust

Amy Sand


I've got a boyfriend who never calls me,
hair that hardly stays clean,
white socks that are anything but.

I've got a special place for sunshine,
a pocket for Billy Joel,
nerves for art.


I've got Tic Tacs that I can't get to tick,
toes that stopped growing straight years ago,
two pieces of carpet—
one to shed, one to grab the mess.

I've a lover who lost his soul,
friendly people who don't bring me soup,
a brother who's anything but.

I've got eyes that move in slow motion,
my head that sees double time,
a real whore of a heart.




The times on my clocks never match.
I find myself cursing out everyone in my
thoughts—
even the old ladies,
even the nuns.

The titles that they just come up with,
they're all sexual to me.
A foamy encounter. 
Two plus one.

I've a big blue ball that wanders my hardwood
floor, Blow Pop green Chap Stick that graces my
stiff lips, thongs in the dust.

I am dirty and misused and mistrusting.
I am good and honest and too real.
One for the water,
this dust under my fingernails all turns to mud.



poetry

15



sand





Lying, Still

Isabeau Dasho

Aaron reminded me a lot of my brother Dominic. They both wore spiked hair and leather jackets that were punk enough to appear dangerous but not drug-dealer authentic. For Aaron, it was the persona he was creating, one of wasted potential. He played the saxophone in band and drew peace signs on his red high-tops. A rumor in school said that he'd spent a night in jail. With my brother Dominic, it wasn't a rumor.

I guess having a crush on the bad boy in school is pretty cliché. I admit that the entire episode smacks of John Hughes. His friends thought it was funny when he started dating a sophomore on the honor roll, the geek who'd just gotten contacts. My best friend Bethany cried when I told her that I had started dating Aaron. We were in the orchestra room. I'd caught her right after class and nervously chatted about nothing as she loosened the strings on her bow and gently put her violin in its case. I waited until everyone else left the room and sat on the first row of chairs before confiding my big secret. I was dating Verbrigghe. Bethany's blue eyes went as round as saucers, and all the blood



drained from her face. She sat with such force that, for a moment, I thought she'd fainted.

"Verbrigghe?" she echoed slowly, as though trying to discern the truth from his last name. "Like Aaron Verbrigghe?"

"Yeah."

She burst into sobs. I was too shocked to even reach for her, too appalled by her violent reaction to do anything but stand there with my mouth open. Between fits of panic, she told me that as soon as Aaron and I were alone, I'd get raped. That's why he'd been in prison, she said. I was holding her by this time, rocking her slowly, letting Bethany listen to her own idiocy. I hoped that her logical side would kick in.

It didn't. For the next twenty minutes, I had to defend my decision to date a known smoker and a C-student who was a disruption in class (he had an A in band). After another ten minutes of fruitless discourse, I told Bethany that I loved her and that my dating a 'bad boy' wouldn't change anything between us.

"I know," she said. "I'm just worried that he's worse than you want to believe. Bad boys aren't all reputation. Sometimes they are just bad."

A week or two later, we went to the drive-





in on HWY 16. With me at the wheel and Aaron riding shotgun, we smuggled eight of our friends into the back of my minivan hidden beneath beach towels and blankets. When the coast was clear, they spilled out into the night, bought bucket-sized popcorn, and slipped off to annoy kissing couples.



Summer nights in Wisconsin are never particularly warm; everyone milled about in jeans and jackets, waiting for the movie to start. Car lights flickered on and off, radios buzzed—it was a perfect evening.

What I didn't realize at that moment was that Aaron had this all planned. He probably even ordered the beautiful weather. I thought that the group was going to the movie and that we all would watch *Dawn of The Dead*. If I was lucky, I'd get to hide my head on Aaron's shoulder and at the end of the night, maybe kiss him with a little more tongue than last time.



He suggested that we move to the back seat.

“What about the others?”

“They'll be out for a while...you know...”

I figured that he meant they'd all gone to smoke their stash. In truth, they were under strict orders from their lord and leader not to disturb the van for the duration of the movie.

I don't remember anything about *Dawn of*



the Dead. After the first zombie tore a still living human to shreds, my attention waned. Aaron thought that was fine. I don't remember exactly how my jacket came off, or how the buttons of my blouse came undone. I do remember his soft lips on my neck and nipping at my earlobe. For some unknown reason, I love making out in cars. To this day, I find the back seat of a Chevy one of the sexiest places to fool around. Maybe I saw Titanic at a very impressionable age; Kate Winslet's handprint left a proverbial mark on my psyche.

This is how I remember it: Aaron and I are making out in the van. We've turned the radio to a soft rock station. His gentle hands move in long, slow, smooth motions. He uses his lips instead of words to lead me, and I try my inexperienced best to do this right. I'm thinking about lip pressure, saliva, and the appropriateness of moaning. I'm desperate to look practiced and cool. I want my hands to caress him rather than lie limp at my sides, but I've never caressed a man before.

My mind is a whirl of firing synapses as my brain tries to comprehend the dual emotions of fear and pleasure. I'm so busy thinking that I miss the part where his hands wander down and unbutton my jeans. It takes me a full five seconds to realize





that my zipper is undone and that his fingers are on the threshold of my pink panties.

“Stop.” I gasp, shocked and scared. His fingers linger as though waiting for me to acclimate to the situation.

“What is it?” he asks. His other hand strokes the side of my face.

I draw a blank. I can’t think of a concrete reason for not wanting him to touch me there. At sixteen, I don’t understand that not wanting is reason enough. My brain is running full throttle, repeating the refrain, “Don’t be a prude.” This is Aaron, the hottest, most sought-after, bad-ass punk in school. He strokes my face slowly, waiting, and I stammer, “I was molested.”

All the air is sucked out of the van as soon as my lie escapes my lips. Aaron’s fingers immediately retreat, and though the hand on my face has stopped its gentle motion, it hasn’t left my cheek. He looks at me in the dark, his blue eyes over bright in the reflection of the movie. He knows it’s a lie. He’s about to expose me when some of the brightness falls and his lower lip quivers uncontrollably. He tries to stop it but he can’t. He takes a deep breath and cries.

