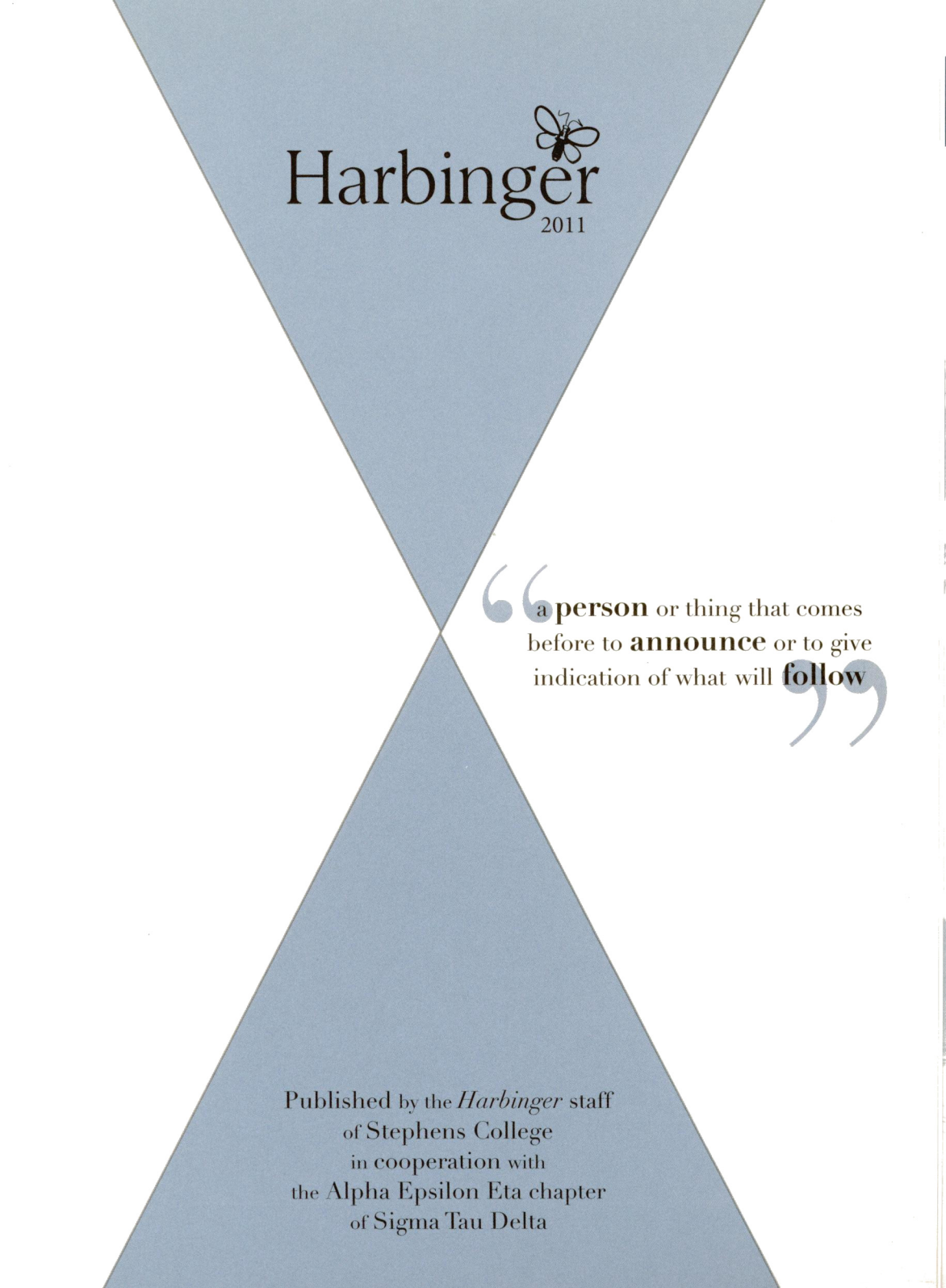


2011 Harbinger

FIGHT
or *flight*





Harbinger
2011

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

Published by the *Harbinger* staff
of Stephens College
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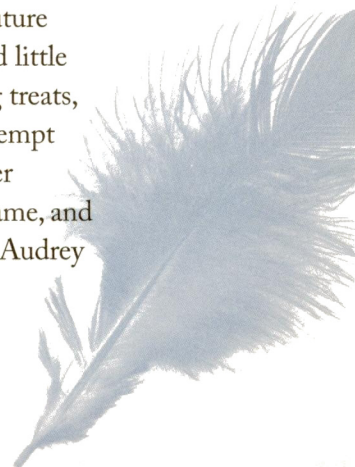
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Foreword

Fight or Flight: The Resiliency of the Human Spirit

As an avid Audrey Hepburn fan, I have benefited from the fact that all things Audrey have experienced a renaissance in the past decade. At the most commercial level, her iconic image is used in television and magazine ads, her elfin face branding everything from T-shirts to wall art. The volume of books published about Hepburn is booming; they range from biographies, to books on the style icon's timeless look, to guides on how to be more like Audrey. The figure of Audrey Hepburn is still prevalent in our culture nearly twenty years later because she is the seemingly effortless embodiment of all the characteristics we strive to attain, perhaps none more than glamour combined with humility. But when one discovers the private battles Hepburn spent her whole life fighting, it becomes clear that her existence was anything but glamorous or effortless.

Audrey grew up in the German-occupied Netherlands during World War II. Her father abandoned their family a few days before German troops invaded their city, when Audrey was only six years old. His abandonment haunted her for the rest of her life and negatively influenced her future relationships with men. Her family had no money and little food. Her brothers occasionally resorted to eating dog treats, while Audrey would read for hours at a time in an attempt to ignore her own hunger. Malnourishment during her developmental years contributed to Audrey's small frame, and while the pressure on current actresses is to stay trim, Audrey

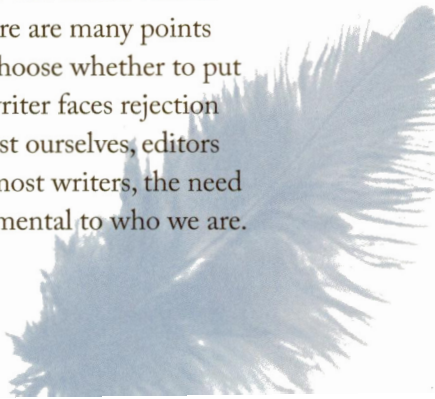




