

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND

Connections

The logo graphic for 'Connections' features a stylized, overlapping geometric shape composed of several rectangular planes in shades of gray and white, creating a three-dimensional effect. Below this shape is a white, elegant, swirling line that loops around itself, resembling a calligraphic flourish or a stylized 'C'.

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Literary Magazine



Connections

COLLEGE *of* SOUTHERN MARYLAND
Fall 2017 Literary Magazine

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A Picture from Muhlberg, Mary Prather

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Connections

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Deal with It

Liz Weaver

What was supposed to be the most relaxing log-cabin get-away vacation ended up being the worst disaster of the year for Jacob. At first, the thought of going on a trip thrilled him. What could be better than winning a trip to a deluxe, resort log cabin? It included a view of the lake, archery grounds on the wood-side, and yes, to his little sister's delight, a pool. Even better than a pool, there would be no people besides staff, which motivated Jacob the most. But all the excitement changed when his sister Sophie got stung by a bee early that morning, which delayed their road trip for three hours. She made the ride miserable with her moaning, crying, and complaining about why they even had to go in the first place. The car breaking down was just the cherry on top along with the sprinkles of rain. Though it certainly wouldn't have been their first choice, his family ended up at the Wolf's Howl Motel because that was the only resting place for miles. His mother, Mrs. Daniels, felt it was the better option than leaving her kids to stay up all night in the rain while her car stayed at the mechanic's shop.

"Here you are Ma'am," the tow truck driver said, dropping them off. "We'll take your car to the shop down the street to see if they can fix it tomorrow."

"Are you sure nothing can be done tonight?" Mrs. Daniels pleaded, her short brown hair now drenched with water.

"Nobody's gonna be able to look at it until tomorrow."

"All right," she said, defeated.

The Daniels walked into the motel office and Mrs. Daniels rang the bell for service. A small woman appeared from the room behind the counter with an old name tag that read "Martha."

“How many for the room?” Martha yawned, pulling a clip boarded list from a drawer. Her black hair looked matted like she had lost a fight with her pillow during the night.

“Uh, three,” Mrs. Daniels replied. “But we can do with two beds if it’s cheaper.”

Jacob leaned against the yellow wall as Sophie tried to push him off with no success.

“Meany,” she whined.

“Brat,” he replied. “How am I mean for trying not to fall?”

“Would both of you stop it?!” Mrs. Daniels shushed.

“All we have are rooms with a single and a double,” Martha said, her tone of voice unaffected by the quarrel between the two kids.

“Then I suppose that will be fine,” she sighed, paying the woman for the night. Martha grabbed two keys from another drawer and handed them to Mrs. Daniels.

“Your room is A9 out to your left,” Martha pointed, leaving back to the room behind the counter.

“Thank you,” Mrs. Daniels called with no answer. “Come on, let’s go,” she motioned to her kids.

When they walked into the room, an overwhelming scent of pine car air-freshener hit their noses, as they peeled off their wet jackets, threw them on a metal chair, and dropped their suit cases by the door.

“Jacob, would you put the suit cases on the love seat by the window?” Mrs. Daniels asked. “We don’t want bugs to crawl into them.”

“Fine,” Jacob said, piling the luggage on the long chair. At the sight of a bed, Sophie took off to flop on it.

“Stop!” Mrs. Daniels demanded as Sophie halted before the bed.

“But Moooooom, I’m so tired!”

“We have to pull off the top quilt first, because we don’t know how clean it is,” she explained. “Or if it even

gets cleaned at all.” She shivered and quickly banished that thought.

They pulled off the top covers and Mrs. Daniels thoroughly searched through the sheets of the double bed for any signs of bedbugs.

“Would you mind searching the single bed since you’re going to be sleeping on it?” she asked, motioning Jacob to the single mattress.

“Why does Jacob get his own bed?!” Sophie complained. “Why don’t I get it?”

“Because,” Jacob replied, sifting through the covers.

“Because why?!”

“It’s not up for discussion,” Mrs. Daniels said, pulling a towel out of her bag. “Now go fish your toothbrush and toothpaste out of your suitcase and brush your teeth. Then I’ll wrap up your hair to dry.”

Reluctantly, Sophie pulled out her toiletry bag and trudged to the bathroom, her wet brown curls limping behind her.

“She’s such a pain,” Jacob groaned flopping on the now checked bed. “She acts like such a brat.”

“Right, and you’ve been an angel this whole trip?” Mrs. Daniels laughed, half-heartedly.

“No, but she’s...”

“EEEEEEEEEEK!” Sophie screamed, running from the bathroom.

“What now?!” Jacob yelled.

“Sweetie, calm down. What’s the matter?” Mrs. Daniels coaxed.

“Mo...mmmouse!” she wailed, “There’s a mouse in the tub!”

“Is it dead?” Jacob said, his tone of voice shifting.

“I don’t know and I don’t care! Just deal with it!” Sophie replied, still sobbing.

“I think you should deal with this,” Mrs. Daniels said, giving Jacob a certain look. “I’m sure this is just a misunderstanding.”

He knew all too well how she intended on him dealing with it. Reluctantly, he walked into the bathroom to take a look. The washroom was small with walls of blue flower wallpaper covering each side. Conveniently, the room was just big enough to squeeze a bathtub, a toilet and a mini-sink into in order to consider it a “bathroom.” Jacob glanced over to the tub to find a small little furry creature awake inside.

“Uh, hey little guy,” he started awkwardly.

The mouse just stared at him with no response.

“Are you...ok?”

“What do you mean? Am. I. Ok.?” the mouse squeaked in disapproval. “That thing woke me from my nap and scared me half to death!”

“Oh, sorry I guess,” Jacob apologized, taken aback by the sound of the mouse’s high voice. “To be fair, it’s not every day you see a mouse sleeping in a tub.” He shifted uncomfortably.

“Can’t go on the bed. They put some nasty stuff by the rim on each side,” the mouse continued. “Couldn’t sleep there if I wanted too.”

“Well, where do you usually sleep?”

“At home underneath the kitchen, but my wife kicked me out.”

“That’s uh, too bad.” He looked away out the door and then back to the mouse.

“I know you want me to leave,” the mouse said. “I can see it in your eyes.”

“It’s not that I personally want you to leave, it’s just my mom and my sister...”

“No, I get it. Family is a pain in the rear sometimes, so I’ll make a deal with you,” the mouse said, “I’ll leave the room, if you get me a packet of flavored cream cheese.”

“Cream cheese?”

“Flavored cream cheese,” he corrected, “It’s an acquired taste, and my kids are all about the sugar.”

“Uh, sure, but I probably can’t get it until tomorrow though. Is that ok?”

“Sure, but if it’s not at my hole by the afternoon, I’ll poop in your luggage.” The mouse chuckled and motioned to a hole next to the tub.

“Fair enough.” Jacob wrinkled his nose as the mouse scurried out of the tub and into the little hole.

“Is it gone?” Mrs. Daniels asked, with Sophie now recuperating in Mrs. Daniels’ lap, her hair wrapped in a towel.

“Yep, but he’ll only stay that way if we get him some cream...flavored cream cheese tomorrow.”

“Flavored? That’s odd, but I think there’s a small mini-store down the street. I’m sure it would be easy to get before we leave,” she sighed. “See Sophie, he was a nice mouse after all.”

Sophie just shook her head.

“Well I think it’s about time we all got some sleep,” Mrs. Daniels started, pulling a cover over herself and Sophie.

“Couldn’t agree more,” Jacob said as he flopped again on the bed and dozed off.

The next morning, Mrs. Daniels walked outside the room to call the auto shop on her cell. After a heated thirty minutes of conversation, she finally came back into the room, flustered and fit to be tied.

“So?” Jacob asked, awoken from the phone conversation.

“They can’t fix it.” Mrs. Daniels groaned. “They say a part is missing entirely and they won’t get a new shipment until Wednesday.”

“Wednesday?! That’s two whole days! The trip will be half done by then,” Jacob protested, waking up Sophie. “Can’t we just call a taxi to take us the rest of the way?”