I’m a wretched human being, I think, as I clutch Aaron closer, trying to comfort him. I need to tell



him the truth. I had a great childhood. No one ever touched me. I was never uncomfortable with an elderly neighbor or uncle. I was a cherished babe for most of my life, insulated in the love of my family. I want to tell him that. I want to unsay the words that have brought him to this sobbing state. But my lips don't move, and I find myself holding him and rocking him back and forth as best I can. To my horror, I begin mumbling about the "incident."

"It was only once," I say desperate to make the lie less horrific. "It was a neighbor boy who moved away three weeks later. I never saw him again." This tidbit makes Aaron cry harder and hug me closer. "It's okay," I say. "I got through it."

"I'm so sorry," he says between sniffles. "I'm so sorry. I always knew that there was a darkness about you, some tragedy. I just didn't think it was this." He cries. He can hardly get a grip at this point, but his words strike me. I've just lied about something grotesque in order to save my reputation. I lied to make Aaron believe that my prudishness comes, not from inexperience, but from tribulation. I am dark.





This is how it was: When I was seven, Dominic ran away from home. He lived on the streets; he sold drugs and ended up in juvenile detention. Out of the four kids, Dominic and I both have my father's dark eyes and hair. One Sunday, after church, I went with Dad to deliver some socks and candy to Dominic at the detention center. My other siblings didn't go. Mom couldn't go. It was just the dark-haired part of the family separated by plate glass and misunderstandings. I watched my father, unable to ask questions he wanted to. He couldn't tell his youngest son how he'd been betrayed and hurt. It was like watching granite quiver.



At seven my father was still my hero. There was nothing my seven-year-old mind could conceive of that would lay my father low. On the way home I watched my father battle his emotions in a way that I was unable to understand. As a father, he must have wanted to break down and weep about Dominic who was detoxing in a mini-prison. But, Dad couldn't cry because I was sitting beside him. I squinted at him through my eyelashes and saw a tear before he wiped it away. He remained mostly jovial for the ride home, keeping up a facade for the daughter he loved.

I hate to see men cry. I find it more disturbing



than most other signs of human agony. Call it societal conditioning but, in my mind, heroes aren't allowed weaknesses. Batman doesn't bleed, and my father never cried. It is a natural law.

Aaron disobeyed the natural law. In the back of a minivan he openly cried, let down his guard and wept. Aaron didn't try to conceal his horror. He was open about his pain, and when he had cried himself out, he took me in his arms and whispered beautiful sentiments about my bravery and my worth.

Ironically, these endearments, meant to assuage whatever I was feeling, had the opposite effect. My lie now separated us.

"I'll understand," he said, "if you never want to go any farther than kissing."

I shook my head. "That's not what I want."

"No?"

"No." I swallowed. "Then I'd never really get over it. I want to have a physical relationship with you. I just want you to ask if that sort of thing is okay, you know?"

I was shaking in his arms, and he tightened his grip.

"I'm sorry. I didn't—I should have known better."





“It’s okay, you couldn’t have seen this coming.”

He kissed my forehead and gently tipped my chin up so that he could see my face. I was crying out of shame for what I’d done.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered. “For ruining the night.”

“It’s okay; it’s not ruined. Just a different kind of special.”

I gave a wet laugh, and so did he.



Aaron and I didn’t make it past the summer. I moved away, and he went to college. But I continue to think about those hours at the drive-in. How my lie affected him and how it did and didn’t change the way we acted together. Later in my other relationships, I was confident to let ‘no’ stand for itself. I understood that my wishes were enough. And now, when my boyfriend cries at movies, it doesn’t upset me like it did. Don’t get me wrong, it’s still unnerving, but now I take comfort in the knowledge that he loves me enough to show weakness. He doesn’t need to lie about it, brush it off, or take it on the chin. It’s enough.





nicci's apartment

Brooke Shippee

kisses on teeth are like candy from strangers
and cigarette breath.
Eskimos and elbows,
there is no language in our lungs.

smoking in the kitchen, tongues on fire, we are
surrounded: bottles and cups and fingers and hands
and girls named after red rocks.

holding hands on the landing, close your eyes—
lightening like never before.
our friendship is like asthma,
unrelenting.



poetry

25



shippee



A Nocturne

Isabeau Dasho

When you sleep, you
mutter, mumble, and sigh
(I love those sighs).

And when you are troubled in your waking state,
your brow furrows in slumber,
as though you can't shake
what's bothering you.

What's bothering you?
I whisper close to your ear.
You don't move.
For a brief second, I wonder if,
in my selfish insomnia,
I've condemned you too.

O-H...

What is O-H?

Hydroxide, you answer,
confused as to why I don't know the formula.

I trace the line of your jaw,
feather light touches lest I bring you
to where I am—
awake, over-warm, tired yet unable to
quiet the noise.

Sigh.
You pull me near, as though your
sleeping will slip into me,
like osmosis between cells.

I settle, and wait for you to quote more chemistry,
delighting in the elements of
you
and me
that combust into
us.





Romantics

Natalie Hank

I sent you hand-crafted cards
and remembered your favorite cookie.
I mentioned my favorite flower
and the places I like to eat.
You said, “Romance costs money
that I don’t have.”
Then you went out with your buddies
and racked up a 150 dollar bar tab.

poetry

27



hank





Enraptured

Olivia Anderson

Swing easy, swing slow
the lazy jazz chords of Gershwin
stir in my veins like tropic winds
on a blue summer night

poetry

28



anderson

They repeat
to the beat
of my heart




I am at rest
in the bosom of swaying melodies





Blur

Amy Sand



It all started with a test that required me to stick my head into a mushroom-shaped dome. It was total darkness, except for a bright dot of light that came from the outside and traveled inward to the middle of the dome. It was an eye test, to examine responsiveness and peripheral vision. This is what I believe caused my life to blur for one month.

Here's what I remember: things shift in and out of consciousness. I wake up with a headache, a migraine. It is March of my junior year at Blair High School in Nebraska. This particular migraine resists all light. I know the best solution is darkness, so when my father comes to wake me for school, I put my head under the covers and say that I'm not going. I sleep.

It goes on like this for a few days. I sleep the entire morning, wake up, drink some milk, eat a little lunch, and go back to sleep. By the third day, my parents are fed up. They wake me between naps so they can talk to me. I say my pain is too intense to do anything. They think the answer lies somewhere in medical land.