continually struggled to keep weight on her boyish figure. Though Audrey personifies compassion and sincerity, her life was full of less admirable characters: a negligent father, a rigid, unaffectionate mother, and two unfaithful husbands. Through all of the rubble, Audrey fought past her obstacles to emerge a highly successful film star, fashion trendsetter, and world humanitarian, not to mention a great wife, mother and friend, according to those closest to her.

Audrey knew how to fight, how to use courage and resilience to overcome obstacles, but she also knew when to flee. She created a haven for herself in her home in Switzerland, where she spent most of her time when she wasn't making movies. She knew how toxic the environment of Hollywood could be, and even though her absence made her less popular among other actors and directors, Audrey felt strongly that it was important to have a place where she could escape the notoriety. Likewise, as much as Audrey wanted to be loved and to be in love, she was capable of saying enough is enough in her marriages. She was no doormat, and when she began to feel as if her husbands were treating her like one, she was willing to wave goodbye and start anew.

Audrey Hepburn is a fine example of *Harbinger* 2011's theme of "Fight or Flight." The concept is one that is vital to the journey of every artist. As writers, there are many points in the creative process when we have to choose whether to put on our armor or our wings. Every great writer faces rejection or, even worse, self-doubt. We fight against ourselves, editors and critics. But we press on, because for most writers, the need for expression through language is fundamental to who we are.



We know that a rejection letter is not the be-all and end-all of our experience as writers. At least, it wasn't for James Joyce's *Dubliners*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, or J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, to name a few.