“No,” Mrs. Daniels replied, irritated. “There are no taxi services for miles. It would cost me an arm and a leg to call one down here.”

“Maybe one of the mechanics could drive us?”

“Mom, can we go home?” Sophie yawned, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

“No, sweetie, we have to stay here some more,”

Mrs. Daniels soothed and turned her attention back to Jacob.

“No one is willing to make the hour drive, ok? We just have to wait and deal with it,” she sighed.

“Ugh,” Jacob said, throwing himself back on the bed.

“I want to go home,” Sophie whimpered.

“Why don’t we go to the grocery store first, and you can pick out something to eat.”

“Ok, then can we go home?”

“Come on let’s go,” Mrs. Daniels said exhaustedly. “We need to stop by the motel office first to extend the stay,” she said as she helped Sophie with her shoes.

“Don’t forget the flavored cream cheese,” Jacob mumbled through the pillow.

“Of course.” Mrs. Daniels shook her head. “If you need to go out, the other key is on the dresser. Try to make use of the day instead of moping.”

“Yeah, don’t be a mopy-pants,” Sophie giggled as they left the room.

“Ugh,” he moaned again in reply. He looked up at the clock on the dresser. 9:31. He rolled out of bed and staggered to his suitcase to grab his phone and charger. After digging for a few minutes, he found his phone dead, but could not find his charger. *Crap, I probably left it in the car.* He walked over to check Mrs. Daniels’ suitcase for her charger but soon realized

that hers was in her purse, which she had taken. He was about to just go back to sleep when he heard a soft tap at the door and walked over to the peep hole to investigate. Nothing. He turned away only to hear the tapping noise again. This time he just opened the door.

“Sucks when they don’t open on the first knock, eh?”

Jacob looked down to see a frisky grey squirrel on the pavement, chattering about. He had a small red ribbon tied onto his wrist.

“Um, did you need something, ‘cause I don’t...” Jacob started

“Nah, I just wanted to see if you really could hear what I said?” the squirrel snickered, wiggling its fluffy tail in pleasure. “It’s not every day you see a human that can understand us.”

“So you seriously just came to see if I could hear you?” Jacob rubbed his forehead in frustration. “How did you even know I could do that?” he said indignantly.

“Calm down, calm down. Sheesh. You humans are so impatient,” the squirrel said. “I got my info from Frank.”

“Who the heck is Frank?”

“The mouse.”

“Of course.” He groaned, regretting his conversation yesterday. “Are you done?”

“Weeeeeell,” the squirrel said. “Now that you mention it...”

“Scratch that. I’m not helping you,” he said, closing the door.

“Wait! It’s not for me, it’s for Milly!” the squirrel yelled as the door clicked closed.

“I’m not helping your squirrel friend either,” Jacob said through the door.

“She’s not a squirrel, she’s a human!”

There was a long pause of silence.

“Why would a human...no, a girl, need my help?” Jacob questioned.

“It’s her dog. She’s in pain, and won’t tell anyone what’s wrong.”

“I still don’t see why I have to...”

“She’s pretty. And I promise I’ll never bug you again!” the squirrel pleaded.

“Fine,” he agreed, opening up the door again, slipping on his shoes, and grabbing the spare key. “Which room is she staying in?”

“Staying?” the squirrel chattered a laugh. “She lives in room B6.”

“Lives?” he said, following the squirrel.

It then occurred to him that he did not know if the squirrel was referring to the girl or the dog as the pretty one, but he had already agreed to go. In the bright daylight, he could see the run down motel more clearly. It looked more like a little town, the way the complex was structured, with some of the rooms looking like they hadn’t been touched in years and others on the next level like small homes. They mounted the stairs with Jacob skipping every other step, and the squirrel hopping each individual step. When they reached the room, Jacob hesitated and stared awkwardly at the door labeled B6.

“Well?”

“I don’t know.” Jacob shrugged. “I don’t want to sound weird.”

“You already sound weird talking to me,” the squirrel snickered.

“Do you want me to leave?”

“No! No, I’ll be quiet. Just knock,” the squirrel said, fiddling with his whiskers.

Jacob landed a sturdy knock on the door and waited. Silence. He knocked again but this time was cut off by the door opening.

“Hello?” a girl’s voice whispered.

“Uh, hi. My family and I are staying in room A9,” Jacob said, scratching his head. “I, uh heard your dog isn’t feeling well and I wondered if I could help?”

“How did you know my dog wasn’t feeling well?”

“Well, um...the squirrel...” Jacob said feeling as dumb as ever.

“What squirrel?” she said. He looked down to find that the grey squirrel was gone.

“He...I thought. Ah, this is dumb!” he said “Sorry for wasting your time.” At that moment he felt instantly pained and annoyed that he’d let an animal trick him so easily.

The girl then fully appeared from the room smiling.

“We’re just messing with you,” the girl laughed as the gray squirrel appeared on her shoulder.

“Oh,” he said, fully confused. “So, I guess it was just a joke.”

“No. Well, my dog is hurting but I have no idea how you knew that,” the girl said. “Teddy usually just brings random things here, but he rarely ever brings people.” She petted the squirrel with her finger, as it nuzzled its head to hers. “Please come in. My name’s Milly. I don’t know what to do anymore about my dog and I could really use someone’s help.”

“I’m Jacob...” he said, not too sure what he just got himself into. The squirrel, however annoying, had been right about one thing—she was pretty, if he was referring to her. She had long black hair, the kind filled with huge curls, and she had a medium skin tone with the rosiest cheeks. Inside the room were dozens of dream catchers, glass bottles on every shelf, along with books piled like buildings next to her bed.

The room was much larger than the one his family spent the night in, with bright aqua painted walls, and almost neon purple shag carpet to top it off. The corner of the room held a dog bed with a tiny cocker spaniel lying inside.

“Her name is Ginger,” Milly said. “The problem is every time I try to pet her, she whimpers and runs away.” Milly sighed.

Jacob looked at the dog, then at Milly’s sad face. There would be no getting out of this one.

“Is it ok if I talk to her?” he asked, unsure of her reaction.

“Sure, but she doesn’t usually like building conversations with strangers,” Milly said jokingly.

Jacob, now looking more embarrassed than ever, brushed the joke off and spoke.

“Mind telling me what’s wrong?” he said oddly. Teddy the grey squirrel then launched himself onto Jacob’s shoulder to show Ginger he was an ok human of sorts.

“Ow,” Jacob winced, and the squirrel loosened its grip.

“Wood.” Ginger said, in the most pitiful voice she could muster.

“Wood?” Jacob inched closer.

“Tiny.”

“Tiny piece? Like a splinter?” he continued.

“Yeah.” she said, her voice now a murmur.

“Do you have any tweezers, Milly?”

“Oh, yes, of course!” she said rushing into the bathroom.

“Are you sure it’s a splinter? We haven’t been to the dock in a month.” Milly returned, handing the tweezers to Jacob.

“Thanks. I think so. Ginger, can you tell me where exactly?”

“Lower back maybe...I’m not sure.”

“Do you mind if I feel for it.”

“No, you can try, just lightly.”

He reached over to her back and gently pressed until her whimpering got louder and louder.

“There!” she cried as Jacob searched through her fur for the splinter, finding a tiny dark brown dash. After sitting on the floor and working on it for a good solid minute, he pulled the splinter out and Ginger started to wag her tail energetically.

“Thank you, boy! Oh thank you, thank you!” The spaniel yipped, running to lick him with delight then running to the other side of the room, then back again to his side.

“No problem.” He smiled a bit. It wasn’t until he looked toward Milly again that he realized that she had been staring at him with bright amazement.

Before she asked any questions, she insisted they sit outside since the day was too nice, and she pulled two chairs out of the room.

“You talked to her, didn’t you?” she said. “I mean really talked to her. Like you understood her and everything?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“That’s so...cool.”

“What? Why?”

“I mean, YOU CAN FREAK’N TALK TO ANIMALS!” She jumped out of her seat.

“Well, don’t yell it!”