We begin the journey at Creighton Medical Center. It's 10:30 p.m. on a weekday, so we are shoved to the emergency waiting room. All the

nonfiction

29



sand





signs are written in English and Spanish. I sit down in a chair, and my father talks with the lady at the desk. I look around to see who else has arrived tonight. There's a crying baby, a man in a wheel chair sucking an oxygen tank, and a man cradling his hand wrapped in a blood-stained cloth.

After half an hour, we are shown to a room. A doctor comes in to talk with us. Unlike my mother, my dad lets me speak with the doctor. Mr. MD is a tall, 40-year-old, dark and handsome type. He asks me a string of questions that will become the only words I can recollect from the episode, like a memorized poem.

"So, Amy, what seems to be the matter?"

Doctors ask questions like statements.

"I have a migraine."

"Where does it hurt?"

"Everywhere."

"On a scale of one to ten, ten being the worst, what would you assign it?"

"An eleven."

He says the best plan is just to "knock it out." The nurse delivering the shot says, "It's what we give to pregnant women before they deliver."

I pull down my pants. She swabs my cheek with cold alcohol.

"On three...one, two..."

She sticks me with the needle. I cringe.

"All over. Now just rest, and we'll be back to check on you in half an hour."

This is the first of eight shots. My ass becomes an experimental pin cushion. When the nurse comes back in, I'm lying on my stomach, feeling nauseous.

"How are you, dear?"

“I feel like I’m gonna throw up.”

“Yes, the medicine does that. How is your head?”

“The same.”

“I’ll let the doctor know.”

When the doctor comes back, he tells my father a slew of contradictory statements. His diagnosis is inconclusive. Over the next few weeks, I discover that doctors never admit when they are wrong. They just prescribe medication.

We are shoved out of the hospital. I feel worse than before, and I’m dreading the forty-five minute drive back home.

A few more days pass. The pills dull my brain, but not the pain. My vision becomes strange. I spend my days sleeping in bed or on the couch. My mom drags me to a creepy office. The doctor is an old jerk. My mother speaks to him while I stare. He tells my mother it’s psychosis, that it’s all in my head. My brain is too numb to be pissed. Only later am I angry.

We visit more hospitals with more doctors. They prescribe more drugs. They ask the same things. The nurse holds a chart out in front of me.

“On a scale of one to ten, how bad does it hurt?”

I point past ten.

“Eleven.”

The doctor comes back and signs small white slips of paper and hands them to my mom.

“Go see your family doctor, so he or she can recommend a specialist.”





I wake up in the morning only to take drugs and go back to sleep. The pills erase the difference between night and day. There are brief moments of pain at a level nine, sometimes lasting 30 minutes, an hour if I'm lucky. When I come down from the brief break, the pain is worse than before.

Time is measured by the appointments my parents make, my mother's grinding teeth and my father taking days off. I quickly learn that the drugs make me sicker. If there is a side effect, I get it: nausea, dry mouth, loss of appetite, dizziness, drowsiness, all of it.

I want to stop taking the pills, but my mother guilties me into it.

"Don't you want to get better, Amy?"

I go see my family doctor. She sticks me with four shots to the buttocks. She recommends a doctor who teaches hand warming. We go see him. He tells me that warming my hands with my mind will distract my head. I tell him my hands are ice. He gives me a cassette for relaxation and concentration. I go home, listen to it, and cry. Concentrating makes the pain more intense.

The days are a blur. I am dragged through long white hallways that look like they used to be tunnels. Dead-eyed people stare at me. I lie face down on exam room beds and look at eye charts as the strongest medications are forced through a needle into my bottom. My migraine vision is now at its peak. I try to explain it to people.

"It's like an Impressionistic painting," I say.

At the time my brain couldn't explain the visual

disruption. It is my souvenir from this episode. It's like this. It only happens indoors. The worse the lighting, the more intense the vision. When I focus on an object or person, it is surrounded by a yellow halo. Rays of light bounce over the top of images, like the reflection of light on water. They flash in slow motion. It used to make me dizzy, but I got used to it.



My mother takes me to a non-denominational church.

"She's helped lots of people," my mother says. "She heals people through God."

The church is empty except for an overweight woman in fancy oversized clothes that only accentuate her curves. We sit together in a glossy pew.

"Do you believe that you will go to heaven when you die?" she asks.

I nod my head.

"Why?"

"Because I am a good person," I say.

"That's wrong. You have to recite this prayer."

I cry.

"Where is the pain coming from?" she asks.

"It all hurts so bad," I say.

We leave. I have the same pain in my head and now a question to match. What if I die?

My father calls his brother, a neurologist from Kansas City. He says to go to Iowa City, to the University Hospital. He says that they know medicine.

The ride is long and bumpy. I stare out the window as the lines on the road zip by. My father





might have spoken to me, but I don't remember. Everything is muffled.

When the sun is on top of the car, we arrive at the hospital. My father helps me walk to the waiting area. By this point I am weak and drugged-up. I look more like seventy than sixteen. I sit on a bright plastic chair and watch kids play with a gumball machine. A child screams in delight as a gumball swirls down a translucent tube and into his hand.

Another old man greets my father and me in the exam room. This MD asks me to walk a straight line. I do it slow and careful. He doesn't tell me if I pass.

"Squeeze my fingers," says the doctor.

I do.

"Harder."

I try.

"Strange," the doctor says turning toward my father. "She only has a feeling of weakness."

We drive home the same day.

"How was the trip?" my mother asks.

"Oh, you know. Pretty much the same," my father says.

Months later I find out why all the doctor visits were the same. After one doctor labeled me with psychosis, I was black listed as a teenager dying for attention.

Some people call to ask my status. Most of the time, I'm too tired to talk. I thank them for their wishes and then say goodbye. My older brother tells the other high schoolers I'm faking it. To keep me company, my little brother gives me his favorite stuffed otter, Mij. I spend my days

asleep. It hurts too much to read or write. I watch soap operas for as long as I can stand the light. Sometimes I sleep on the couch in the living room to avoid feeling so alone.



Some doctor thinks more sleep will help, and he prescribes Ambien. I wake up in the middle of the dose and dream while I'm awake. I think that the stripes on the walls are attacking me. I stumble to the phone, dial my father at work and mumble jibberish. He comes home to find me throwing up on the bathroom floor.

I feel hopeless, as if in a limbo state. My migraine vision gets more intense everyday. I can't focus on anything. I am not strong enough to stand up and take showers, so I resort to baths.