Simultaneously, there are times when we have to know when to give in. This does not mean that we have to fly from our writerly ambitions, but occasionally we have to be willing to put a story or poem that we have been ceaselessly working on in the drawer when we realize it is holding us back. We have to be willing to start fresh, to leave our comfort zone and stand unflinchingly before the blank canvas. Daringly, we let ourselves imagine in order to create something new and unfamiliar. Fleeing can be just as brave as fighting, and just as difficult.

This year, the *Harbinger* staff chose the theme of "Fight or Flight" because, though each piece possesses a different voice and tells a unique story, much of the poetry and prose published in this issue are about milestones. They explore that point in life when one has to choose to fight or to flee. In "The D Word," Amanda Visser gives a refreshing take on divorce as she details her journey to find the positive in a situation our society usually deems as negative. Taylor Grant's "Always Seventeen" is about a young man's disappointment upon returning to his hometown to discover that his high school reputation supersedes his ambitions. "Food Wars," by Sela Freuler, explores the author's conflicts with food and body image, a story that is both amusing and heartbreaking.

The poetry in this issue likewise demonstrates the spirit of resiliency amidst disappointments and doubts. In "Sleepers," Lydia Lane addresses her generation's struggles and cultural

pitfalls while finding comfort in the determination to make an effort. Kristin J. McCowan's narrative poem, "Cheers," is about the consequences of a precarious lifestyle. "Falling Asleep" is a dreamy, meditative piece by Paige Kesner about the comforts and familiar surroundings of one's bedroom at night. "Bars Poetica," by Emily Petrie, addresses the inevitable second thoughts of pursuing a writing career.

Great literature speaks to a common human experience. I hope readers of *Harbinger* 2011 will be taken back to a moment, a memory, a milestone – a familiar place that reminds them of the strength of the human spirit.

Enjoy!

P.B.

Hello, dreamer, with fists knocking
back glass after glass. Any luck
becoming a novelist, a poet?