“This must be a prank! I’m probably just being silly, but that would be really cool. Can you prove it?” She asked, with puppy dog looking, olive eyes.

Jacob looked over to Ginger, and the little dog wagged her tail again in agreement to whatever Jacob wanted to do.

“Can you tell me something she likes?” Jacob asked the spaniel.

“Ooh yes! Let’s see...her favorite pie is apple.” Ginger yapped.

“Your favorite pie is apple.” Jacob repeated.

“Favorite song is *Help* from The Beatles!”

“Your favorite song is *Help* from The Beatles.”

“OH! And she LOVES Blueberry Blast Soda.” she ended with a loud bark.

“And your favorite soda is Blueberry Blast,” he ended, grinning a bit.

“Damn, that’s good,” she laughed. “Ginger, you’ve betrayed me!”

The dog howled in contentment, and both of them fell into laughter.

“How long have you been able to do that?” Milly asked.

“Since forever, I guess. But I try to ignore it because it would always cause me trouble in school,” he said. “So after one really bad experience, my mom took me out of school and homeschooled me, and I just learned to not tell people.”

“That’s really sad,” she empathized. “How old are you now?”

“Fifteen,” he said.

“I’ll be fifteen in September. Hopefully by then my aunt will teach me how to drive.” She laughed, “I want to drive so badly!”

“So you live here at the motel with your aunt?”

“Yep, well I like to think of it as having my own little town.”

“Sure looks like it.”

“Doesn’t it?” she smiled. “Someday I want to fix all of these rooms up exactly like little houses and maybe people will actually come here.”

“Jacob, are you out there?” Mrs. Daniels called from below. “I bought the cream cheese and some lunch.”

“I should go,” Jacob said.

“Want to hang out later?” she said, her eyes bright with possibilities.

“Sure.”

When he got back into his room, he found the bag full of sandwich materials for lunch, and the cream cheese.

“I didn’t even know they had this flavor,” Jacob said opening the container.

His mother and sister both walked out of the bathroom.

“I looked around for anything else but all they had left was apricot flavored Philadelphia cream cheese, of all the things,” she commented. “Hopefully the mouse isn’t picky, but I think it tastes pretty good.”

“I met Sarah!” Sophie said proudly.

“Sarah?” Jacob said, confused.

“Yes, turns out the store owner has a daughter Sophie’s age and tomorrow, they’re going to have a play date,” Mrs. Daniels smiled. “And the shop owner’s wife gave me some great tips on my home gardening.”

“Cool,” he said, taking the cheese to the bathroom.

“I hope your time wasn’t too boring.” Mrs. Daniels said.

“Nah, it was ok. Sorry I was such a pain.”

He laid the apricot flavored Philadelphia cream cheese by the mouse hole, ate a quick sandwich, and headed back outside to Milly’s.

By Thursday morning, their car had been fixed and it was time to go to the log cabin resort, as Mrs. Daniels put it, “to use what days we have left to make the most of the trip.”

“Do you think you’ll ever come back here, to Wolf’s Howl Motel?” Milly asked as the Daniels loaded up the car again.

“I’m sure I’ll find a way,” he said. “And if not, I’m sure you and your pets will find their way to me.” He grinned.

“Oh believe me, we’ll find you,” Teddy the squirrel said.

“By the way, Frank says thanks for the cream cheese. His kids liked it even more than the regular flavors.”

“Tell him my mom deserves all the credit for getting it.”

“Will do,” Teddy said, giving Jacob a tiny salute.

Ginger came yipping down the way and ran up to Jacob's leg.

"Don't forget about me, my love!" the cocker spaniel barked, as he bent down to give her a good scratch behind the ear.

"I won't," he promised.

Milly laughed, handing him a piece of paper. "It has my number and e-mail," she said. "Don't forget to call." She looked at him with dead serious eyes.

"Of course," he said, shaking off the awkward stare. "Why ever wouldn't I call you?" he said, shifting his eyes back and forth.

"And here I thought I was insane." She laughed, "You truly are weird, Jacob Daniels!"

He waved back to her, as the Daniels all got into the car and drove off.

"Oh, I missed playing with the doggie!" Sophie said, saddened.

"It's ok, Sophie. I'm sure we'll come back someday," Jacob said, looking at the piece of paper Milly gave him.

"Who's the girl with the cocker spaniel?" Mrs. Daniels asked.

"Oh, Milly? She's a friend." He grinned and added her number to his phone.



Follow Me, William Moroney

The Scent of Loss

Jennifer Polhemus

My brother, Eddie, was killed in the early spring of 1971. He was eleven years old. Mom's tea rose bushes bloomed early that year. Eddie almost got to see them. An emotionally disturbed resident of Rosemont Extended Care Facility in Baltimore, Maryland, where Eddie lived, forced a bar of soap down his throat. He was supposed to move back home that weekend. Staff got the object out before he choked to death, but not before deadly chemicals made their pungent way into his lungs. He died later that night, alone, while Mom and Dad made the long trek to the hospital.

It was a difficult decision for Dad and Mom to admit Eddie to Rosemont in the winter of 1969. He was fourth of their seven children and required special care because he suffered from Prader-Willi Syndrome, a neuromuscular disorder. He had grown obese from his constant eating of anything he could get into his mouth: food, cleaning products or trash. Eddie would wander out of the house and down the street on a whim. Mom did not have enough eyes to keep track of him. They resorted to locking him in his tiny, ground floor bedroom and cut the door in half so the top could stay open. This made them feel like they were not completely cutting him off from the rest of the family. As his disease progressed he required a full body brace. Eddie fought like a trapped lion not to wear the thing. He needed 24/7 care. Mom and Dad could not provide it.

Eddie did not always hate Rosemont. At first it was an ordeal to convince him to come home for weekend visits. Rosemont was populated with kids like Eddie. The employees

were extremely competent, gentle and kind. Within a year Eddie dropped almost all of his extra weight. Slowly the faces of Rosemont's workforce and inhabitants changed. Staff with years of experience were let go in favor of inept college kids who could be paid far less. Children with forensic and oppositional behavior issues were added to the resident population. Personnel often neglected and sometimes abused patients. Through disregard Eddie lost even more pounds, was pale and rail thin. Particularly cruel workers forced him to crawl around the community room floor holding a soda bottle under his chin. Eddie wanted to come home. Two days before he was due to come home, irresponsible employees ushered a gaggle of boys down the corridor to the communal showers. They were not supervising the bunch, and Eddie was attacked.

I remember fragments of his funeral, like a collage of loss. The woman sitting in front of me wore a tremendous black and white hat with feathers and netting creating an obstructed view of my brother. Her perfume was musky and distracting. Mom walked with me through the viewing line and explained that Eddie was sleeping until God resurrected him and we would see him again in paradise. When I pulled my chin over the edge of his casket it looked like Eddie was breathing. I begged Mom not to bury him alive. He was dressed in our older brother's dark gray suit and his fluff of platinum hair wept against the white, satin pillow beneath his head. There seemed to be enough room for me to climb in next to his fragile frame. Eddie looked so weak and I imagined bullies overpowering him while he showered. And there were flowers everywhere. I was almost drunk, at least dizzy, from their aroma that forced its way up my nose and down my throat. Is this what Eddie felt? Am I going to die too?

He was buried in Fort Lincoln Cemetery back when people were still allowed to watch them lower the casket into the grave. I have a picture of Mom standing beside the swell of earth softened by baskets of flowers laid on their sides. She wore a periwinkle dress over her ample body, belly swollen with her last birth of twins, and a faithful strand of pearls around her mole-ridden neck. The fragrance of freshly disturbed earth reminded me of days when Eddie still lived at home and the family planted a garden out back, behind the apple tree with its sweet blossoms.

There was a giant clock at the entrance, fashioned out of shrubbery with hands of petunias and begonias. The grounds keeper could change the time with seasons of daffodils, verbena and mums. I wondered what time it would be that winter when most everything shriveled in on itself and if Eddie would finally see the tea roses that bloomed late in the spring of 1971.