More hospitals in Omaha. We go to the Children's because my mother says, "They're nice." They want to rule out everything wrong with me. They want to rule out meningitis with a spinal tap.

"Please don't make me do this," I cry to my mom after the doctors leave the room.

"Don't you want to get better?" she hisses. "What if you have this?"

Intense anger is the last emotion I remember having. The doctors come back in to prep me. I am told to lie in a fetal position. I watch the nurse put on gloves. She rips open a packet and cleans the needle. Bright and silver, the needle is as long as my arm from my finger tips to my elbow.

"This is going to hurt," the doctor says.

My mother is behind me, watching the doctor insert the needle into the base of my spine. After the test, the fluid should reveal the answers.



It's the most intense pain I've ever experienced. It's worse than breaking my fingers, worse than cracking open my head. I scream, tears streaming as I try to breathe. In pain, I bite the inside of my right cheek.

"Well, we didn't get anything that time," says the doctor.

"What?" I manage to say.

"We are going to have to try again."

I don't talk to my mother the rest of the day.

I wake up being walked around a hospital. I look down at the black-and-white checkered floor. It swirls into a black hole. I freak out and realize that my parents are on each side of me, holding onto my arms. They move me to an elevator. When it rises, I lose my balance and fall to the floor. I'm not in control.

My parents take me to Kansas City to see my uncle. His offices are luxurious and deep red. I don't think my sickness is fancy enough for his place. He examines my eyes and tells my parents that I might go blind. Back in Nebraska, I am given an I.V. treatment. For three days I come in for four hours and watch T.V. while Cortisone drips into my veins. These steroids are supposed to strengthen my eye muscles. I have to sleep sitting up because of the I.V. in my left arm. They say it will make my hospital trips smoother.

My eyes don't get worse, but they don't get better.

"Maybe you will have to learn to live with it," my father says.



I do learn. I learn like an old woman who joins a bridge club. I do it to fit in.

My mother tells all her friends about me. One recommends a chiropractor. I don't want to go. My mother says this was a hard appointment to get. "She's well known around town," my mother says. I concede. The lady lays me face down on a bed. My neck cracks as she yanks it left, then right.

"Ouch!" I say.

"A good kinda pain, right?" she says.

"No. That hurts," I say.

"Strange," she says.

We go home. I sit on the couch. I watch other people speak. My family is a sitcom that isn't funny.

My mother's weight trainer also wants to see me. She says to bring me into the physical therapy center. I tell my mother I haven't the breath for any more poking and prodding.

"Amy, I don't know what else to do."

"There is nothing else," I say.

"It sounds like you've given up," says Mom.

I don't say anything.

"I think the Devil has gotten a hold of you," she says.

I go to physical therapy.

I sit in a beige chair with my hood over my head. People pass by me in bright, blinding colors. They chat cheerfully. I am certain I will be dead in a week. After so long, I figure that the pain has to end.



nonfiction

37



sand



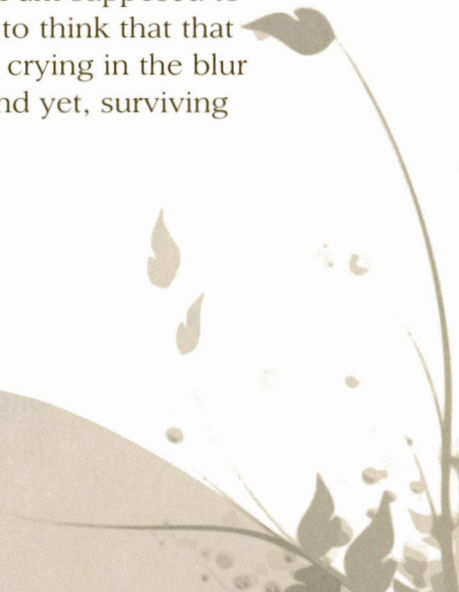


“Amy?” says a petite, red-headed woman.

I halfway raise my hand. She introduces herself as Jen Peterson. She says my mother has told her all about me. She touches my head and asks me where it hurts. She rubs the sore spots in a circular motion and then pulls the scalp at different angles and asks if it feels better. She calls this “releasing trigger points.” When she is done, she puts ice on my head and offers her home to me for the weekend, to knock out my migraine. I’m so scared and confused by the hospitality and friendliness that I don’t say anything. I don’t really take it as a serious offer until later when she brings it up again.

After a week with Jen, I go back to school. I step out of the numb daydream and back into the world. Jen and I work on my head for months. I cut out “trigger foods” such as pickles, nuts, and large amounts of sugar. I start walking and jogging. After a year and a half, my pain level is zero. I stop seeing Jen.

The migraine episode caused brain damage. I don’t remember anything that I am supposed to be studying in school. It’s hard to think that that puppet girl was me. Screaming, crying in the blur of death is a distant memory. And yet, surviving was nothing less than rebirth.



Pieces of Home

Casse Surface

This is where my roots lie,
soaking up small town ideals.
Raised among cowboys and cattle,
I grew up reaching for the open sky,
running around barefoot,
skin dark from the summer sun.
I never imagined
I'd come to resent this place.

A homemade patchwork quilt wraps around
me, smelling of strawberry muffins,
hot from the oven,
newly mown grass,
and the lilac bush below my bedroom window.

I grew up in a town
where the local teenagers
loiter in the parking lot
of the supermarket. They soak up nicotine and
alcohol and crash on back roads to nowhere.
I'm the abnormality.
I want more than marriage at eighteen, five
kids by twenty-three.

My roots are suffocating under nicotine clouds,
and drowning in the alcohol rain.

poetry

39



surface



Wasted Generations

Rhea Amos

I asked,
“What’s black and white and red all over?”
You said,
“Charlie Chaplin in a blender.”
That’s you, I suppose.
Lipstick stains your yellow teeth
as your fingers spread like bird’s wings
across the faded blue tablecloth.
From the kitchen window,
cars putter away.
You laugh at the dreamers,
and I am a dreamer
so you laugh at me.
Your head tilts back,
disenchanted,
far away,
in some lonely place
where the curtains smell like
bonfire smoke.

poetry

40



amos



Photography

by Emily Petrie

petrie photography

41



petrie



Surreptitious Santa

petrie photography

42




petrie



Chica Camaraderie



petrie  43 photography

Dirty, Sexy, Mystery Man



petrie 44 photography

Lion's Mane




photography

45



petrie

Virtuoso of Venice

petrie  46 photography



Mary Poppins, The Younger Years




petrie photography

47



petrie

Revolving Cadence

petrie  48 photography





Augusta County, 1930

Brooke Shippee

He beat the mines like
diamonds existed there,
under the hills.