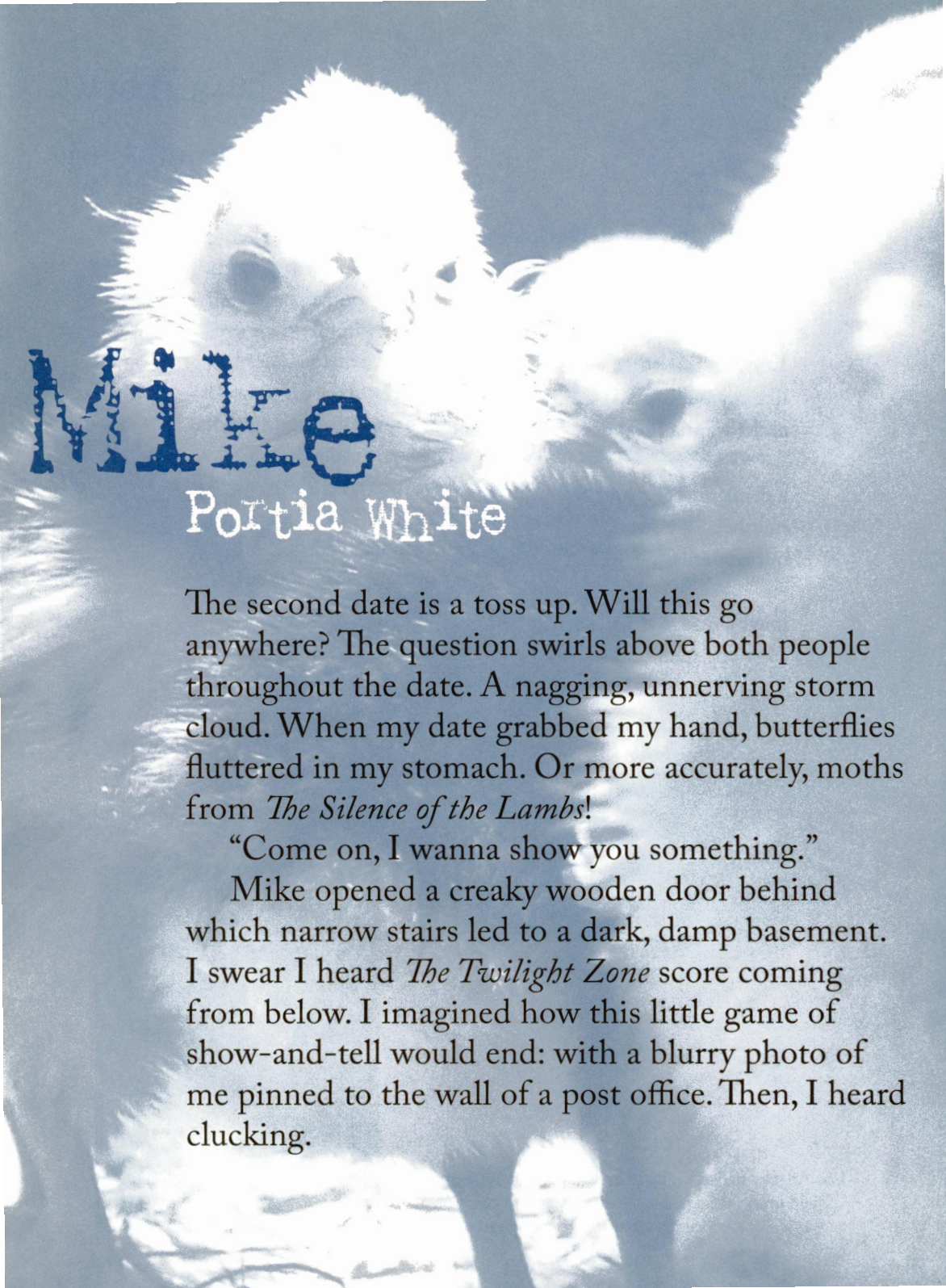
Long Islands are a letdown
like my publisher is a letdown,
and I wanna buy you

a drink and get your
number, take you
out sometime,

maybe read you an excerpt
from my memoir.

Los Angeles native Emily Petrie studies creative writing
and music at Stephens College. She is working on a
collection of roller derby inspired poems.





Mike

Portia White

The second date is a toss up. Will this go anywhere? The question swirls above both people throughout the date. A nagging, unnerving storm cloud. When my date grabbed my hand, butterflies fluttered in my stomach. Or more accurately, moths from *The Silence of the Lambs*!

“Come on, I wanna show you something.”

Mike opened a creaky wooden door behind which narrow stairs led to a dark, damp basement. I swear I heard *The Twilight Zone* score coming from below. I imagined how this little game of show-and-tell would end: with a blurry photo of me pinned to the wall of a post office. Then, I heard clucking.

The first night we met, Mike said he had a few chickens at his house, but I thought he was trying to make me laugh with another cheesy agriculture joke. I was also buzzed. He was against anything that was harmful to the body or the environment. He wanted chickens so that he could breed them and sell the chicks off to farmers. He also wanted to eat the eggs instead of purchasing them from some evil grocery store. I admired him for his stance on animal cruelty. I was dating a modern-day Thoreau.

In the basement, my shoes felt as if they were buried in cement. He snatched the hens from their comfortable crouching positions and introduced each of them. He explained the coloring of the feathers and their origin. Fascinating. As he placed the third hen on the floor, he looked around perplexed. I scanned the room as well, although I was searching for sharp objects.

“I know I have another one somewhere around here?”

He scratched his head. In his hemp beanie and striped Salvation Army sweater, he looked like the hipster version of Waldo.

A black hen clucked above me. It was wedged between a black beam and black ceiling. Its eyes flashed, the pupils large and wild. A stare down commenced. On the second date, most girls are worried about second base and who should pay for dinner. I was worried about getting shit on by a chicken.

