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The Clarion

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—Lucy Sandin

Broken Things

My existence is an odd thing
I was not created in the traditional
Not by conception between a man and a woman
I was, in fact, created by a mind
By a mind pushed to the end
Time and time again
Until it broke of course
Perhaps cracked is more accurate
And I was created
A pointless attempt by it
To heal itself
But I suppose broken things
Can only create other broken things
The body looked over at me and sighed
"What's wrong?" it asked
I merely looked at it and smiled
It scowled
"Well, are you go to say anyhting or not?"
It demanded
I continued to smile
The people nearby were starting to look at it
It finally became unnerved by my smile
My smile that was now a bit to sharp
"Will you quit grinning like that?"
It begged
My smile was now full of teeth
The people nearby finally spoke up
"Who are you talking to?"
They asked
He said he was talking to me
He got more and more hysteric as they insisted I did not exist
As he was dragged away kicking and screaming
I laughed

-Danielle Moyer

My World

Like the sun,
even on the cloudiest of days,
managing to breakthrough and
brighten my day.
Like the drums in the music,
which would be nothing without the beat.
Like sparkling water,
bubbling like butterflies
dancing in my stomach.
Like a scar that stays with me,
never seeming to leave
or fade away.
Like a palm tree,
bending in the breeze,
leaves flowing without a care
in the world.
Like the curtains that are
slowly opening,
allowing me to see the
secrets of the world.

-Claudia L'abbe



Bennett Hight



Murder

-Andrea Bryant

Indecision

How should I start?

What devices should I use if any?

How should I present the chosen subject?

What perspective should I take?

What do you think?

How should I set up the spacing,

The lines, the words?

What font should I use,

Cambria, Times Roman, or Ariel?

How should I convey the meaning of the chosen subject,

Through imagery, feeling, or some of both?

What will the reaction of the audience be?

What do you think?

Well, I need to make a decision. I don't have all day.

Still, I shouldn't rush it.

I need a subject.

What do you think?

I can't decide

-Bennett Hight

Untitled

Here I sit on a plane so clustered,
thrown into a seat I need not be in.
For flights delay, and so does love.
I should have left, not hours, but days ago.
Business will call in the worst of times,
when one yearns for a "yes".
Luggage is lost, with the ring,
but boss states he's the king.
Endless meetings, patience, running low.
The unease of it all sets into place,
What if this is all for nothing, what if she says no.
I sit back in the only suit I have to wear.
A stranger, friendly as can be, chats wit me.
He sees my distress, and comforts with words,
"Some secrets can only be told to strangers"
These are the words that let me see,
Through the fog of anxiety,
Till I say, "Will you marry me?"

-Jordan Grotz



-Willow Razza

I'm Scared

I'm scared:
Of being buried.
Of spiders.
Of losing things.
Of losing my dreams.
That I'm a seventeen year old has been.
Of never being good enough for me.
Of never being good enough for you.
That I can't trust you with my heart...
Trust.
Trust.
Trust,
Never trust.
Always fear.
Fear like a snake with an iron grip,
Not fear like a roller coaster, fear like a punch in the
heart.
Fear, fear, fear.
Im scared of living in fear.

-Alec Fisher



-Min Wu

I Do Not Fear the Dark

Lately, I wake up at 3:03 in the morning. I shoot my body up like I had just woken up from a nightmare. Cold and sweaty, I look around the darkness of my room. Everything is still and quiet. So quiet it could drive a sane person into a whirl of endless psychotic thoughts. What is behind my door, what lies within the black stillness of my little room. My eyes start playing tricks on me. The clothes in my closet have suddenly turned into figures of all different sizes. The trophies on my shelves have turned into jars that look to have something inside. My stuffed animals at the foot of my bed which have smiles during the day, turn to twisted looks at night. Scared of what my mind has turned my belongings into, I turn over in bed hide under my covers. I am paralyzed. I do not fear the dark. It's my brain that I fear.

-Kelsey Grant



-Asher Strickland

Alive

So quick. So sudden. So afraid. From head to toe the fear washed over me. I was floating. The choices that had to be made in a matter of seconds were overwhelming. There was no time to swim to shore. No time to catch the wave. No time to even be rescued.

Hopelessness.

It was all a blur: people yelling at me from the beach- the steady crash of the waves- my surfboard slapping the water. My heart raced. The wave came closer, and closer. It was pulling me. It was bigger than I had ever seen before. I regretted my decision to surf the waves the hurricane had brought. It was supposed to be fun. Now I was going to die. The surf was already giant and strong, but this wave was a massive wall of gray. I started shaking. Fear was my worst nightmare and it was becoming a reality. It came closer. It was useless to swim away. In a matter of moments I would be underwater. The wave began curling. I stood on my board, hoping I could catch the wave. Maybe this nightmare would turn out okay. It crashed and I tumbled. Then it was dark.
But I was alive

-Katherine Randall

This Ends Tonight

As Tulus lit the pile of oil-covered wood ablaze, we saw figures from Colner Street start to charge towards us. We still couldn't tell who they were, but then Janin yelled from the rooftops that they were Korians. We stood no chance against them. We had already been separated from the rest of our group, who were most likely in small skirmishes all around the city by this point. If we stayed to hold our position though this would be much less of a skirmish, but a one sided massacre. We decided to fall back and collapse three of the surrounding buildings to slow the Korians down but we knew they would catch us fast if we didn't act now. I couldn't believe how deceived I had been in the lone towns. Out there we saw the Korians republished as heroes. I wanted to join their ranks, striving to be like my uncle. I was poorly mistaken. They're corrupt and evil I see now why my uncle disappeared all those years ago. What they've done to the surface and the people who try and live there. Just wrong, that's what it is. Now we stand with Tulus a warrior from the

surface part of a peaceful empire that has defended themselves from the Korians for decades. A war we never knew existed. Lies that's all the republic has ever been.

This ends tonight though; this attack has been planned out for the past year there is no way we can lose. As I we were running down the streets towards the Spire of Dust, Janin who was running across the rooftops above us stopped and yelled in horror, "The sky shield is down!" We looked up as the sky filled with lights falling, racing towards the city. I couldn't believe it, the skies fell on Ventious once again...