Ran Out of Wire, Jim McDonald

Imagine That

Christopher Wilkins

One of the gifts reserved for age
is death, an adder's masque of slinking
shed skins withering, bees fluttering

between glazed panes on a Michaelmas-spring
morning. Another gift is to see, in winter,
winter's end in summer lakes and sailing ships,

pantaloons, warmed cream, desiccated
limes and the fluke of a whale staving
a schooner's hull in a glinting sea.

Catmint spikes purple as day-lilies take
their star turn on the lea in July, or on hills
far away in a meadow, by a grave—

and age is woven of days,
runs a cliché, aged like a gull
scavenging from day to day.

Driving through Jersey

Sherbie Carson

Autumn leaves twirl around us—fall ribbons adrift—
in chilled anticipation—of winter songs.
The gentle caress of Pennsylvania maples
yielding to the fractured asphalt—of the Jersey turnpike.

“This is my home,” she said—
Eyes fixed forward—miles growing longer
between exits—as if given the opportunity
to escape—weary souls might follow their feet
toward softer, brighter streets.

For 3 states we admired the weather—
spoke of children—vacations—dreams.
It wasn't until exit 8 to Freehold
that I met the little girl who hid
from fists and belts, flying.

In each of the tears that fell slowly, I could taste her salt—
and the bittersweet memory, of a mother's love—
Held down by the weight of bills to pay,
and men who offered no more
than a name and their seed.

Her mother's heart, too heavy, for flesh to carry,
Rests beneath the earth and fresh flowers at exit 15.
In silence, we knelt down, in grass still damp
and learned that the whole of this life
is holding close to one another,
through the soft budding of spring flowers,
and the broken winter of Jersey streets.



Ibis in the Looking Glass, Ginette Krantz

How Winter Feels

Mikaela Pollard

She grew up poor and abandoned on the streets of southern Sudan. Her parents she never knew; she had been an orphan for as long as she could remember, with no place to call her own. Her name was Fatima. Her earliest memories were begging for food. Her belly constantly ached with hunger. Deserted, alone, and no place to call her own, Fatima slept on the dirty streets of Al Fashir, as people constantly passed her by. Yet, Fatima dreamed. She dreamed of being a princess in a castle far, far away from the abject poverty surrounding her. She dreamed of being a normal child, with parents, food, and a place to lay her head. But most of all, Fatima dreamed of winter. The Sudan sun burned with a fervent heat, and very rarely was there so much as a cool breeze. She'd had dreams. Dreams of miles and miles of white. She didn't realize this was snow. She'd never seen snow before, in real life. But she had read of it in books. Fatima had taught herself to read at the age of five. Ever since then, she had fallen in love with reading. She'd read stories of fairies and ice princesses; however, none of the fairies or ice princesses looked like her. Her dark skin contrasted with the icy white skin of the female protagonists. So she colored their faces brown with crayons she'd find lying on the ground. And so she imagined that she was a beautiful, intelligent princess with the world at her feet. This would only last for a moment before the stark reality sunk in; she was a poor, lowly orphan, with no family, and no hope. Who would ever love a poor, orphan child? She could barely eat enough food to satisfy her belly. She was far from being a princess. But that would all change through an unexpected turn of events.

America. Freedom. These words were constantly on the lips of the people passing by. Fatima heard. “I hear anyone can become wealthy in America,” she heard one man say to another. “Even poor chaps like us.” “Just think of how much money we’d make doing this in America,” an old, wrinkled washer woman said to another old, wrinkled washer woman. Surely Fatima could be a princess only in America. If she stayed in Sudan, she would remain a pauper. She would be an ice princess, like the ice princesses she loved to read about. She’d have her own castle, high up in the mountains, just like the imaginary castles in her storybooks. Then she would see how winter felt.

The missionaries came in the middle of summer, the hottest time of the year in Sudan. To add to that, there was a serious drought, resulting in damaged crops, lack of food, and shortage of water. Fatima’s stomach ached for a crumb. The hunger that struck her belly made her think she was dying. She was sure she was nothing more than a stick figure. Her body ached from lack of food. She was so hungry, she was afraid she would pass out. All the people in her village, who would usually give her food, had no food for themselves, much less for her. That is when she saw them. The missionaries. There was a man with dark hair and a beard, and a youthful looking woman with bright blue eyes, the clear color of the sky. There were two children with them, a boy and a girl. A family. Looking at them, Fatima knew that they were American. Her heart began to race. Maybe these people represented the freedom she had always longed for. Could there be hope for her in America? Suddenly, the man locked eyes with her. He was looking dead at her. Fatima’s overwhelming joy quickly turned to overwhelming dread. He probably saw how she thought she looked: a poor, dirty, orphan. But with a closer look, Fatima saw something else in the man’s eyes. Compassion. For her. Without hesitation,

the man walked over to her. Her heart beat fast. What was happening? What was he going to say? Fatima noticed that the man's wife and their children were following behind him. When he finally reached her, he knelt down to be eye level with her. "What is your name?" the man kindly asked in Dinka, her language. She answered. He nodded and looked down at his own children. The girl had the same blue eyes as her mother, but her hair was dark like her father's. She looked to be about six, which was how old Fatima was. "My name is David," the man said. "David Greenlend. I'm a missionary." She didn't know what a missionary was, but his words brought hope to her heart. He and his wife began to speak in a language Fatima didn't understand. She didn't know they were speaking English, because she had never heard it before. But there was one word she did recognize. America. She would know that word in any language. The woman began to speak, her voice soft and gentle. She looked like the princesses Fatima had always read about in her storybooks, and she liked her instantly. Then they both looked at her. "Fatima," the beautiful woman said, in a gentle voice, "how would you like to come to America?"

The missionaries stayed for three months. During that time, Fatima and others in her village learned about a God she had never heard of. But He seemed to be kind and gracious, just as the missionaries were. She also learned to speak English. English was a hard language to grasp, but Fatima was learning quickly. She loved to play with the missionaries' children, because they taught her English as well. At the end of the three months, it was time for Fatima to leave with her new family. During the plane ride to America, Fatima was very quiet. She was afraid. What if this was a mistake? What if these people weren't who they said they were? What if they would take her back to Sudan, to beg on the streets again, like she had before?

But all the fear left her when the plane landed. “Fatima,” Mary, David’s wife, announced, in English, “we’re home.” Home it was. Fatima had never seen such beauty. By this time it was early October, and leaves were turning various shades of red and gold. But one thing was missing. Snow. “Where is the snow?” she asked her new siblings, Jared and Ashley. They smiled. “It will be here really soon,” Ashley answered. Really soon wasn’t soon enough for Fatima. She wanted to see the snow. She wanted to touch it. The weeks went by, and soon the Greenlend family were celebrating a holiday she had never heard of: Christmas. They sang songs about a little baby in a manger, surrounded by animals. Whoever the baby was, Fatima could relate to him. That was the story of her life. Ever since she arrived in America with her new family, she constantly asked them about the snow. They never got exasperated, but would tell her, “Just be patient, Fatima. It will come.” But today was different. She’d woken up this morning, on the day her new family called Christmas to the sound of singing and laughter. “Fatima,” her new bother, Jared, whispered. “It’s time.” “Time for what?” Fatima was confused. “It’s time to open presents!” he shouted emphatically. Presents? What were Presents? Her question was soon answered. In the living room was a huge, decorated tree, covered with lights and sparkly things. Underneath the trees were piles and piles of beautifully wrapped boxes. Those must be the presents, Fatima thought to herself. “Open them!” David told her excitedly. Fatima looked at him. Were all these presents for her? They couldn’t be. As if on cue, Ashley ran up to the tree and picked up a big, pink box. Pink was Fatima’s favorite color. Ashley handed the box to Fatima. She didn’t know what to do.