“I think I found her,” I said and pointed directly above my newly washed hair.

“Oh yeah, there she is. She’s a little skittish. Do you wanna hold her?” He was too excited.

“No, uh, that’s ok. She looks pretty comfortable where she’s at.”

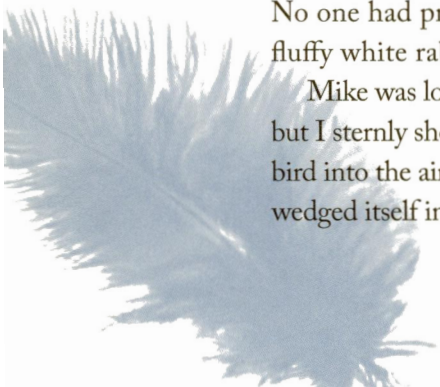
“No, don’t be scared,” he said. He reached both of his hands above my head and in one swift motion snatched the hen from its hide-out. The frightened bird squawked loudly. I half expected it to drop an egg. He cradled it to his chest and finished his demonstration. He pointed out how this hen was thinner than the others because it came from the southern part of some such country. The hen’s body rose and fell. It took quick and labored breaths. Its eyes were angry, a gold iris turning bronze.

“Here, squeeze her neck.”

I stepped back. I did not sign up for this. The bird started to calm down, but its feet were still flexed. He shoved this feathery load in my direction, and I was suddenly transported to the darkest days of my childhood.

When I was five years old, my kindergarten class was invited to a “real” farm called Old MacDonald’s. As soon as we got off the bus, kids sprinted toward the stables, eager to pet the mules and feed the goats. I spent the majority of that trip by the van, forcing down the vomit that had risen in my throat. I didn’t want to barf all over my new red jumper, but the smell of horse manure choked my lungs. No one had prepared me. I was duped with the promise of fluffy white rabbits.

Mike was looking at me waiting with the bird in his arms, but I sternly shook my head “no.” He shrugged and tossed the bird into the air. It flew to the other side of the basement and wedged itself into a corner. It looked like a bat on steroids. I was



ready to go back upstairs where there was actual furniture and windows, but unfortunately our tour was not over. The basement contained more than one room. He stepped over a huge rolled-up carpet and said, "Ignore the trash burrito."

"Trash burrito?"

"Yeah, I collect trash and save it so that I can recycle it or maybe turn it into compost."

"Oh! Is all this trash yours?" I asked. Ripped posters and pizza boxes sprinkled with food bits covered the floor. I tried to uncrease my face but couldn't. Mike noticed.

"Oh no, I just collect stuff when I walk around town. I usually put all of it on this old rug. I roll it up so that I don't have to look at all the trash, hence the trash burrito."

He laughed a little, and I plastered on a stiff smile. He showed me his latest experiment: 'eco fuel.' He was an unofficial chemist, making fuel from natural products that could run his dirt bike efficiently and curb pollutants. He poured a thick green tea mixture into a bowl and swirled it around.


"It doesn't even smell," he said.

He was right. Just before I leaned in to take a big whiff, he quickly dabbed his index finger into the bowl and licked it.

"Try it." He offered the bowl as if it were only an exotic soup.

"Tour over," I said.

In his living room, we sat on a lumpy sofa in front of a brick fireplace. It was the best room in the house. No curtains, but still nice. Outside, winter frost glistened on tree branches and car hoods. I sat off center on the couch. I wished that I




had something to do with my hands. I played with a buckle on the back of my boot, but it wasn't enough. I watched Mike's back as he worked on the fire. In this moment I remembered why I was attracted to him. Chic Waldo had a primal quality about him. His skills as hunter-gatherer could not be denied. Despite his thin frame, I could see the muscles in his back and hands as he tore through thick bits of cardboard. His eyes were a calming, clear blue. His dirty blond locks curled around his ears, and he sniffled every few moments. The sniffles were cute but the source behind them was not. He was constantly conscious of his carbon footprint and, therefore, refused to turn on the heat. It was February.