-Asber Strickland



-Deblia Mitchell-Gray

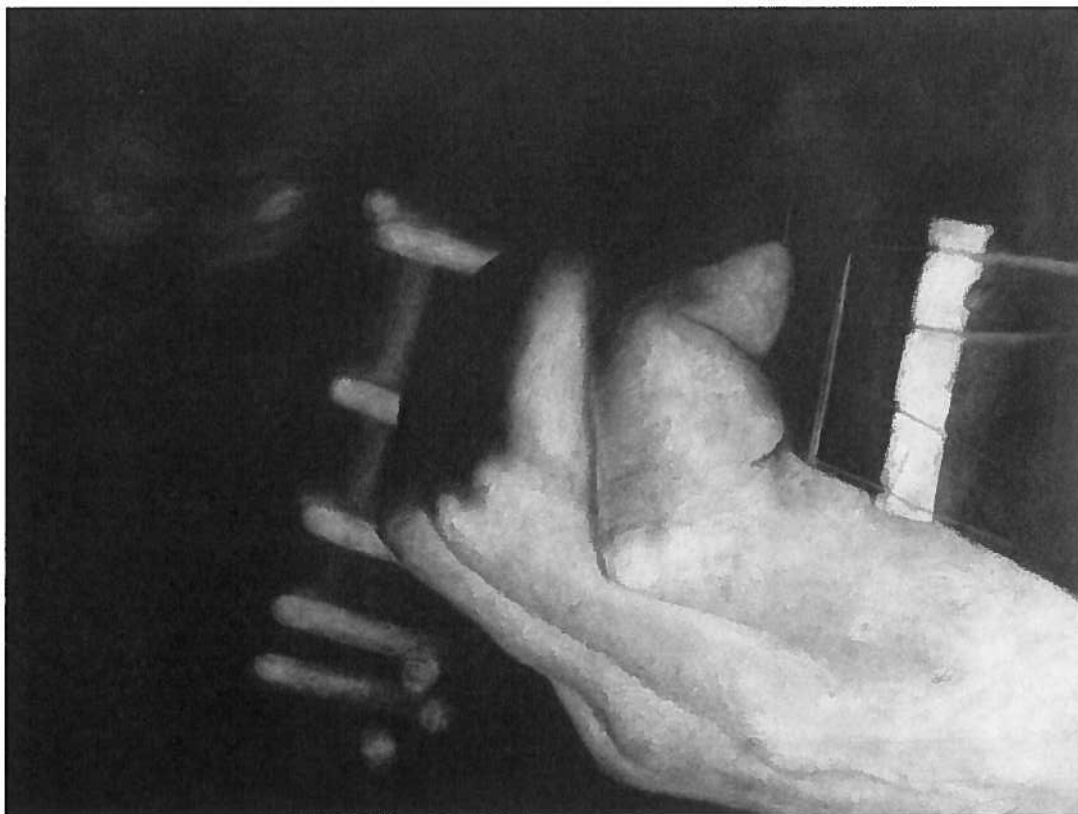
I Can Shine

Chills. Flashes. A fluttering unsteadiness in my stomach. I just stand. It's no big deal; tons of people have already finished. But I can't even start. My vision gets fuzzy. I pause and wait for it to clear. The butterflies are killed by a cold invading weight. Deep breaths are not helping. I'm not going to be able to do this. What is fear? It's just an instinct. A thought. But fear is strong. It's taking over. I can't. I just can't. My hands are cold. My emotions seem to mess with the temperature. But really they're messing with my head. My knees shake. Knocking knees? It's not just a made up expression. Fear is manipulating my thoughts. What happened to 'I can do it'? 'I can do it' was broken by the fear.

I can't get rid of fear. It will always be there to hold me back.

A little thought speaks up. I don't have to get rid of fear. I will always be there to fight back. My emotions conflict. Fear wants me to hide. But I can do it in spite of fear. I can shine.

-Rachel Hollen



-Perrin Davidson

Over the Crest

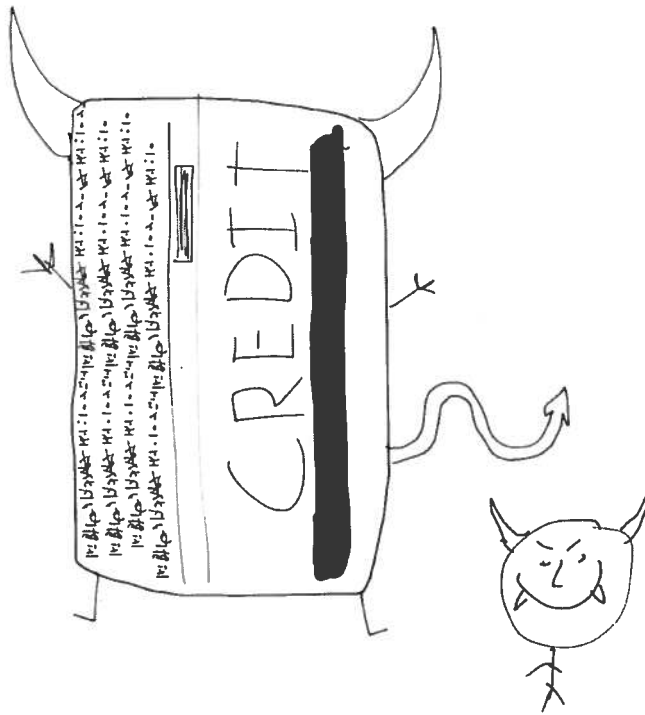
Over the crest, and into the fray we go
Into the friends falling around you, the blood spurting, the flash of the gun,
The plumes of smoke, trees splintering, mounds of earth erupting from the mortars,
The smile of a broken man, the sobbing of a grieving one over a fallen comrade,
The sullen look of those who know that death is upon them
Yet still we go over the crest and into the fray
Into the machine gun rattling, the sound of empty hollow shells hitting the ground
The popping of your clip running out and the solid clank of the new one going in,
The screams of the wounded, the sobbing of the grieving, the blasts of the explosions
ringing your ears,
the drums play a low dark song that echoes the mood
Over the crest and into the fray we go
Where your body tenses, and memories flash before your eyes,
Your family and friends, the reasons you fight,
Then pain, searing hot pain, but the need to keep moving,
Your training comes up in your mind, it's reflex you fire-move-fire,
The tears sting your eyes, then you become very cold
Over the crest and into the fray we go once more
Into the iron taste of blood, of dirt and snow, tree sap in the air,
The coldness of death lies inches from your heart on the tip of your tongue,
The smell of singed hair and burning flesh, of smoke everywhere,
And the musky smell of oiled guns and ammunition being fired
Over the crest to face our fears and fight for those we love

-Maxwell Joseph Heatleo

Hair

In my family everybody's hair varies in their own special way. My dad's hair is a rich black with tiny curls that spring back if pulled. His hair is styled in the traditional African hair cut but with his own twist to it. My hair seems to have a mind of it's own. It can be crazy and frizzy if water gets to it, and it can be messy and always in my face. The only time my hair obeys me is when it becomes tamed by getting "relaxed" at the hair salon. As for my mom, her hair is always submissive, as it stays in a curly white and gray afro showing off that marvelous Cape Verdean style. But, oh, my sister's hair, my wonderful sister and her hair - hundreds of dark, chocolate brown ringlets all over her head. She can pin them back or let them loose. Her hair is soft when it brushes up against your face as you go in for a hug. My sister's hair has to be the craziest out of all my family, but also the most stylish.

-Naomi Williams



-Wylie Holt

You Missed

My wife's face was the only thing I could see in my head that morning as I stood in the elevator. Level 30, 31, 32... I numbly watched the floors tick by. The flashing neon numbers routinely increased by floor and gave me a headache. I waited for level 41 to come up. I could still see the disappointment in her face, the way her shoulders sagged, how she bit her lip like she always does when she's trying to keep from crying.

The elevator doors opened and snapped me back to reality. A man was getting off on level 40. He shuffled out and everyone in the elevator repositioned themselves, quickly consuming the extra room. The doors shut and it seemed to me that the elevator took forever to get to the next floor. I was restless and unfocused and needed to get off right now.

Finally, the neon lights lit up with number 41. I scooted out of the elevator and onto the work floor.

"Good morning, Jack," our secretary, Valerie, greeted. I gave a half-hearted wave and kept moving towards my office.

Upon entering my room, I saw a pile of papers stacked on my desk. I dropped my briefcase onto a nearby chair and sighed. Typical workday, what a typical workday. Nothing changes. Happy Monday to me.

I sat down in my chair and turned on my computer. As I waited for it to power on, I looked around my office. Everything was the same, just as I'd left it on Friday, yet everything looked different, too. Funny how things can really change your perspective sometimes. The weekend began to replay in my head again. Saturday morning excitement, the air filled with light hearted chatter as my wife and I drove in the car. The promise, the hopes, the dreams, not yet shattered. Then the doctor's office, nervous yet happy, so innocent and unsuspecting of the news that would come in such a short amount of time.

The phone rang, waking up my wandering mind. "Hello?" I answered.

"Hey Jack, how are you? Look, did you get the papers left on your desk on Friday after you left? Yeah, I need you to read those asap. Oh, and please write down your reactions, you know, suggestions, comments, that kind of stuff, as you go. Could you have that done by the end of the day? That would be great. Thanks so much."

"Sure, boss. I'll give them to Valerie as soon as I'm done. You're just out of state for the day, right?"

"Yeah, yeah, it's not a big deal. I'll be back tomorrow. Yeah, give them to Val, that'd be great. I'll check over them first thing tomorrow. Thanks again." Click. He was gone.

I hung up the phone and rifled through my desk drawer for an empty notepad to write on. Finding it buried between folders, I grabbed it and plopped it down on the desk. The empty sheets of paper suddenly seemed daunting. I stared at them feeling unsettled and tired.

My mind wandered back to the weekend again. I saw myself with my wife in the doctor's office, waiting, hopeful, expectant. I saw the doctor run the tests, then once more, as if the first results couldn't have been right. But they were. I saw the look on his face, felt that drop in my stomach that you feel when you know something bad is about to happen. His words played back in my head again. I replayed the same scene I'd been replaying all morning, the one I saw in the elevator. Seeing my wife so devastated, so crushed, and feeling that way myself.

Upset, I ripped off a piece of paper from the blank notepad and crumpled it into a ball. Aiming at the trashcan, I dejectedly threw the ball over. Miss. I ripped off another piece and tried again. Miss.

"You missed!"

"I know."

"But you never miss."

"I know." I didn't have to look over at the door to know who I was talking to.

"Are you okay, Jack?"