He didn't come home
for lunch
that day when
Little Bo fell off a ladder
and spilled his forehead
across the kitchen floor.

We cleaned the spot with paint thinner
and the smell stuck to my nose
and ran down my face like mucus,
hit my lips and stung with salt.
The whole house was stained.
The neighbors knew, and we let the county knock
on our door
for days. He let the kitchen table fill with pies.

After,
he quit the caves
and blamed himself when
our house in Augusta
went up in smoke.

poetry

49

shippee

Say, it's all my fault,
all my fault,
all his fault
now.



My fingers still smelled of turpentine
when we pulled away
in the V-8, and I sat with my
sister on suitcases that caved in.
We made hats and ropes and necklaces
out of my dead mother's scarves.

We hit the plains, and,
soon enough,
the dust came, and my aunt cursed in her letters.

What is better:
blackened breath or grit
in our mouths?





Burning Fingertips

Summer Crosby

She says that the memories burn like hell and the only way she can escape the pain is to cut off one of her fingers.

I watched her do it once. We sat outside on the beach behind her house. All the windows were boarded, except for the one that looked out from the kitchen. The porch dropped down from the house to a beaten trail of crushed pebbles leading to a fire pit.

She lit a match and tossed it into the pit littered with ashes, dried skin, and twigs. I poured a cup of gasoline onto the flames as the blaze illuminated her eyes. She said she felt giddy, unafraid.

Without warning, she drove her left pointer finger deep into the heart of the fire.

"It doesn't hurt," she promised, tears stifled at the back of her throat. "Not as much as it should."

"You should try it sometime," she suggested, rotating the bright, red appendage, roasting it to a crisp. The nerve must have been dead, for all she did was choke a little as the white bone began to show through. "It's really not that bad."

I was numb, unable to move. We were both wearing matching gray men's sweatshirts that we

fiction

51



crosby

stole from Wal-Mart the night before. My lank, brunette locks were pulled back into a loose bun. She didn't care as much. Her dirty blonde hair fell across her thin shoulders.

I told her that I was not interested and rubbed my own thumbs together against the cold. In truth, I wanted to try it, but I'm not that reckless.

Her world was quickly becoming more seductive. I found it disturbing that she invited me to hang out with her more yet, at the same time, I was honored.

I wasn't fond of drinking and drugs, but over time, I picked up the habit. Some mornings, I woke up unsure of what I'd touched the night before. But then, I was joyful because, for a brief moment, I wasn't conscious of my life.

My foster parents weren't happy. The school called each time I was late to class or a test grade slipped below a B. They screamed at me, while I sat in bed with my purple paisley blanket over my head. They wanted to know why I was flunking history.

My foster dad's a lawyer and my foster mom an accountant. I provided them a way to give back to their community, to make them feel like they were spending their money on something worthwhile. They thought they could change someone's life, influence them to become something more than they are.



fiction

52



crosby



I don't know why they tried. I almost wished that they'd put me in a kennel with other unwanted misfits. When I talked to her about it, she explained that humans don't want to appear to devalue other human lives.

It didn't take me long to learn when to walk out, and soon, they didn't bother with me anymore. I succeeded in pushing them away like all the others. They wouldn't send me off; they're too moral for that.

She only had three fingers left on her right hand, four on her left. After I watched her in the act again, I asked when she might stop, get help and become normal again, like the rest of us. She looked at me, disgusted.

In history class, we sat in the back row, unwelcome up front with the pricks, or in the middle of the room with the brains. The side rows were for the nerds and freaks.

"No one's normal," she complained. "Welcome to my fucked up world. I've lived through tragedy. Don't bitch to me about your awful, preppy life. No one gets me; no one's normal. Some of us are just more wounded than others."

She flashed me her missing finger. The welt was bandaged. She was still hung over from last night, and she babbled about how school dragged on forever.

"Is the pain gone?"





“Tap it with a pen or something,” she taunted.
“Go ahead.”

I did, curious. She shook her head, smiling. I wasn’t sure what there was to be proud of, but as long as she was happy.

“It works every time.”

She said it took a steak knife to remove the bone. “Damn thing wouldn’t fall off.”

Three days later, she came to school and told me about a recurring memory. The bastard thing wouldn’t leave her alone. The memories popped into her head like unwanted strangers at a party.

“I’m not sure I understand,” I said, pulling textbooks from my desk. “Why don’t we try a party tonight instead?” I was sickened by the thought of having to watch her burn off another finger. “What do you think?”

She flipped her hair and agreed.

The party was across the river at a new guy’s house. It wasn’t so much for the popular crowd as it was for the “non-clones.” The property was in shambles. The house was falling in and there were holes in the floor.

“At least there’s alcohol,” she commented.

I didn’t respond. When the host’s somber eyes caught mine, I looked away, uncomfortable.

“You should be a whore tonight. It’s something I used to try when drugs failed to take the edge off,” she said. She took a glass of wine from the



table, then slumped off on her own.

The mysterious stranger who hosted the party asked me if I had a curfew.

“No,” I said and he invited me to his bedroom.

I turned down a beer and pushed away a handful of white pills. I wasn’t sure what I wanted. I was sweating as I let him touch me. Through the broken glass, I could see her blurred outline. She was drinking, laughing loudly with some shady looking characters. And there were drugs.

Wanting to be able to let go of what I cared about, I let him take advantage of me, but the entire time I was crying and thinking of her. I told myself, I was better, sober. A part of me was conscious. I was able to defend us if something more should happen.

Later, after I left, I found her passed out underneath the stars. She moaned, flopping onto her side into a sagging heap.

“What? Is it six o’clock?”

“Way past,” I answered. “You don’t have a curfew do you?”

“My mom is probably doped up too.”

“What’d you take?” I asked.

“Hell if I know. I should have cut off another finger tonight.”

I barely made it to school the next day, and when I saw her strolling into third period, I was happy to find out that she hadn’t burnt off another



finger. I also noticed that she hadn't changed her clothes.