I had never been attracted to his type before. I preferred a cross between Boris Kojo and John Stewart. At sixteen, I realized that I would probably never encounter this exact combination; as a result, I decided that Mike wasn't so bad.

He hovered over the growing flames and warmed his hands a little. In an awkward and geekish way, he was handsome. Yep, I decided that Mike was the cream. He had all of his teeth and no children. He had even finished high school. He freaked me out a bit, but that was simply because I was too picky. I needed to update my standards. I wasn't in high school anymore. I was twenty and in the middle of a mandemic. Adjustments had to be made.

Mike finished nursing the fire and sat down next to me. At my feet was an old ID card with a photo of a young Mike smiling because he was now a member of a YMCA in Montana. I looked back up at him and laughed a little.

"What is that?" I gestured at the card with the tip of my right foot.



“Oh that? That’s from when I was living in Montana, and I was in Boy Scouts.”

“Really?” This was too cute.

“Yeah, really. How do you think I was able to build this awesome fire? We had to learn that stuff right away, and I graduated all the way to Eagle Scouts.” He leaned closer, clearly pleased with himself and his scout status.

“That’s impressive. I couldn’t get through Brownies.”

“Why not?”

“I didn’t have a knack for sales.” I shrugged.

“Oh well, what can ya do then?”

“I certainly couldn’t do this, build a fire.”

“What? Everyone should know how to do that. It’s pretty important. I’ll have to show you next time.”

He mentioned the future. There was a “next time,” but I wasn’t sure how I felt about it. I changed the subject to my childhood or something equally irrelevant. He laughed at the self deprecation that had turned into a one-woman comedy act. I made him laugh, which made me relax. He leaned in closer, and I let him kiss me. At the end of our first date, Mike had given me such a pathetic hug that I thought I wouldn’t hear from him again. I was ready for a kiss.

His lips were soft, unlike my last boyfriend who had lips like a catfish. Mike’s breath was warm and tasted like cannabis. His tongue seemed apprehensive and lost. This was a disappointment. I didn’t pull away. I knew if I did, he would think that I didn’t like him, so I rode it out after a decent amount of tongue tangling. He stopped and pulled me to him. That was nice. Mike was a quality cuddler; he

should've taught cuddling seminars. For the rest of the night we played the kissing game with Mike initiating and me pulling away. He probably thought that I was being coy, when really I was not interested in inhaling skunk breath. Aware that the first few dates aren't always the greatest, I remained optimistic. I curled up next to him, and we watched the flames as the night turned into morning.

Things with Mike went faster than with any other guy I had dated. I invited him over to my place for coffee. I

stepped outside of my building to greet him. He got out of the car, and it smelled as if he had been hot boxing for at least an hour before his arrival. I wasn't sure what to do. Send him back, forcing him to drive while he was as high as the Chrysler Building? Or chastise him and let him stay? I led him to my room. When he found out that I lived in 311, he looked as if he was about to burst with excitement.

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah."

"Room 311? This is so crazy. This is like fate. 311 is the best band ever, so this is pretty cool!"

"Ok then, it's up this way," I said. He followed me to the third floor.

Sweet merciful Jesus, what had I done? I should have left him in the parking lot. I should've cursed him out. I got all guidance counselor on him instead. When we were both in my

Mike's breath was warm
and tasted like cannabis.


room, I poured him a cup of coffee and asked him, “Why do you like to smoke so much?”

He laughed as if my question was a trick that he was too smart to fall for. He could not possibly answer my naïve question in mere words. I would need to be a fellow toker in order to understand. My question was sincere. I had taken a hit or two before, but never really saw what the big deal was. I usually laughed for ten minutes straight, and then craved Steak’n Shake. For me it was just a way to waste time. He paused for what seemed like an eternity. For a moment, I thought that he had fallen asleep with his eyes open. A realization was building. I began to feel like Mike’s mistress, and the wife was Mary Jane. Finally he spoke.