I sighed, pulled my empty gaze away from the trash can, and looked over at my friend standing in the doorway. "How long have you been standing there?" I asked him.

He stepped into the room and leaned himself against the wall. "Not long, I just watched you miss that shot." He glanced over at the trash can and saw the crumpled balls on the floor. "Or... two shots, I guess." He came closer, moved my briefcase off the chair, and sat in it. Our eyes were level now and looked at me intently. "Something but really be getting to you if you missed those two shots. Man, you never ever miss. Tell me what's going on."

I ran my hand through my hair and shook my head, wondering how to tell my friend the news. He sat in the chair patiently waiting, and I knew I just had to spit it out. I told him about the weekend, the appointment, the news. How my wife wasn't the same since then, how she moped around all weekend. All Saturday afternoon, all Saturday night, all Sunday. The silent car ride home. How the news just broke her, broke me. How she cried in the bathroom when she didn't think I could hear her. The thoughts about the life we could've had, the life we'd been planning, and how it was going to take both of us some time to get over this. The way everything just seemed to have a black lining around it now.

I could hear my friend apologizing; I could hear the pity and sympathy in his voice. But I'd become numb. It was almost like speaking the words suddenly made the situation even more real. It felt like I had to reprocess the situation all over again, it felt like I was reopening the cut that wasn't even close to healed yet.

"Jack..." I heard my friend get out of his chair, heard his footsteps walking around the desk, felt his presence close to me. I looked up and saw him there. Instinctively, I stood up and accepted his open arms. I felt his hand pat my back, then felt him break away from the hug. "Jack, I'm here for you. I'm sorry, I know this is tough."

And in that moment, that was exactly what I needed. A friendly embrace, a loyal friend, someone to speak to. Someone who wasn't going through the same thing I was, someone other than my wife, someone from the outside to bring me up. It was amazing how much better I felt, and I suddenly knew that, somehow, everything would be okay again soon.

"Come on, Jack, let's go get a coffee from Starbucks real quick. On me," he continued.

"That's sounds good, sounds like just what I need. I...", I started, but couldn't find the words. "Thanks, man, really. I appreciate it."

He nodded and we silently walked out of the office and into the elevator. As I pressed the ground floor button, the doors shut in front of us. The neon numbers glowed as they began to tick by again, and I eagerly watched them pass by.

-Hayley Steckler

Fear

Honor is endless, but not like the movies
Flags don't flutter, they stand in the dryness
Papers are fate, sealed like a tomb.
Pain is a feeling so lock it down
They say soldiers don't think, they just do
This is pure falsity and the brass hides it well.

Real life is an alley, 12-foot walls
Real life is a corner; their sighs are on it
Real life is your friends; their return trip Arlington

Life is but a dream,
Spielberg's on my side

18 hours of possibilities,
Sprint that hill
Shoot your impossible shot
Trek until your boots break
Press yourself flat, let no mud puddle be brighter
Agony, endless, make it stop
Another day is luck
Another week is a lifetime.

-Elijah McCurdy

I Shop a Lot

I shop a lot.

Which is to say, I shop most of the time. Which is a different way of saying that I have an unhealthy addiction to working all day to buy things that I know full well are unnecessary to my existence. Still, I shop, like how most Americans know the food they eat kills them but eat it anyway.

On this fateful day, I find myself wandering listlessly through my local Macy's. A journey I have made countless times, there is nothing unexpected to greet me here. The perfume still sits exactly where it always sits, enticing me to lighten my pockets. The exact same

bland white and red tiles still sit in a strangely peaceful way in a checkerboard pattern. It reminds me of a calm lake, the light reflecting off the slightly rippled surface. Yeah, I'm a little crazy. Maybe even more than a little crazy, maybe approaching nuts. But hey, that's okay! Picasso was crazy. Rembrandt was crazy. I think. Except I don't paint, I simply willingly add my soul to the hellish wasteland of American consumerism that so gladly receives me. Even now I can picture a large white man with a stomach straining against his cheaply made shirt buttons, rubbing his hands together in a gleeful way, happy to capture me in his spider web. Or maybe it's more of a matrix-y thing.

Matrix or spiders, those shoes just caught my eye. Gold, vaguely sparkly. hanging from a hook in a pristine manner eminent of an untouched fossil that holds the secrets to the evolution of life, waiting quietly for a brilliant person to unearth it from its resting place. These shoes speak to me in the way that I am quite sure paint spoke to Picasso, the way that the universe speaks to Stephen Hawking. They have been waiting for me, I'm sure of it. They could also very well just be shoes, and I could just be crazy. But let's ignore that for now. I rush up to the shoes. Grasping them I almost rip down the entire display, but manage at the last second to hold back. Finally, they reside in my hands.

Hands that numb with shock as I see the price tag, exactly twenty two dollars and forty eight cents more than I have on me. My heart rate slows. I can feel a panic. These shoes want me, and I want them. Like lovers destined to meet against impossible odds, like galaxies fated by the universe to collide in a fiery display of power and starlight, these shoes have greeted me here in this environment of cheaply made things. They have been waiting.

I oblige them.

I can't exactly describe what happened next, as it happened in a blur. A blur similar to what I'm sure a tigress feels when it takes down an antelope. I can recall stuffing the shoes into my purse, looking around nonchalantly, and exiting the store. I can also remember driving away, feeling utterly serene. What I do remember most clearly was the moment I realized I absolutely, utterly and completely loved stealing. It isn't a hobby, it is a career. Like Picasso, I have found my paintbrush. I've found a way to get back a little bit at the fat white man who controls the web. I've found my calling. Tomorrow, it's going to be Macy's again. The day after, I'm thinking something a little more hardcore. A fancy store in the mall, maybe. What I do know is this: those shoes were waiting for me. Like galaxies, we were destined to collide.

I can already hear the click they will make on the Macy's floor tiles tomorrow. I cannot wait.

-Evan Timms

Lucy's Daily Walk

"Please! Please let me go, please," I said.

"Shut up!" He yelled.

"Please, I didn't do anything wrong, please let me go." I screamed at the top of my lungs.

"I said shut up, bitch! Now I am going into town. Try anything, try to leave, and I will find you and I will kill you. Make yourself comfortable, your going to be here for a long time," He said.

My name is Lucy and this man, who ever he is, is my captor. He kidnapped me while I was on my usual stroll from my house to town. The distance is about 3 miles and the terrain is woodland. I had walked about halfway to town when I heard the sound of tires on tar come up behind me. Out of the corner of my eye and, I saw the car slowly coming closer and closer. It was a long black car with big windows that were tinted, too dark to see through. The car slowly came closer and pulled up beside me. The man inside the car moved his hand towards the door. I stopped and watched as the window rolled down to reveal the image of the man inside. This man, he looked to be like the average and nice enough person. He had short black hair, a round face with dark blue eyes and a small pointy nose. He wore a white button up shirt, with a blue and white striped tie. He leaned out the window and asked, "How do you get to town?"

"Just keep following this road and in about a mile and a half you will reach the town," I answered.

"Thanks," he replied.

I turned from him and continued to walk towards town, but he didn't continue on. Instead he had slowly moved off to the side of the road and just sat there. This seemed very strange, but at the time I thought nothing of it and just continued walking on. Red flags went up in the back of my head, so I looked back and saw that he was slowly moving forward. I was not sure what the man was doing so I started to slowly increase my pace to a light jog. We continued moving on like this for a few minutes, but then I heard the tires of his car on the tar coming closer and closer to me. Again I started to pick up my pace from a light jog to a light run. This time there was no slow progression, I could hear him speeding up faster. I looked back for the last time and this time his car was coming straight for me. I went straight to a full on sprint, I had to get away. I don't know what is wrong with this guy, but knew town was not that far ahead. Maybe I could escape into the woods, but I saw steepness to the ditch beside me and knew if I tried running into the woods I would fall and get hurt or get caught. I had to run and keep running, maybe I could get to town, someone there could help me. The tires on the tar made it sound like the

car was getting closer and closer to me, but I couldn't see, I couldn't turn around. If I did I might trip and fall or slow down too much and he might catch me. I had to keep running, just focus on running and maybe I would get away. Closer and closer he came, but why? what was he doing? what did he want from me? I just kept running, focusing on my running I had to get fast, run faster, I need to make it to town. I looked around.