She had never received a present before, and everyone was staring at her. Slowly, tentatively, she tore open the box. As layer after layer of the wrapping paper came off, Fatima's heart beat faster and faster. Suddenly she gasped. Staring up at her was the most beautiful doll she had ever seen. She was dressed in a beautiful purple dress, and there was a golden tiara on her head. She was a princess. The best part was that her skin matched Fatima's perfectly. Tears welled up in her eyes. She had never received something so beautiful, so wonderful. Her family embraced her as the tears fell down her face. For the first time in her life, Fatima felt loved and appreciated. She was no longer a poor, orphan girl begging on the streets of Sudan. She had a family who loved her. And even better, she was a princess, the princess she always dreamed to be. It was in that moment that something white caught her eye. Something white was falling, and she could see it through the window. Was it what she thought it was? It had to be! Fatima didn't have time to doubt. "Snow!" Jared and Ashley exclaimed. They rushed outside. Snow. It was everywhere. On the ground, in the trees, and in the air, falling and falling. "Let's make snow angels!" Ashley exclaimed. Fatima didn't know what snow angels were. But one thing she did know for sure; miracles happened, and her life was just beginning.



Don Quijote, Richard Taylor

Carved Just Right

Rachel Heinhorst

Pumpkin carving,
almost twenty years
consecutively,
my oldest twenty-two,
his birth excuse enough
for pumpkin patches, hayrides,
corn mazes, costumes, carvings,

and in those years,
two more children
so we've been hauling and rolling
and digging in our hands
and roasting seeds
and lighting up porches
for a long time.

My youngest, twelve now,
although no princess or witch,
she's gotten good at creativity
and make-up—how clever
her costumes are—
she's moved on to painting pumpkins,
but maybe next year
she'll carve something cool.

Time rolls out year after year
and the years change
and enter the world
bumpy as hayrides,
directionless as a maze,
and sometimes,
pleasantly simple
and carved just right.

Electric Poppy

Melissa Reese

I was nestled into my reading nook in the library, my copy of *The Bell Jar* sitting on my lap, wedged between my knobby knees. I created a nest for myself the same way birds created homes for their flock. The sleeves of my dusty rose bomber jacket were tied around my waist. I sat cross-legged, the heels of my studded boots touching. I was sitting on my jacket, the light of the afternoon spilling in from the window. I love sitting by the window, watching the light illuminate the pages of my book, feeling how the pages' edges are warmed ever so slightly by the gentle caress of the sun's rays.

"I love the way you read," said a quiet, dreamy voice.

I looked up my from my book, vaguely irritated to be interrupted. Even if it was by someone with dimples and freckles for days. Her auburn hair was luminescent. She was wearing a red velvet dress, like she walked out of a movie from the 1990s. She was so small that she was like a fairy. Even the way that she carried herself was fairylike. She stood on her tiptoes and walked up to me silently. She smelled of vanilla and lavender. She had a glow emanating from her that shone brighter than the sun. She was like the moon. Her ethereal light beamed, glowed, and illuminated brighter in the darkness.

"I can see the way you get lost—totally transported to your book's destination," she murmured, smiling a little nervously.

"Maybe I want to take the voyage alone," I said a little too harshly.

"I'm Poppy."

"Like the flowers that made everyone fall asleep in *The Wizard of Oz*?"

“Yeah,” she blushed.

Maybe I was too hasty, casting her aside too quickly, shooing her away like an unwanted bird.

“I’m Audrina,” I said, outstretching my hand to meet hers. As I did, I noticed a small tattoo on her forearm. Her tattoo showed a crescent moon cradling a lotus flower. The details of the tattoo were so intricately defined for such a small tattoo.

“What are you reading?” Curiosity sparkled and bloomed in her eyes like her tattoo of a lotus flower illuminated by the light of the moon.

“The madness of the fragile mind of Sylvia Plath.” I held up my book to her.

“Didn’t she kill herself?”

I felt a strong urge to defend her because from reading her book, I felt as if I knew her and understood her. “Her husband left her for another woman. She was deeply depressed. She attempted suicide many times. She overdosed on pills. She drove her car into a river. Finally, she died by carbon monoxide poisoning by sticking her head in an oven. Her kids were asleep nearby.”

“I’m sorry,” she bowed her head, ashamed of having asked me so bluntly what happened.

“Why are you sorry? You didn’t do anything. You weren’t even alive.”

“I just know that she means a lot to you. And I know that no one deserves to be treated that way. I know that I would never treat you that way.”

I stared at her, totally flabbergasted. Had she been flirting with me this whole time? Was I flirting, too? I knew that I felt a strong connection to her immediately, like she was a part of me that I had been missing, like being around her was like having a part of my identity restored after having been stripped away, a past memory remembered, a flame rekindled. Perhaps we were kindred spirits.

She kept talking to me, about anime, about how she wished she could time travel back to the nineties (So did I!), and about her Shetland sheepdog, Pippi, with her long, flowing hair. She loved to give her belly rubs and cuddle with her in bed, though she ended up taking up almost the whole bed. Pippi even pushed her off sometimes as she snuggled underneath her floral quilt that her grandmother had sewn for her. We talked in the afternoon sunshine for hours, always worried that a librarian would come along and shush us, especially when she giggled and I chuckled loudly in response. Her laugh was so silly and hilarious that it made me laugh.

All the while, I never knew if she wanted me the same way I wanted her, but I was thrilled to be in her company nonetheless. Love is not about ownership. It is about a mutual respect, understanding, and adoration of each other, I reminded myself, even though it was far too soon to think about love. But, then again, I felt as if I had known her for so long, like she was a part of my childhood returned to me.

If you see a beautiful flower, you should not pick it, but let it bloom. You should let it live and be wild and free. Similarly, you should respect your companion enough to give them the choice of whether they want to have freedom or be inextricably tied to someone. The poppies in Oz may have made people fall asleep, but my Poppy made me feel more awake than I have ever been.



Summer, Niquisha B. Keys

Bob Dylan's Shades

JR Rhine

How long behind Bob Dylan's Shades—
smoke furls and curls among the glass—
before a man belies his fame?

The corner of the room pervades—
imbued with smoke if so to pass—
How long behind Bob Dylan's Shades?

Visage so cool but starts to jade;
will eyes see through and to surpass,
before a man belies his fame?

Caught in the great aesthetical wake,
the fans will bend and surge en masse—
How long behind Bob Dylan's Shades?

His words, his voice, depict a sage—
I wonder if the lore will last
before a man belies his fame.

But once the petals cease to sway
and blades blow back a pompous ass—
How long behind Bob Dylan's shades,
before a man belies his fame?

Pinkies

Michele LaCroix

“Pinkies” they are called by vet techs, zoo keepers and people who make pets of snakes.

Pinkies come flash frozen—in fifty-pound bags. No sooner born than crystallized in ice—the chill setting in—hairless and squirming—bare skin to brother’s bare skin as they cool.

Who in our world of endless abandonment, betrayal, and pain, takes such a job?

Removing the pinkies from their frantic scrambling mouse mother as she persists seeking the sleek pink flesh of her newborns—perished to nourish other hungry caged and kept creatures.

Who on our planet has not felt such hunger?

Who among us does not suffer such cold?

With You

Alexis Kubala

With you, the flowers in me grew.
With every touch,
they flourished.
I fed them, watered them,
and through you,
they got sunlight.

Now that you're gone,
I hardly feed them.
They never get water.

And they groan at the weeds
I no longer pick.



Butter Flower, Chaunte Garrett

Smoke

Thomas Donohue

There was something about the first cool fall breeze, carrying a certain crisp quality that seemed to fill the nostrils and lungs to the point of bursting, which made Milton crave a cigarette. Milton reflected on why that was as he pulled out a cigarette on his walk home. He paused to flick the lighter, staring at the glorious flame for a moment before lighting what would be, if he kept count, his seventeenth cigarette that day. For him, smoking was more than just a habit or an addiction; there was a quality to the winking, fiery ember at the tip that transfixed him. Any time he lit a cigarette, it was like creating a new life form which danced and played just inches from his face. It breathed because he breathed. He was essentially its life-giver, its God. He liked to pretend that he was creating some sort of fairy, or a sprite that could only live in a flame. Whenever he put out a cigarette a minute ripple of sadness would come over him, unnoticed by even himself. If anything, his only reaction would be to crave another. These fiery sprites of his, which only he seemed to notice or even care about, were the only form of control in his life. He was painfully reminded of this fact as he sat at dinner with his family, at a table strewn with lumpy mashed potatoes, carelessly prepared peas, dry dinner rolls and a ham. He hated dinner there—hated eating, really. However, to say so out loud would be blasphemy against Mrs. Milton. Regardless, it was very rarely that Milton talked at the dinner table any which way.