She said that the washing machine broke and her mother called some half-ass man to fix it. She complained about her headache and about the half-assed man who broke the dryer, too.

I don't suppose the teachers cared much for either our apathy or our enthusiasm as we moved through their classes; all that mattered was that we were present. I imagined that they had their own problems.

"That's just it," she told me, trying to explain a newly sketched out theory. "Why do we come here if no one cares? The only reason I'm here is to prove that no one cares, but if no one's listening, what am I proving?"

Later, we hung out at our lockers, our hips pressed against the cold steel doors. I was curious. I asked, "How does your mother react when you use a knife to cut the bone from your dead finger?"

She told me that I really needed to get help. I was confused. I reminded her that I wasn't the one who burned off fingers. I told her that she should find help. She didn't take my advice. In fact, she wasn't even listening. She stared blankly down the hallway.

I never knew what she was thinking. I struggled constantly to know what was going on in her head. But I couldn't figure her out. Rather, I stared off in my own direction, wondering what I'd be thinking



if I were her.

She began asking me if she'd influenced my behavior. At first, I didn't answer, but I was never good with being pestered. I didn't plan on cutting her out of my life.

"I'm curious, that's all. Only curious."

I didn't want her to call attention to my mistakes. I didn't want her to know that deep inside there was a twinge of regret forming around some choices. As I turned to pick up a pencil, a slip of paper fell from my folder.

"What's this?" she asked, unfolding it.

I shrugged.

She read my list aloud. "The worst phrases in life: 'you always have a choice,' 'life goes on,' 'it gets better.'"

"Fuck. Why are you doing this?"

"I've been seeing a counselor."

"Why?"

"Fosters. Can't push the envelope too much."

"'Time heals all wounds.' The counselor got you to write down that one too? Why are you going? You think it'll get better?" she demanded.

"No."

"You want to become someone else, don't you? A prep? A nerd, maybe?"

"I don't want to be anybody."

"You're getting ready to leave the only real friend you have ever had. God, I knew you



wouldn't last." She crumbled the list into a wad. "You should add the following: 'things change,' 'nothing stays the same.' That's classic."

I managed to piss her off again. She mumbled to herself before turning to me. "Aren't you going to leave?"

"Will you braid my ponytail?" I asked.

She did, tying it off with a black rubber band from around her wrist.

"Thanks," I said in a whisper, fearing that I'd upset her again.

"You didn't answer my question. Aren't you going to leave?"

I answered her with the only thing I could say: "Not if you're still hurting."

"My mom finally took me to the hospital. Said something like she was neglecting me if she didn't. Since I've burned off some of my fingers or whatever. She said she could be sued. I suppose that's why she finally took me in. A doctor bill costs less than a lawyer."

"She could end up in jail," I said. "I'm surprised. What did the doctors say to you?"

We were in the library for study hall.

"They told me that I was malnourished, and I told them not to ask about my six fingers."

The door to the library slammed. A freshman-looking student smiled sheepishly before walking back toward the tables.



“Doesn’t anybody know how to hold onto the door so it doesn’t slam?” she yelled.

“Be quiet, fruitcake!” someone responded.

“Why don’t you come over here and make me?” she challenged.

I sank down into my chair. I didn’t want to be affiliated with her so I pretended to read.

Her chair scraped along the wooden floor. The study hall monitor told her to sit down, but she refused and continued toward the wrestler who insulted her. When the monitor threatened her with a visit to the principal’s office, she muttered, “Last place I want to be.”

I glanced at her, the wrestler, then her again, and finally the study hall monitor. I didn’t want to say anything. Nobody would hear, but I wanted to take her side.

She caught my eye. I shook it off, swallowing the dry taste in my mouth. When I looked up again, she was still staring at me.

“What?”

“Why do you hang out with me?” she asked.

I bit my tongue as I struggled to answer.

Over the next week, she avoided me. When we did get together, she ranted about how I’d taken advantage of her. I didn’t understand. Another finger was gone, and I was mad at myself for not being there to stop her.

I trailed after her for several minutes as she





walked around the parking lot, waiting for the late bus. She finally quit asking me to leave. After we dropped our bags on the ground, we sat on the bleachers outside the baseball diamond. Suddenly she stood and stared silently through the chain-link fence.

“It’s raining,” she finally said. “Can you see it?”

“What?”

She told me she was no longer on the school grounds, but on a street filled with all the gleaming white hospitals she’d been to over the years. The vision disturbed her. I could only stand beside her and see what was really there—cars carrying their passengers home from work.

As she spoke, and I forgot to care, my own grip on reality slackened, and I began to see the very scene that she described.

The first hospital she saw was the worst. It was where she was born.

The second resembled the clinic her father took her to after she was bitten by a dog. The third was where he took her for a broken leg.

The fourth hospital brought back the memory of her first concussion from falling off a horse. The fifth, another fall. That time, though, she was lucky. Just a sprained thumb. At the sixth, they put a plaster cast on her arm. Again, her father was there.

The seventh, they treated her for a locked jaw. The shot they gave her to relieve the tension



made her sleepy and knocked her out for several seconds. Then, her dad was sick, too.

The eighth hospital she went to was where she saw him dead. Her mother took her to the ninth after the ambulance failed to show.

“That’s where it happened.”

“What?” I asked softly, afraid to intrude. “What happened?”

“I touched his fingers. His cold fingers. Can’t you feel it?”

I wanted to say yes. I wanted to tell her that every detail was as clear to me as it was for her. “I’m sorry, no.”

I upset her. She swore she’d claim another finger tonight, maybe two. I apologized for several minutes, but I don’t think she heard my voice. I think she’s still trapped on that street, with no signs, only doctors clad in white. They are waiting to diagnose her, open her up, and implant into her head the same glimpse of hope residing within everyone else.

Out of guilt, I followed her home. The glass in the kitchen window was cracked; her mother was probably responsible. All the times I’ve been here, I haven’t seen her up close, only an obscured face spying down on us.

“Just ignore her,” she called. “I always do.”

I followed her down to the low edges of the riverbank. Frogs were croaking; the air smelled musty and felt damp on my skin. The crickets sang



their own strange tune in the background. I told her of the nasty competition I envisioned between the crickets and frogs, but she's not interested.

"Fine," I invited, nesting down in the sand. "I suppose the frogs win anyway. In a perfect world, they're dominating."