'1 mile to town,' I thought. 'How fast can I run and how long would it take me to get to town? 15 or 12 minutes at best, but that's too long he may catch me he's in a car and I am just running. Why hasn't he caught me by now, I am running and he is in a car. How far back he is I didn't notice, or is he just toying with me? Is he getting some sick thrill out of chasing me?' These thoughts flew through my head as I ran faster and faster. Faster, faster. I looked around again. 'Half a mile 'til town.'

Almost there, just have to go fast I can make it. I couldn't hear the tires anymore. My breath was coming out at too fast of a rate that it muffled all other sounds. Still no escape to the woods beside me, the drop was too great to risk going into. Run, run, run, just focus on running I can make it I am almost there he won't get me. A sound very faint and growing louder rang in my ear, over the sound of my breath. It sound like a car engine, was he that close? I don't know, I can't look back, I have to keep running. I looked around for the last time.

'1/4 of a mile left 'til I get to town.' I looked up over the trees on the right side of the road and there is where I saw the tops of small buildings. I made it, the town I'm safe, or so I thought. The moment I saw the tops of the buildings was the moment I stop focusing on my running. My right foot came down on the tar in front of my left foot. I was not focusing on my running, this made me clumsy and my left foot tripped over my right foot. Down I went, knees scraping, elbows and arms scraping. Light trickle of blood, oozing from my arm. This was the last thing I saw before my head came crashing down on a rock on the side of the road. Then everything went black.

I awoke to darkness. 'Am I dead,' I thought. I was jolted into the air, but my head smashed into a hard surface. A sharp ring went through my head, I felt nauseous, and my head was spinning. It felt as if I was moving, but it was hard to tell because of the ringing that was going through my head. I felt around, and realized I was lying down in a very small space.

'I must be in his car,' this thought scared me. Was I truly in the trunk of his car or is this just a dream. The car slowed down to a complete stop, then there was silence. The silence was broken by the sound of a key turning in a lock. The top of the trunk was opened and light flooded into the dark space. What was going on, I could not see, the light was too bright.

'Where am I? How long was I out? Why is he doing this to me? Will I ever get away?' I thought of these questions over and over again, but no answer came. All I know is that I am now trapped inside this mans house with no means of escape. My hands and feet are bound to a bed and he could return from town any minute.

'I don't know if I can escape, and if I do escape will he ever find me again. Will I ever be safe' my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of car tires on tar and the roaring of his car engine. Two sounds that I will never forget, sounds that will haunt me for the rest of my life. I then heard the sound of keys turning in a lock. I could hear his foot steps as he entered the house. The sound of a door slamming came from a room just outside the room I am in. Lastly I heard his disgusting voice, "Honey, I'm home."

-Chandler Stilkey



-Addie Morang

These Thoughts You Have

When venturing outside during the late hours of the night, when the sky is so dark and the moonlight so dim, there are noises. The scuff of your feet on the pavement, the inhale, exhale of your breath. But what about the other noises?

The cracking branches, long limbs rustling the leaves on the bushes.

When you hear a noise when you're alone late at night, your mind doesn't think that it's just a squirrel. It jumps right to the most fearful images: big black bears with long, jagged claws; snarling wolves just waiting to lunge at your jugular. Vicious creatures, longing to tear you apart.

There are other wolves, too. People waiting to inflict harm on you. When you're all alone in the dark silence of night, no one will be able to help you.

Keep walking fast, you tell yourself. Don't turn around. "They'll never catch me!" You whisper, a mantra that helps you ward off the evils of the world. Regardless, you're still scared.

These thoughts you have? The ones of fear and utter terror that plague your mind when you wander outside during the late hours of the night, when the sky is so dark and the moonlight so dim; thoughts that are inescapable when the trees rustle their lofty leaves and you feel something's there? Don't worry at all... They're all in your head.

But wait, what's that sound?

-Rachel Sayward

The Tipping Point

The guy who walked in the bar and sat next to Frank looked like a definite regular.

"This place sucks, huh." It sounded like a statement.

"It's not bad," Frank answered simply. They looked around. There were a few other guys besides the two.

The guy faced the wall as he continued to talk to Frank: "They're these great little places where you just lose yourself, because nobody here's gonna know you. I bet everybody here's trying to lose themselves."

Frank, thinking this was aimed at him, got defensive. "Not me. I'm here just 'cause it's, uh... you know, the thing to do."

The guy laughed loudly, some people glanced at him. "Look at you, kid! Lookit me in the eye tell me you're twenty-one for Christ's sake! The one reason a little joker like you's in here all alone is if you're losing yourself." This guy had no idea Frank had dropped out of college not three months ago.

"What about you?"

"Oh, me? My son got me fired." Frank was surprised by the blunt response from this man who was still looking at the wall. He almost laughed at this response, despite the bitterness in the man's voice.

But the guy was still talking.

"And I don't know whether to be proud of him for it. I sure as hell never would've done something like that to my old man. My kid fired me, the little bastard. And look, now I'm in a tiny bar in this hell that he can't pull me out of." The guy smiled and sniffed, changing his focus to Frank.

"Not that he would know where to look, right?" He nudged Frank. "How'd your son fire you?" It was the obvious question. "He saw me do something you're just not supposed to see your dad do,

especially in my line of business. The kid's got integrity, wasted no time telling the suits. And as for what I done, sport, that's where I'll let your imagination take you."

"Why aren't you home, fixing what you done, if it's so bad?"

"Do I look like a family man to you?" The guy paused for a swig of his drink, then kept talking.

"No. Besides, at the end of the day, the only thing that matters at all is guts, that's what it all boils down to. And I don't got it. If I did, I wouldn't be in some hellhole talking to a kid who can't relate to anything I'm saying, eh? But my son's got it, guts."

"You live with him, though. He's not going no where. Call him, fix it," Frank challenged.

"Wouldn't I love to say that to you, kiddo. You're not in some crappy bar for any good reasons, are you?"

Frank remembered he was the dropout.

"The worst thing is, my son's the better man. He's 'bout your age, you know, looks like you. So how can I possibly go out there and stand up to my own son? He's shown me up in this life, and I can't do nothing. I can't call him; that's why I can't call him. Or maybe I just don't got balls. Probably both." The guy downed his glass. "You ain't a bad kid. I bet you got balls."

It was this beer-heavy comment that really got Frank. Here he was, a college freshman, stuck in a bar. And now this drunk was calling him out for being brave, maybe even having integrity. Alcohol makes you talk, but it doesn't make you lie, Frank thought. On the other hand, Frank didn't even know the guy, so how could he lie? He felt like his future had just gotten slapped in the face. He couldn't ignore it.

I could end up just like this guy. Tomorrow will be the tipping point, whether I get on my feet or end up like this guy.

Frank got up and left the bar without a word.

The guy, now alone, raised a full glass to Frank behind his back, and kept drinking.

-Max Greenwood



-Perrin Davidson

Mud

Michael Carter stood on an upturned milk carton looking down at the grubby faces around him. He too, had a permanent layer of grime that had settled on him, much like an unwelcome blanket. It didn't matter how hard his mother scrubbed, when he clambered out of the claw foot tub he'd still have dirt caked beneath his fingernails and a thin layer of dust everywhere else. But these were the summer months, so she let him be, and put her feet up until it was time to make the supper. Looking at the faces of his comrades, Michael could almost trace the trail the bar of soap had left behind and the boys' struggles against their mothers at bath time each evening. He shook off the thought of his impending bath and puffed out his chest. The boys below him immediately snapped to attention and craned their necks to get a better look at their leader.

"Claire Montgomery is having a birthday party," He stated.

Several of the boys shared glances. Claire Montgomery was the girliest girl in the school. She wore pink ribbons with pink dresses, and cried if her stockings had a run in them. And every single boy knew her case of cooties was going to be hard to get over.

"We're not invited!" Tommy Walfield piped up from the back of their congregation in Mr. Porter's tool shed. Receiving a scathing look from Michael and a nudge from the boy next to him.

"Why should we be?" Michael asked, a malicious look in his eye, "But we're going."

A murmur rose from the tightly packed throng. Everyone knew where Claire lived: two streets over, near the cemetery. Everyone also knew that they could get there, no problem.

"I dunno if my rents'll let me..." Neil Casey trailed off, as much as he didn't want cooties, he didn't want to look like a baby. "They'll probly let me." He finished, eyes locked on his dirty sneakers.

"Alan!" Michael barked, "Go turn on your garden hose, I've got a plan."

Alan Baker didn't question his leader, he slid out the door and followed the orders he'd been given. Running across the street and letting the water soak his lawn. He knew the others would be able to fill him in soon enough.