Mr. Milton crumpled his copy of *The Lancaster Daily* and huffed in frustration as he sat at the table. The sudden gust of wind disturbed a fly from its perch, only for a moment, before zipping back down to the table.

“What is it, dear?” asked Mrs. Milton, out of no particular interest.

“It’s that damned union again! They’re doing everything in their power to undermine and take down the mill—they can’t even begin to understand how this strike will affect them!” Mr. Milton’s face crumpled like his newspaper into a frown as he spooned more and more potatoes onto his plate. “It’s almost as if they’d be happy if the whole damn place burned down. With every last one of them still trapped inside!”

Mrs. Milton smiled politely. “Oh, I’m sure it’ll all be fine. You know how these things go,” she said reassuringly, and hoping that he did know how these things went, because the hell if she did.

Little Sally Milton skipped into the dining room and over to her chair.

“Where have you been?” asked Mr. Milton as he smoothed out the crumpled newspaper before folding it.

“Sorry Daddy, I’ve just been trying to figure out what I should wear to the Spring Fling on Friday. Oh! —I’m just torn between this beautiful black lacy thing or that blue gown—you know, the one you got me last Christmas?”

“Oh, that’s a beautiful one, the one with the flower, right?” Mrs. Milton asked, bursting at her seams at her daughter’s youth, at the thought of she herself slipping into that delicate gown.

Mr. Milton merely grunted, and asked in between tremendous bites “You still going with that Edwards boy?”

“Tommy?” Sally Milton seemed to ooze a certain air of pleasure, and even superiority at the mention of his name. “Why, of course I am!”

Mr. Milton simply nodded, spooning yet another pile of potatoes onto his plate. The dinner rolls began to grow cold, as the fly on the table grew more and more adventurous with its advances towards the food. The setting sun outside cast a

golden light along the side of the Miltons' house, sending rays leaping in through the windows.

Milton wanted, more than anything, to smoke a cigarette.

“May I please be excused?” he asked after a time.

“What?” Mr. Milton looked up from his plate. “Oh, yes. Sure, sure. Oh wait, you’re still helping me and Mr. Dean move that old jalopy out of his yard tomorrow, right?”

Milton paused to consider this, as if he had an option. “Yes sir.”

“Good man.” Mr. Milton smiled widely and returned to his potatoes.

Milton walked outside and immediately lit a cigarette, once again bringing life to a fiery little sprite to play with. He stared out at the sun dipping down into the Deans' field; it seemed to be casting fire upon the untilled growth, surrounding the tall blades of grass with a luminous quality not unlike his cigarettes. Without thinking, he began to walk out into the glowing field. He was disappointed to find that the more and more he walked out into the field, the more the grass lost its amber sheen. Milton looked up. It was obvious that he would just have to walk towards the sun. Maybe even into the sun. He lit another cigarette as he strode west. The sun was abandoning him now; it was urgent that he pick up his pace. That he jog, no, sprint towards the sun and find the spot on the earth where it would crash down.

Crickets chirped nonchalantly off in the distance, the first stars began to poke through the veil of the night sky, and Milton gave up, lighting another cigarette, as the shimmering face of a moon took the place of the sun. Milton wheezed pathetically and laid down in the tall grass, just staring up at the night sky and smoking, blanketed by the tall, browning grass. Moments later, he calmly drifted off to sleep.

Milton had a wonderful dream—truly a fantastical dream. He was on the sun, with his sprite friends. All of them were

there, each and every one that he'd ever created. They were all together, dancing and frolicking amongst the flames. Milton laughed and laughed and laughed like he had never done before. He didn't even have the urge for a cigarette until he woke up, covered in a fine mist of dew. Milton had no idea what time it was—just that it was very late. He lit another cigarette as he began walking back. He shamefully snuffed it out as he reached his yard. There was something welling up inside of him, something strange and sad and unique. He almost thought that he could hear one of his sprite friends, asking why he had to kill them all the time.

Milton paused. He began to wonder the same thing himself, “Why do you have to go? I don't ever want you to leave.” Milton said to the still night air, as he lit yet another cigarette.

“We don't have to,” whispered the newly birthed sprite.

That was when Milton got an idea—the best idea he'd ever had. He went out into the decrepit old tool shed in the corner of the yard, rustling around for a moment amongst old tires, rusty tools, empty beer cans, and the like. He came back with a gallon of gasoline, carefully spreading it all along the perimeter and outside walls of the house. He took great care to make sure it reached up along its faded shingles and around the chipped green front door. Then, before it was too late, he tossed his beloved friend upon the nearest puddle of gasoline. My, oh my, did Milton's friend dance to life.

“Thank you so much Milton!” The fire seemed to roar.

Milton cried for a moment. But only for a moment. He spent the rest of the night dancing with his new friend.



Trash Baskets at Jones Beach, Paul Toscano

Like Sand

Joanne Van Wie

It's your soul-like hand that listens,
knows the pale shell I formed as a child,
the sound you felt when you lifted this
whelk out of the sea to answer.

Not the white noise of the ocean,
or the illusion of soft blue in waves.
You leaned closer-in, like sand,
like what couldn't be shaken loose.

The underwater of your heart,
came in softly like missing air.
It pressed overtop like layers of the broken
sky, and somehow as it held me

you knew how to listen.

Each of Us Is Special

Zach Smith

The boy slowly began to stir.

“Huh?” he said, and sat up from lying on the floor. “Well, it’s about time. Man, you were out forever.” As he opened his eyes, the boy realized he was being watched. Three young men were staring at him as if he had done something wrong. The tallest among them was stocky, but not built. He had long brown hair and incredibly smooth features; though at the moment, they were pressed into a scowl. He reminded the boy of what he thought a surfer would look like. The second was the exact opposite; bald with a small stature, yet muscled, making him look like a linebacker that had been shrunk. He even had the blank look on his face. The last was slightly taller, yet everything else about him was average: black, ruffled hair at average length, an average build, even his eyes were a dull, average blue. The only thing that made him stand out were those eyes. While they may have been normal, the look in them was not. They looked crazed, as if the young man had an insane idea that would be suicide—and he couldn’t wait to try it.

As he looked at them, he also noticed that each seemed to have their own style. The tall one wore what you would expect: a pair of shorts and a fitted t-shirt with a band of some kind on the front. The bald one had on a pair of worn-out old blue jeans and a cutoff white tee. It looked more like he was on his way to a construction company, or maybe a farm, than being locked up in a warehouse with a bunch of people he didn’t know. But the last one, he had the weirdest outfit the boy had ever seen. He wore a pair of red athletic shorts that were in perfect condition, but were at least two sizes too small. His shirt was a long-sleeved, heavy cotton

with nothing on it; it was solid purple. There were gaping holes where the elbows should be, and the ends of the sleeves were tattered. It looked like it fit well, though. Maybe it was just really old?

The boy suddenly realized they were still watching him. “What?” he said defensively. It was as if they were looking for something in him. “Do you know why we’re here? Or even where here is?” the tall one asked. What? What does he mean where here...is...

As the boy looked around, he realized he was in a warehouse of some kind. The warehouse was dimly lit, with no windows and few lights inside, casting shadows in every part of the warehouse. There were shelves along the outer walls with bins and containers and boxes stored neatly. And crates. There were crates everywhere, of all different shapes and sizes. Each had a label on its side to tell its contents, but they were all too far away to read. Whatever was held within those boxes, it must be important. But why was he here with all these crates?