"The crickets are more beautiful; strength means nothing."

She set the sticks. I poured the gasoline. The fire cast its ugly shadow across the sand. She burned off her fifth finger, and, for an unknown reason, I killed one of mine.



fiction

62



crosby





Eating Dust

Kat Thomas

Five-years Ago, an Interview with Margaret
Gumpton

Five years ago? Well, five years ago we were sitting pretty. Eddie was sick, but tweren't nuthin'.

We seen it before that cough. He shake his little chest, rattle it like a can full of pebbles. The small kind in the stream we played in down the road before this drought. Not like them on the road. The hunks of leftover quarry rock. They ain't no good; hurt your feet if you ain't careful. Eddie's eyes would 'bout pop out of his head, but like I said tweren't nuthin'.

Five years ago, though. Ain't anything left from that long ago. The ground's all dried up. No good for farmin'. Leasts that's what they're sayin'. I can't remember the last time we had a good crop. All I can see is dirt. Gets in your eyes, scrapes 'em up if you ain't careful. Can't send them children outside without them coming back powdered up and brown.

My daddy used to plant down the road, even after I married Buddy. He kept plantin' until he died. Mama went before him. They said it was the heat that shriveled her up. I don't know about that. But by the time we found her, she was all crumpled on herself like one of them frogs that the kids brought back and kept in a jar. Forgot to feed it, and it dried up, crusty like Mama.





Mama and Daddy died before this. Like I was sayin' Mama looked all crusted up in the kitchen. Nobody found her 'til I went over to help with dinner. It was Buddy's birthday, and we were gonna to do it right. Mama was gonna help me make a sweet potato cake. I already had the chicken made, and Maria, one of our neighbors, was makin' her cornbread. She called it jalapeno cornbread, something her grandma used to make in Mexico. Tasted good, and Buddy liked it. That's all that mattered.

Anyway, me, not being the cook Mama was, I went over to get help on that cake. I remember climbing the step to the back door, the wooden boards creaking under me, thinking I was pregnant with Sandy then. Mama was just layin' there with egg on her dress. Must have fallen off the counter when she hit the ground.

Then Daddy went. His heart gave out in the field. Comin' back for lunch from harvest. He had to get that wheat to market. Never made it back, though. I was cookin' up something good for him too.

Mama and Daddy were long gone before all this happened.

You know what I've always wondered? Why didn't those men in their slick, cheap-trick suits not see this comin'? I mean that was their job, right?



I can't say this wouldn't have happened, but honestly, instead of figurin' this mess out, they tossed themselves out the windows of their spit-shined skyscrapers? Thought they could fly or somethin'.

How we doin' now?

We're survivin', everyone's survivin'. I guess it'd be about three years since Maria's man took a shotgun to their children, then killed himself. Six children. The youngest wasn't even three. After the bodies were buried, she went back to that house and hung herself across that field.


Yep, most folks have tried to get out of here. Ain't nuthin' much left. It's tough, you know. Kids keep growing, and I'm gonna have to feed them. Don't know how much more work I can find if folks keep getting the hell up outta here.

Buddy? It don't matter what Buddy's doin'. Ain't got nothin' to do with us.

Like I was sayin', life got tough. And now I'm livin' here, tryin' to figure out how Sandy and Eddie are gonna eat. What happens if work goes away and I can't feed 'em?

There are people in this world right now who don't know what it's like sending their children to bed with that hunger-hole in their belly. They just read about Mr. Roosevelt and what he's gonna do, not really givin' a damn one way or another, because they got shoes on their feet and they don't have to worry about chunks of Texas tearin' them up when they walk down the road. They got their houses that ain't bleachin' or breakin' under the sun. And them and their children got their clothes. And those ladies of them houses don't have to patch up a dress they stole off their neighbor's body before she dropped six feet under.





No, those ladies ain't the only one left after their man grabbed the next train to California "looking for work." Yeah, Buddy ran. He ran so he didn't have to look at us, hollowed eye and hungry. He ran cause he couldn't take us looking at him, hoping he'd take care of us.

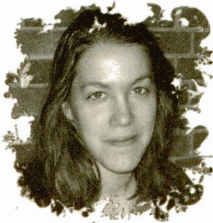
No, these people don't know. Eatin' dirt every time I walk to the store to weasel some food out of a owner by showin' a little leg. One day, I think I'm gonna have to show more, but not now and that's all that matters.

Yep, five years ago tweren't nothing, I would wake up next to Buddy, feed my children, visit my neighbor. See, somewhere between then and now life got tough. I tell my kids it'll be over soon. It'll be all right. But darlin', just between you and me, it ain't gonna end now or anytime soon. I don't tell them kids though. There ain't no reason to tell 'em, not now. Not when they're gonna figure it out later. Later seems harder to get to than before, but maybe we'll get there, covered in dirt and tired as hell, but maybe we'll get there.

Contributors' Notes



Rhea Amos majors in theater at Stephens College. She is a member of the Warehouse Theater Company and an understudy in *Fuddy Meers*. "Wasted Generations" is her first publication.



Olivia Anderson, a junior digital film major and creative writing minor, is a new member of Sigma Tau Delta. She is actively involved in the Stephens film department and has received the department's Rising Star Award. "Enraptured" is her first publication. The poem was inspired by a warm summer night in Georgetown, Texas, her hometown.



Jessica Church is a junior majoring in graphic design with a minor in mass media. She has been a member of Creative Ink, a student-run marketing firm on campus, for two years and has designed for the Citizen Jane Film Festival. This is her first magazine design.



A senior at Stephens College, Summer Crosby will graduate with a B.S. in mass media with an emphasis in print. She enjoys journalism, creative writing, reading science fiction and all things horses. After graduation, Summer plans to pursue a career in equine journalism and to publish a novel. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



Isabeau Dasho is a senior creative writing major at Stephens College. During the summer of 2008, she traveled throughout Europe with the program Semester at Sea, an experience which deeply informs her writing. Isabeau is vice president of Sigma Tau Delta and a contributing writer for the radio soap opera *Dear Donnybrook*.



Natalie Hank, a senior with a major in marketing and a minor in creative writing, is from O'Fallon, Missouri. She is a member of both Sigma Tau Delta and Sigma Sigma Sigma. After graduating from Stephens College in December 2009, she plans on getting a masters degree. She enjoys painting, singing, and spending time with her friends and family.