Alan was right. Sooner than all the boys knew what was happening, they were riding their bicycles in a pack, with their beach pails full of mud. As they rode the two streets over to the Montgomery's, many of them had a sinking feeling that all was not going to end well, and a growing suspicion of Michael's feelings towards Claire.

There were pink balloons tied to the white picket fence, and cake and presents visible in the back yard. Squeals of delight were audible, proving to the pack that they were in the right place. Fifteen boys dismounted their bikes. One boy swung open the gate and motioned for the others to follow. Fifteen boys filed through and into the yard. One boy led them around the house, peeking his head around the corner to get a better visual of the festivities. Fifteen boys shifted from foot to food, fistfuls of mud at the ready. One boy smiled back at them and gave the command, "Charge."

Mud flew, and little girls screams mixed with whoops and hollers from the little boys. Pink and purple dresses soon turned to brown and the faces of all involved soon turned red. Parents were called, scoldings were given, and apologies were needed. Michael Carter sat on the Montgomery's front stoop, mud dripping from his left hand. He sat with a smattering of other boys, all awaiting their doom. A black Cadillac rolled up and the passenger window slowly rolled down. "Michael," said a voice wearily from the inside.

Michael stood up slowly and meandered down the walk, pausing before opening the door to the backseat and getting in. The door closed and the few remaining boys watched in awe, all remembering the big black car as a limousine.

"Michael," his father repeated, but Michael already wasn't listening. He pressed a button, lifted his fistful of mud, and threw it out the car window, watching it splatter on the pavement behind him.

-Lucy Sandin



-Rachel Balzer

Untitled

I've always had a fear of losing those I love. There haven't been a lot of people in my life that I could fully trust. When I do end up trusting someone, I don't shut up. He gained my trust the moment he said, " Hey".

I wanted to take things slow with him. I had already experienced things he could only dream of. Which he probably did. I mean come on. He's a teenage boy. They all do. I really liked this guy. I don't know what it was. Maybe it was his personality. Maybe it was his charm. Or maybe it was just his ginger afro. I don't know. All I knew was that I wanted us to work.

I never get nervous. I've been friends with guys for my entire life. I was practically one of them. I understood their language. I knew how to read them. With him, I had no idea. I got butterflies every time I was near him, and every time I thought about him. I still do sometimes.

It was a cold day in January, and the snow was falling from the clouds, like feathers drifting through the air ever so gently. The clock read three thirty two. We sat on the rounded bench, my head resting on his shoulder, and his arm wrapped around me, holding me tightly in his arm. The urge was unbearable. I didn't want to do anything drastic, but I could hardly contain myself. I wanted his lips. I wanted the sparks to truly fly.

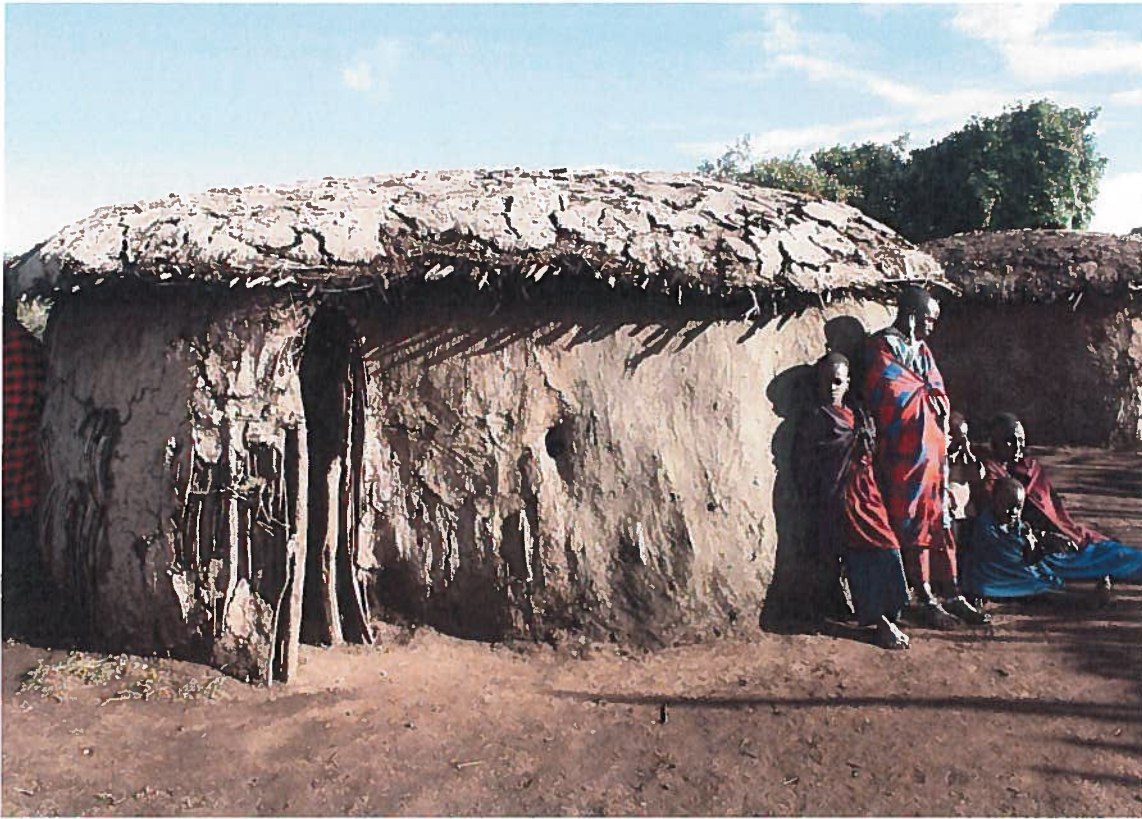
Before I could act on any of my impulses, he whispered my name. I looked at him, and he looked at me. Our brown eyes meeting. The snow fluttering around us. He took hold of both my hands, and stood me up. He pulled back my hood, and gently caressed my cheeks. His fingers were freezing, but I didn't care. He bent his head down, and kissed me. As soon as our lips met, I could feel myself being lifted up. I could feel myself drifting.

I never felt that feeling before. I've never felt it since. I loved him. I've loved before, but nothing like this. This was different. A feeling I never want to let go of.

Though we broke up, we are still friends. I have that fear of losing him. He was and is still very important to me. I fear that when I go off to college, he'll forget all the good times.

He'll still be here and I'll be miles away. I fear that I'll lose the greatest love of my life.

-Alisha Goldrup



-Mayla

Clutter

He closes the book, puts it on the table, and walks through the door. You follow close behind. There's nothing of importance in this shop, at least you don't think you'll be needing anything from The Thumbled Pages as of right now. You find yourself on the corner of Mulberry and Andover. Rain spits from the gray abyss above as you walk along the streets of old storefronts and new plate glass ones; it falls on the hat you just bought from Mr. Haigel's Apparel on 5th.

Eventually you find yourself outside, what I guess would be best described as a hole-in-the-wall-once-amazing-but-now-not antique shop. A weather beaten sign above your head says that this establishment is *Meath and Sonw Procurers of Fine Antiquities Since 1899*. You stare through the dirty windows, squinting into the cluttered mess beyond. You

must be thinking how all of London's unwanted items could fit into such a seemingly small store. My reply is rather unsatisfactory: "Neither can I".

I see you now, slowly getting colder as your pea coat starts to become a wet, spongy disaster. You see an old grandfather clock in the corner, its pendulum still swinging after all those years of use. An old Steinway and Sons piano sits in the corner. Once a conduit at which musical melodies were born, it now acts as just another surface for clutter to be strewn upon.

Then you see me: an old, slightly molded, slightly warped, very yellowed standing globe placed oddly between an overcrowded bookshelf and the old clock. You move along now, thinking to yourself about how you don't need any antiques anyway. You can do that, though, because I don't mind. I can take my story from here.

"Mr. McGloughlin, we're closing soon." Mary Meath, owner of Meath and Sons, says as she finishes her knitting. An old man ambles out from the shadows of towering clutter and, on his way through, hands Seamus a red sucker before disappearing with the sound of a tinkling bell.

"Seamus, get ready to go." She says to her young son while getting her purse and coat out from under the worn countertop. Then, they too disappear with the twinkling of the bell, and with them, so did the light. A vale was cast over the clutter of London. Amazing, isn't it, how products of want and creativity can age, outdate, and accumulate to sit in a dusty, dry shop until they fall to pieces?