“I can answer that one.” Another person stepped out of the shadows towards them. He was only slightly older than them, yet his hair was already gray. While he seemed to be just like anyone else, he had incredibly sharp features. He had a long face, with thin lips, a sharp nose, and large eyes. And what magnificent eyes they were. While most would be a muted color of blue or green, his were a bright yellow. It was hard to look at his face without immediately turning to look at his eyes. As he stepped out of the shadows, he exuded a confidence in him that was intimidating; here was someone who knew how to handle people. “But first,” he said, “I want to know who you all are.”

“Why should we tell you anything? You should be the one explaining, not us. How about we talk when you tell us why you want to know,” the tall one demanded. “I’m Sam.”

What about you?” the one with the crazy eyes said. “And the grumpy one is Floyd.” The tall man’s face became a mask of outrage that his name was given away against his opinion. “Why’d you do that? We don’t know this guy and you’re already listening to him?” “Well, I don’t exactly know you, either. He seems interesting, though. Why not give him a chance?” Sam said. The bald one looked confused like he didn’t know what to do, but for fear of being left out, said “I’m Freid. I’d say nice to meet’cha, but I don’ think we know anythin’ about what’s goin’ on. Oh yea, we never got the chance to ask ya yer name, since ya slept so long. Who are ya?”

The boy thought about it for a moment. Could he trust these people? He had never met them before, and he had no idea where he was or why or how he got there. But, since he didn’t know anything about what was going on, he might as well work with these guys to figure something out. “Kyle,” he said. “Oh, so you’re one of those silent types, huh?” said Sam. “That’s cool. So Wolfie, where are we?” Everyone turned to look at Sam. “Aw c’mon, don’t tell me no one else thinks he looks like a wolf. He even has the eyes!” When you think about it, Kyle thought, he does look like a wolf. The thought would be funny, if they knew who he was.

The lupine man smirked, as if the idea amused him. “That sounds like a good enough name. It’ll have to do. Just call me the Wolfe. So, you all wanted to know where you are, right?” He looked at each in turn. All of them were nodding to each other, trying to see if any of them already knew. “You’re in Framingham, Massachusetts. This is a warehouse devoted to keeping old World War Two gear. There is a World War Two museum over in Natick, and this is where the extras are kept.”

“So why are we here?” Floyd asked. The Wolfe raised his eyebrows at the question. “Is that the most important question you have right now?” he asked. Floyd looked at him angrily

and said, “Well, what do you expect? We don’t know how we got here or why. What do you think we want to know?” Sam looked thoughtful for a moment, then asked “Why are we meeting in a warehouse for a World War Two museum? I mean, of all places, this is kinda interesting, don’t you think?” The Wolfe’s eyes lit up at the question. “That,” he said, “is what I expect. However, that is a question for you to figure out in your own time. There is another question you should be asking.”

Everyone stopped to think about it for a moment. Kyle looked around and noticed that none of them had anything in common; each was a different size, with different looks and different attitudes. But they had to have something in common. What could it be? “Why us?” he asked. Everyone turned to him. “What d’ya mean?” Freid asked, confused. Kyle looked like he didn’t know how to explain, then said, “Well, none of us know each other, but obviously we were chosen for something. Right?” The Wolfe smiled and responded, “Close. You were chosen ‘because’ of something, but not necessarily ‘for.’ You are here because I wanted to meet all of you. Not only me, but I wanted all of you to meet each other as well. You see, you were wrong that none of us have anything in common. Each of us is special.”

“Special?” Freid asked. “What d’you mean by ‘special’?” Sam laughed nervously and looked terrified. He seemed very tense, almost as if he was on the verge of running away. “What do you think we are? Crazy?” The Wolfe chuckled and said, “No, no, nothing like that. Each of you have abilities that you didn’t know you had. You might have tapped them at some point, but you probably assumed it was adrenaline or something similar. You see, everyone here is super-human. Granted, you are not Superman, but you are more than a normal person. You have stronger internal structures, which allow you to have certain...abilities that are stronger than

a normal human's. For instance, your bones are stronger, your heart is able to beat faster, your muscles are firmer and able to withstand more tension. So basically, you are able to run faster, jump higher, lift heavier objects, and many other things. It is an ability that very few have." All of them looked skeptical at what the Wolfe said, except for Sam who seemed positively elated.

"How few?" Freid asked. The Wolfe looked put off-guard for the first time during their brief time together. "You're looking at them." For a moment, everything was silent. No one could believe what they had just heard. "You mean, this is it? How is there no one else? If this is true, how are there so few?" Kyle asked. "I don't know. I'm not sure what causes this, or what its limitations are, or why it has only happened to people who are both young and male, but I can assure you that we are the only super-humans in this country. I was hoping that if we came together, maybe we could find out."

"How can you tell us this and expect us to just accept it? Like, 'hey guys, you are naturally better at just about everything, but no one knows about this. And you're the only ones. And I have no idea why you have this difference, but you do.'? How can we hear this and just accept it?" Kyle asked, incredulous. "You are not better at everything. This strength only affects you physically; your mind is no better than what it normally would be. As such, your reflexes are unaffected as well. I know this is a lot to take in, but what I am saying is true. I may not know what we can do, but I am sure we can find out, if you are willing to come with me. What do all of you think?" Everyone became pensive, not knowing what to believe, until Sam suddenly shouted, "Are you kidding? This is amazing! We have a gift no one else has. Imagine what we could do with it! Oh man, I gotta learn parkour now. Do you know any limits yet?" The Wolfe looked taken aback by the sudden enthusiasm. "A few. You can, when focusing hard

enough, run upwards of the speed you could on a bicycle. You can jump the height of a one-story building. Lifting a large amount of weight seems to be something that can't be determined; the amount has always varied for me. That is all I know about our limitations at the moment."

Freid did not seem nearly as upbeat as Sam, yet he did not look as skeptical as before. "I guess there are times when I 'ave done some amazin' things sometimes" he said. "But I never woulda guessed I was different. Why's my doctor never seen this?" The Wolfe turned to him and said, "Because it requires an incredible amount of focus to be able to activate this extra strength. You won't notice any change occurring, but believe me, it is there. If you do not focus, that strength is not there. Any time you are not physically active and focused intensely on whatever you are doing, you are just like everyone else. In a doctor's office, you would not be focused on being able to tap that strength, so it is unnoticeable."

Floyd suddenly became livid, asking, "But why kidnap us? Why drag us away from our homes under the suspicion that we are 'super-human' as you say? And why assume we would give a damn?" The others were choosing not to say anything, but their approval of what Floyd said was written in their faces. The Wolfe looked patiently at Floyd and said, "Well, I cannot speak for everyone, but I know that you were hardly 'dragged' from your home. Isn't that right?" Both the anger and the color suddenly drained from Floyd's face. "How do you know about that?" he whispered. But the Wolfe instead answered, "I wanted to meet you all because I was hoping we could find out what makes us what we are. The only way to do that is to come together. I would like to work with all of you to figure out what this difference within us is. And there is no better way to find out than to work together to figure it out. However, I know this is a lot to be putting on you. I think it would be a good idea to meet back here tomorrow at noon.

That will give each of you ample time to get a good night's rest and try testing out your powers. As a tip to figuring out how to use it, try finding a straight path where nothing will get in your way, and just start running. Once you start, focus on where you want to be and you will get there much faster than you should. Now, I have a few provisions for each of you. See these packs?" The Wolfe gestured to a set of four duffel bags set neatly on a nearby crate, each neatly arranged by numbers one through four printed on their sides. They were small, barely big enough for overnight supplies. Each was black and unmarked except for their number. "Inside each of these are two changes of clothes; my apologies for the sizes. I took my best guess. There are also any sort of overnight supplies you may need, along with a hundred dollars in cash, in case you need anything. Each of you has a room in the Madison Hotel. It is not too far away, just ten minutes walking. Tell the man at the front desk who you are and he will give you your room key. Now, I must bid you goodnight. I am sure you are anxious to get out there and test what I have said, and I have something to attend to. I hope to see all of you here at tomorrow noon." And with that, the Wolfe casually walked out the front door of the warehouse and left the four to themselves. Behind him, they noticed there was no light; it was the middle of the night. For a moment, no one moved. What were they to do? Just start running around like madmen? How do you try to use something you didn't know you had, and have no idea how to use it?