Rachel Henderson is a senior majoring in creative writing and a member of Sigma Tau Delta. She plays basketball and runs cross-country for the Stephens Stars. She is also active in Overflow. Her poetry has appeared in *Relief Journal*. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



Lydia Lane, a sophomore digital film major, aspires to write and direct films that will make people re-examine their lives in a beneficial way. This is her first publication.



Ciara McCormack is a freshman dance major and creative writing minor from Goehner, Nebraska and Burlington, Vermont. At Stephens, she is involved with Campus Life Unleashed, Dance Collaborations, and the Honors House Plan. Ciara believes that the best things in life are rainbows, hugs, and good poetry. "Gypsies" is her first publication.

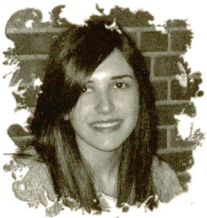




Emily Petrie, a sophomore creative writing major and music minor, is vice president of Student Ambassadors. She was born and raised in Los Angeles and was introduced to photography at a young age. Her photography focuses on interesting milieus.



A junior from Blair, Nebraska, Amy Sand is majoring in creative writing and minoring in graphic design. She serves as junior class vice president, public relations chair for Sigma Tau Delta, and a writer/producer for the radio soap opera *Dear Donnybrook*. Her awards include the Venus Award for mass media and Counselor of the Week. In the future, Amy plans on being funny. "Blur" is Amy's first nonfiction publication.



Brooke Shippee is a senior creative writing major. Her fiction and poetry have appeared in *elementia*, *Penpoint* and *The Southwestern Review*. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta, a Stephens Sister, and the A&E editor of *Stephens Life*. This is her first publication in *Harbinger*.



Casse Surface is a junior creative writing major. She is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and a writer for the radio soap opera drama *Dear Donnybrook*. This is her first publication.

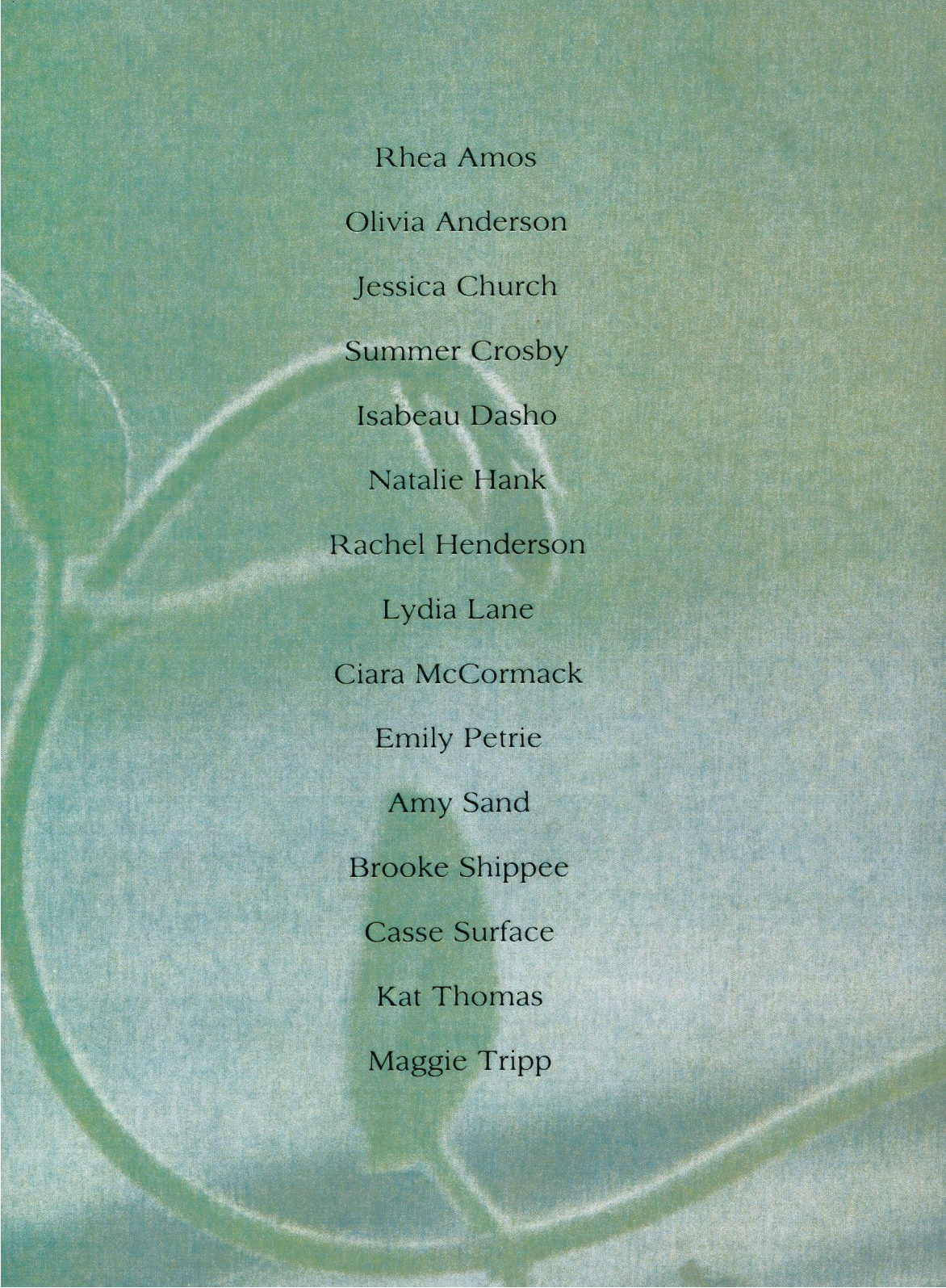


Kat Thomas is a senior creative writing and broadcasting double major from Celina, Texas. She is active in the Stephens community, serving as both the Student Government President and the Sigma Tau Delta President. She enjoys reading Dorothy Allison, Tony Morrison, and any work of poetry or spoken word.



Maggie Tripp majors in theater at Stephens College. She is the dramaturge for the Warehouse Theater Company and is also a board member. She played Grace in *Princess* and will be appearing as the Woman in Queenly Spanish Garb in an upcoming production of *Chamber Music*. This is Maggie's first publication.





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