Day's last rays slowly slide into night, and, eventually, Mr. Werner strikes twelve. I then delve into my story.

"It was night. I sat as an end cap to an elegant couch in a huge living room of someone who was aught too hot for himself..."

"Ah, so we hear the globe speak!" Steinway says.

"Well, it was either that or we get to hear of how Grampy Werner over there hates getting his gears wound." I reply back

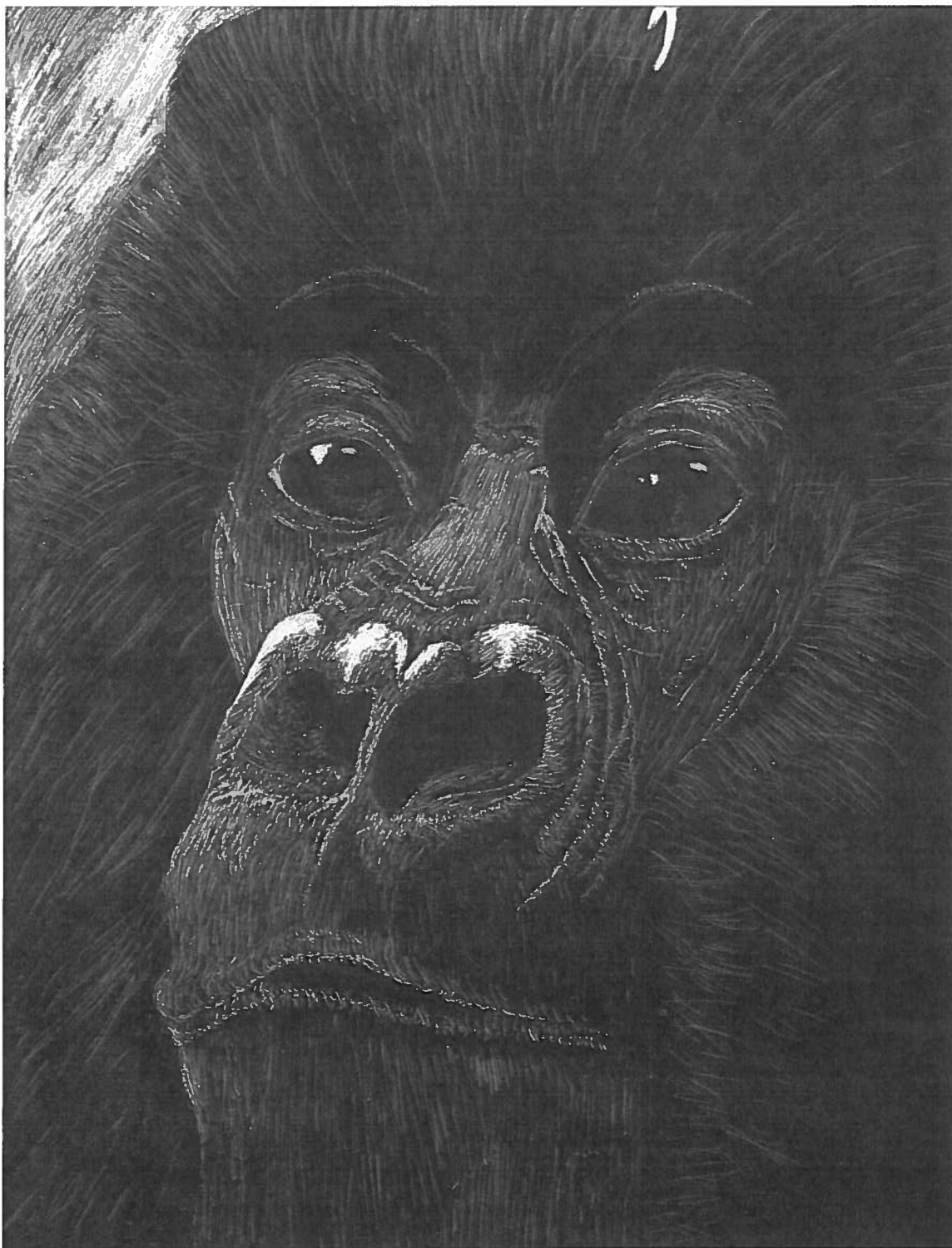
"And we are glad for that," An old ornate picture frame says from his place, nestled in the corner, "Go on..."

"We were bathed in the glow of the moon. This hot-on-himself man was, for the intents and purposes of that day and age, a magician. A dove-harboring, cut 'er in half, disappearing jack. He was successful at that, I might add. Having a genuine, moleskin, mahogany-encased globe just sitting in his living room is a statement if I ever saw one..."

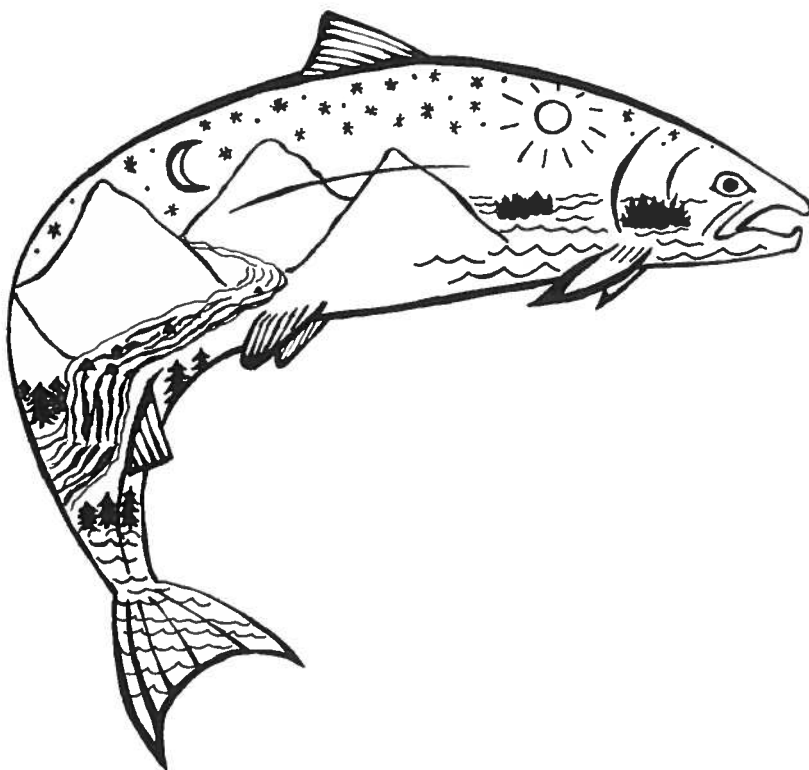
"Who is calling who 'aught too hot on himself'?" A table of drawers piped from under a pile of atlases and dictionaries. Then results a chorus of hoots and hollers from all likes of London's clutter.

The night went on like this. My life story as a globe of a magician, a rather too nice librarian, and a graveyard of London's unwanted, interspersed with the comments of dusty clutter. This is our life. This is how we like it. This is the life of the unwanted clutter of London.

-Perrin Davidson



-Zoe Fox



-Lily Johnston

Home Alone

Thinking
Stressed
Tired
Muscles tighten
Hear
Noises
Alarms
Feeling
Creek
Home alone
Quiet
Dark
Heart racing
Fast breathing
Clutched phone tightly
Anxiety

-Samantha Hart

Escape through the Storm

The icy rain clattered on the windows as our ship flew towards the storm. "They're gaining on us." Hanse said to me from ladder below. I looked out the circular window with a three hundred and sixty degree view of the surrounding area. It was difficult to see through the rain and clouds but I saw a large cloud we could use to lose them in. It was a monster, pitch black baring fangs of blinding purple and white light. Celecie saw what I moved us towards and yelled to me.

"We're going through something like that again!?"

"How else are we going to lose them, we don't have the firepower to fight back either!" I replied.

"You are crazy, but the best damn flyer I've ever met. It's just like last time right?"

"Yes, cut the power on my word."

"Got it!"

She disappeared down the ladder into the steam from the ship.

"Alright... Gacwien help me now." I said patting the helm.

This ship had been good to us. I refuse to loose it to the hunters or to this monster of a storm. But I have doubts I'm the best flyer in the country of Wesnall. Last time we flew through something like this sheer luck got us through. I don't know if I can do it this time but I have to... I will get us through.