After a brief moment, Sam began to laugh. "What's so funny?" Kyle asked. "Nothing, just...that's it? Just go out and do whatever? In a town we aren't familiar with? Oh, man. That's too good. I gotta go try this out. And everyone knows the best way to learn is to jump right in, right? Man, I'm starving. I could really go for some pizza now. Anyone else?" Floyd just simply shook his head and walked out into the

night. “Okay, so not him. Anyone else? C’mon it’ll be fun!” For a moment, neither of the remaining two said anything, then Freid looked up. “Well, guess I am a bit hungry. Sure, I’ll come along.” “Sweet,” Sam said, “what about you, oh quiet one?” For a moment, Kyle considered it. But the look in Sam’s eyes spoke of trouble, and even if he wouldn’t admit it out loud, this little man scared him a little. So he said, “No thanks. I’m kinda tired. I think I will try to find that hotel the Wolfe was talking about.”

“Suit yourself” Sam replied. “We are off to nab dinner. Oh man, I can’t wait to figure this out. This is gonna be so much fun! C’mon!” “Wait,” Freid replied after a moment, “ya said ‘nab’. What’d ya mean by that?” Sam just laughed as he stepped out into the night.

Eternal Repose

Eleora Bartsch

Fall into eternal repose.
When there is no longer a spark,
Everything must come to a close.

The midnight ravens and the crows,
The red-breast robin and the western lark,
Fall into eternal repose.

Just like the white Cherokee Rose
on which the cold winter left its mark,
Everything must come to a close.

Even the creatures of the meadows,
Know when their existence is stark,
Fall into eternal repose.

Although men and women oppose
it, aspire to further embark,
Everything must come to a close.

Succumb to the veiled shadows,
Embrace the everlasting dark.
Fall into eternal repose.
Everything must come to a close.



Donut Connection, Diane Payne

Geologist

Kate Lassman

Can any words, made of only breath and ink,
truly capture the inscape of the mountains,
their violet hue in the pink light of the dawn,
the snow atop them like the last streetlamp,
or, in the clarity of full sunshine,
that precise tint of distant-evergreen blue?
You showed me the mountains, father,
when I was a child
on pebbled alpine trails,
around pristine glacial lakes,
into aspen woods and pine.
I wish I had understood that you
were sharing strata of yourself as well.

Can any words, made of only breath and ink,
truly capture the inscape of a soul?
They say we become like what we love,
and so you did, with rocklike steadiness
watching protectively over me
and orienting me, as the mountains in the west;
I have never needed nor have kept a compass.

Nothing fazes the mountains,
not the fiercest blizzards
nor the most rambunctious children;
they endure without complaint eroding rains,
and when the clouds or the fog
or the depths of a starless night
conceal them from view,
the mountains remain dependable, like you;
they are nevertheless still there.

a walk in the woods

Neal Dwyer

I beheld an image
and prayed I could receive

the words to convey
its mood
and emotional meaning

so that someone else could feel
as I did—alive.

If I were a poet,
I would listen with my better ear,
hear the words drop

like leaves
from rain-soaked limbs
to puddle, pond

and pine bed—and from them
craft a poem
to breathe life back

into the mood, into the moment,
into the image
that has only just now

passed before my eyes

Contributors

ELEORA BARTSCH is currently an 18-year-old student at CSM. She has always had a deep love of literature and the arts. In her free time, you can find her reading or writing stories and poems of her own.

SHERBIE CARSON is a local creative writer, barefoot mural designer, picker of wildflowers, and overall seeker of silver-linings. Her greatest loves are serving as a missionary overseas, friends who became family, and those who call her mom.

THOMAS DONOHUE says he is a strange person who likes to write weird stuff. He lives with his parents, two brothers, sister, cat, and ukulele. He says that they all get along relatively well, except the cat sometimes disagrees with the uke.

NEAL DWYER teaches English at CSM and has been instrumental in bringing the Connections Literary Series to CSM each year, which offers the Southern Maryland community a chance to hear from and meet established and emerging local writers.

CHAUNTE GARRETT is currently working as a mail operations assistant in Mail, Distribution, and Fulfillment Services at CSM. She is currently taking classes to reach her goal of becoming a graphic designer. She has a passion for photography, but is not confident in her abilities to be one.

RACHEL HEINHORST is an assistant professor at CSM. She has been published several times in *Connections*.

NIQUISHA B. KEYS is a 20-year-old student majoring in Communications at CSM. Photography has been a hobby of hers since 12th grade, and she takes pictures when not busy at work.

GINETTE KRANTZ is an adjunct professor teaching criminal justice at CSM.

ALEXIS KUBALA is a writer with a heart full of pins and needles.

MICHELE LaCROIX has been an English teacher at CSM for twenty-two years and still enjoys teaching composition classes as well as literature. She dabbles in poetry to capture her personal impressions of life in words when the muse inspires.

KATE LASSMAN is an adjunct instructor teaching English composition at the CSM La Plata Campus. She holds an MFA in poetry from George Mason University and lives in Waldorf with her husband, two spoiled rotten cats, and two infant kittens well on their way to becoming spoiled rotten.

JIM McDONALD has two books of poetry, and they both include 25 poems that tell the reader about his life.

WILLIAM MORONEY is an associate professor at CSM teaching criminal justice and homeland security.

DIANE PAYNE currently works full-time for Mail, Distribution, and Fulfillment Services in the Marketing Department at CSM as the mail electronic support technician and is a photography assistant for the Community Relations Department.

JENNIFER POLHEMUS graduated from CSM in 1999. She currently lives in Central Pennsylvania. Her fourth collection of poetry, *Balloons...and Other Things That Float* will be released sometime in the next several months. Jennifer is currently editing an anthology of poetry, *Her Believing Heart*, about domestic violence in lesbian relationships. She has been publishing her work in *Connections* since 1993.

MIKAELA POLLARD says her dream has always been to be a published writer. Even as a child, she was fascinated by the power of words and the effect they have on the reader. She says that for her, “How Winter Feels” is a story that needs to be told. She wanted to capture the hope that a poor, forgotten orphan child still has in spite of her unfortunate circumstances. Prior to this story, Mikaela has had two other works published, a short story about her grandmother’s childhood, and a short prose on hummingbirds.

MARY PRATHER is a first-year graduate student.

MELISSA REESE is Salisbury University student majoring in communication arts – multimedia journalism with a minor in English. Her works have been published by *The Flyer*, the Salisbury University newspaper. She is a passionate book, film, and television lover, and she dreams of faraway fantasy lands, full of magical characters.

JR RHINE is 23 years old and currently residing in California, Maryland. He is a College of Southern Maryland Class of 2012 alum, having graduated with his Associate of Arts degree in General Studies. He has his bachelor’s degree in History from St. Mary’s College of Maryland, and is a Master of Arts in Teaching Candidate. He skateboards, plays music,

reads a lot, and writes it all down when it's too much to think. His self-published debut collection of poems, *Parking Lot Poems*, is now available online.

ZACH SMITH is a third semester student at CSM.

RICHARD TAYLOR currently works full-time for Mail, Distribution, and Fulfillment Services at CSM in the Marketing Department as the mail courier.

PAUL TOSCANO has been a serious photographer for nearly ten years. His work has been exhibited at several local galleries and in several publications.

JOANNE VAN WIE is a local poet who is not ashamed to frequent the urban dictionary. Recently, she found “poet” defined there as “a map-maker of the collective unconscious,” and so she continues her lifetime cartography project. Joanne has been previously published in *Connections* and recently was featured in the inaugural issue of *TEXTure* magazine of Annapolis. She is a twenty-year resident of St. Mary's County and an upstate New Yorker by birth.

LIZ WEAVER is in her final semester at CSM. She has created story ideas in her head since before she can remember and she started writing stories at the age of nine. She plans to continue writing after college in the hopes of someday becoming an author.

CHRISTOPHER WILKINS is a poet, novelist, violist, and Episcopal priest living in Southern Maryland. He has taught at CSM since 2008.



Connections

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