I flew us strait into the storm at full speed. Right as we entered I reared the ship upward. Everything around me slowed down. The raindrops around me glowed from the large lightning bolt that passed in front of the window and into the clouds. I saw the dials spinning out of control. Waiting for the moment. Everything was so seren, I found some sort of peace among this scattered chaos in the storm. This was when I could focus on anything and everything. Then the dials made a loud clank noise. This was the moment.

"Celecie! NOW!"

Everything went dark except for the small lantern hanging behind me. We started the to fall backwards faster and faster until the ship started to shake from the velocity. I pulled the lever to release the lighting rods. Then the whole deck of the ship lit up with arcs of lightning, sending power to the generator and powering up the ship in an instant. All the lights became much brighter than normal and the engine made a deep humming noise as we regained power and control. I set the speed to full and deployed the sails, making the ship level out back to normal. We stopped falling and had ended up in the fog layer below

the sky. I could hear the storm raging above, and everyone yelling with joy in the decks below.

"You did it again! I don't know how but you did!" Celecie yelled to me.

"I don't know myself..." I mumbled.

Suddenly a large explosion went off overhead. I opened the hatch above me to get a better look. As I climbed out the hunter ship that had been chasing us flew past in a blaze of fire, until it disappeared into the depths of the fog. I was shocked at the fact they followed us into the storm. It was sheer suicide if they didn't know what they were doing. What reason did they have for putting so much effort into catching us?

"Inzuae! Take us up and see where we are."

"Okay!" I replied. I had forgotten that we were in the fog layer. Staying down here too long could get you killed or worse if the stories are true. I climbed back into the helm seat and brought us up and out of the fog. Just as we cleared the fog we saw it. Ventincius city, we made it to the capital.

-Asher Strickland



--Addie Morang

Foxfire Witchcraft

He stumbled through her door, caught completely unaware by the sudden drop. Picking himself up from the floor, he looked around, mesmerized by the things he saw. The room itself was a circle. Opposite the door was a bookshelf filled entirely with bottles, some pink, others blue, or red, or any other color of the rainbow. A few glowed from up above the rafters that crisscrossed the ceiling, all a deep purple. One continuous shelf circled all around the hut. It was stacked with ingredients; powders, bottles, assorted eyeballs, animal hearts, and many other things that he couldn't identify.

But, even with all of these different things, all around the room, so many interests, the most interesting thing, the greatest eye-catcher, was the woman in the center, grinning wickedly at him, standing over her cauldron of bubbling water. Her hair was a white blond, and her eyes were red. Canines protruded from her jaw, and she had red paint streaking her face, emanating from her nose. She had a ladle in her hand, and as he watched, she threw in a handful of what looked like greenish dust.

"Thyme," she said.

"What?"

"I threw thyme into my lunch. What are you here for, human? Must be awfully important, for you to trek through the mountains all the way from Usaki village." Her grin stretched, and she looked positively frightening. He was shocked. How had she known where he was from? Maybe it had been a mistake, coming here.

"So? What is it? Loved one is sick? Love potion? Starving village? Bad crop year? What is it?" She seemed curious, more than would be expected from a witch.

"Um... My, er, my sister is with child, and she's been having trouble breathing with it. I need a potion to help her," he said.

"Hmm, a potion to help a pregnant woman with breathing, eh? Who's the father?"

"My brother-in-law," he said simply. He remembered the words of his village elder, words he had repeated to himself since then; never give the witch your name, or anyone else's. Curses such as hers require a name to be cast.

"And, then, who is your brother-in-law?" she asked.

"The husband of my sister," he replied smoothly. Don't lie, don't use names.

"Circles, circles," the witch chittered. She giggled. She stirred her cauldron. She paid the human no mind. Finally, he could stand it no more.

"Excuse me, what about the potion?"

"What about my lunch?" This definitely took him aback. He gathered himself, then pressed on.

"I'm prepared to pay you."

"You may be prepared to pay, but what cost are you willing to reach?"

"I will give you whatever you require, even my own life." At that, the witch's interest was piqued.

"Even your own life...? Fine. I'll make it." She pulled out a mortar and pestle, then grabbed and ground a very pungent plant. She stuffed the ground plant into a bag, then handed it to him.

"Once you get home, mix that with water, then have her breathe it in." He bowed.

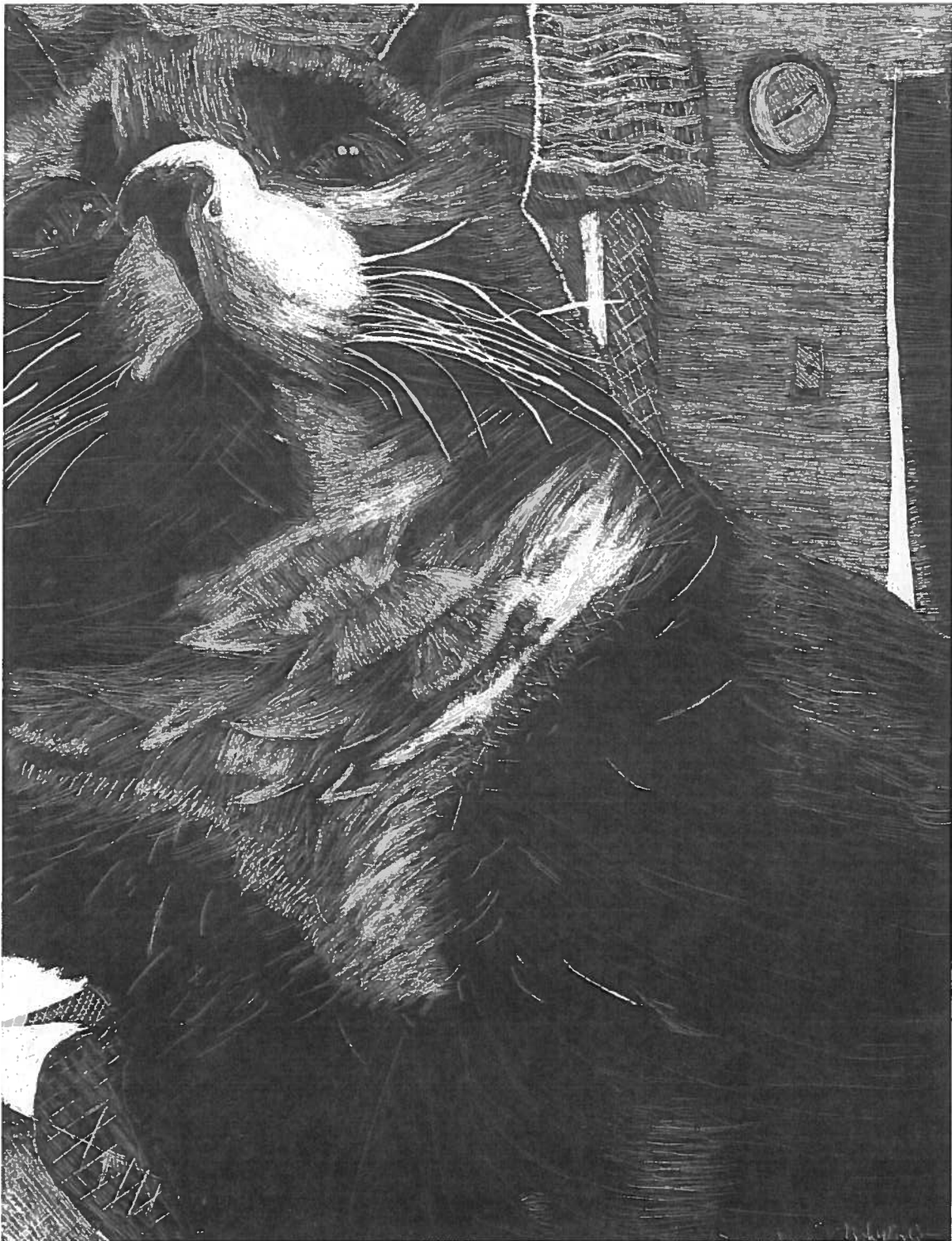
"Thank you, miss."

She looked in the still water, smooth as glass. The man she had helped a week ago had used her potion. She wondered what he would give her. But, after three weeks of receiving nothing, she knew that he had no intention of returning to her. So, that night, she cast a spell.

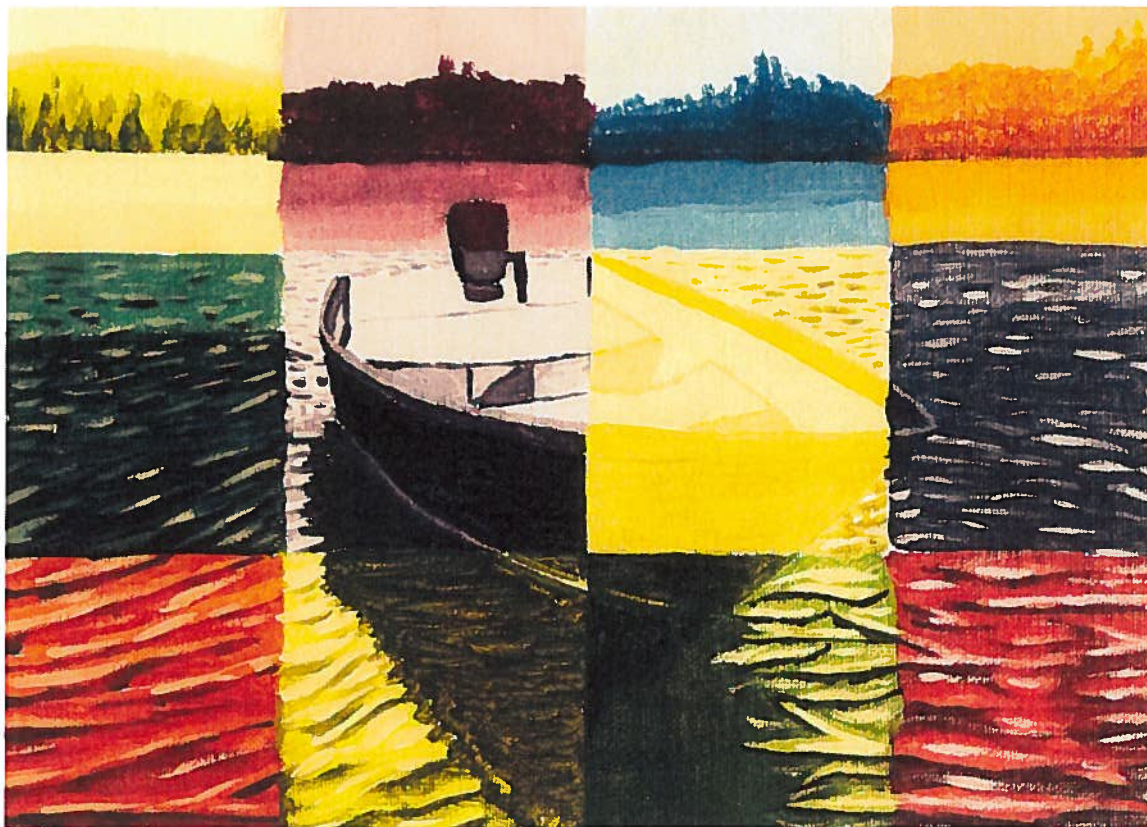
He was found dead in his sleep. She cackled madly, holding his soul in her claws. She was a kitsune, a vengeful one, one trained in dark magics. She dropped the soul into her cauldron, added many dimensionally foreign items, then screamed her spells. This particular potion took a ton of power. She had to revert to her natural fox form and use some of the reserve power in her glowing ball. But, finally, nearly a week later, the potion was done. It glowed deep purple. She bottled it, everything filling the bottle halfway, then she put the bottle with its siblings.

A fourth bottle joined the other three above the rafters.

-Shauna Holland



-Hayley Boyden



-Kyle Dorsey

Fight or Flight

I am, you're awoken in middle of a perfect dream. You weren't woken up by a physical touch or sound but a feeling. The feeling you get when you step into a room full of dark faces. The feeling you get when you are alone on a bus full of strangers. The feeling you get when you are walking home and every step you take there is a person behind taking two steps. Slowly catching up and to the point where you can almost feel them grab your shoulder. Your skin begins to tingle, every part of your body is covered in goosebumps. This feeling is stronger than any other you have had before. Your eyes slowly adjust to the lighting in the room. You can't shake the feeling that there is someone watching you, or maybe two people. You set your eyes on the dark object across the room. It happens to be on the opposite side as the door. In the back corner, just lurking, staring at you. You fight or flight starts to sink in, telling you to either jump this lurking figure in the corner of your

room or just book it out the door. You take a step towards the door and it seems like the figure is moving, you don't look back. Your next 4 steps are right for the light. If you were gonna die tonight you were gonna see your killers face. Almost at the light you feel a tough on your shoulder! You scream, falling to the ground you knick the light switch on the wall releasing the suspense of the identity of this strange killer, you turn back, and your heart stops.

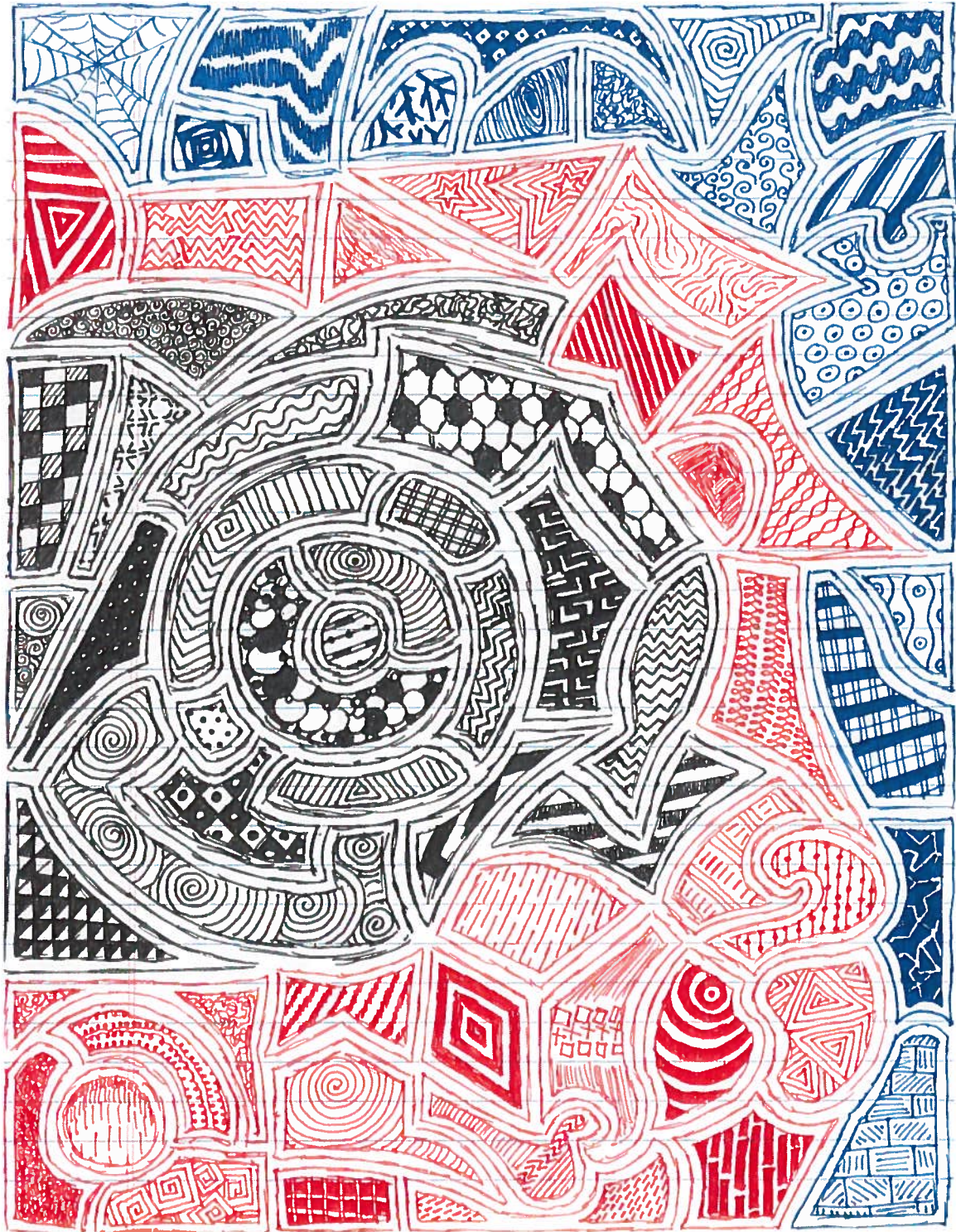
-Matt Schultheis



-Ellis Price



-Gabby Tilton



-Andrea Bryant