He told me about his childhood. He was puny and got kicked around by other kids. This made him moody and anti-social. He had a strong loathing for himself and the rest of humanity. He used to cry and injure himself. Whoa! This was way too much info for date three. I sipped my now cold coffee while he continued to unload. What could I have said in that instant? I just listened.

Mike said that pot calmed him down, helped him gain friends and find his passion. I felt that he was self medicating. How could I tell him that I wouldn’t date him anymore if he didn’t lay off the bong? He smelled like skunk all the time. I didn’t want to introduce my friends to Pepé Le Pew.

I had asked a question and gotten an answer. I just didn’t like the answer. I left the rest of my homework by the cold coffee and decided to spoon with him. He wouldn’t last long anyway. We swapped stories about our week and compared



the scars on our bodies. We kissed and this time it was better than the first time. I tasted a hint of coffee, and we drifted off to sleep.

The next morning I rolled over and looked at Mike. It was like seeing him for the first time. This moment and how soon it would fade away brought a brief but immense sadness. Mike began to stir, and I could tell that he wanted to do more than kiss and cuddle. I enjoyed our little sleep over, but I couldn't shake that quick but quivering sadness I felt when I watched him sleep. There was a film between us, a screen of smoke that Mike refused to remove. We would never be that close again because Mike would never be as clear, conscious and pleasant as he was that morning. So I sent him home. I needed time to think.

I wasn't ready to give up on Mike, so date four led me back to his place. We spent that morning at the farm where he worked. I petted goats and horses and didn't gag once. Out there in the fields, it was our own little private heaven. We fed the turkey and checked on his puppy that was too young to take back to his house.

I was reading a dream dictionary in his bed while he was tending to the chickens strutting around in his backyard. I waited for a few minutes and eventually he came back inside from the winter cold. He smiled at me, washed his hands, and then lay down beside me. He kissed me, and I examined the fresh scars on his palms.

"Mike, I'm getting attached to you."

"Don't," he said, and rolled away from me.

Was this a joke? It took me a second to recover before I asked, “What?”

“I just don’t do well with relationships. It takes a lot of attention.”

“Oh,” I said.

It took all of my inner strength to keep from thumping him hard on his head. I lay in the bed a little while longer. He stayed affectionate, but I was a mannequin. I got up to get a glass of water and asked him to take me home. He seemed sad but didn’t say no. When he pulled into my parking lot, he kissed me. I got out of the car and walked away with a fire in my gut.

I spent the next several days in a robotic state and waited to hear from him. He called me. He didn’t apologize, but he wanted to know what happened. He wanted to see me. I stared at the phone in disbelief. I wasn’t sure that I wanted to see him after he gave me that line in his bed. He wanted to meet tomorrow night for coffee. I surprised myself when I said yes. I wasn’t sure of where we fell in the dating category, but I was sure of my six-month dry spell. I would see him again for self-serving reasons. No more spooning nonsense and no more free therapy sessions. I was no Dr. Laura. If I couldn’t get a relationship from him, I would get a carnal consolation prize.

I sat across from Mike and sipped blueberry tea while he explained that the world was going to hell. I pretended to listen while studying the people passing by the café. I hadn’t introduced Mike to any of my friends, and now that I knew there was nothing to hold onto, I decided that a run-in



with a friend would equal disaster.

“I mean, people who litter really piss me off. Look at this,” he said as he pulled a huge crumpled up sorority photograph from his purse. “I just wish that I could’ve seen whoever left this on the street.”

“Why?”

“So that I could tell them to pick it up. It’s ridiculous the way people just don’t care about the world and what’s going on around them!”

“That’s true, but what if they didn’t even know that they had dropped the photo?”

Mike rolled his eyes at me.

“Ok, what if they knew that they had dropped it but had gotten a really bad phone call that their grandma died and then they couldn’t be bothered to pick the photo up?”

“Doesn’t happen.”

There was no convincing him. I began to see Mike’s fear of commitment as a good thing. He honestly believed that people who littered clearly deserved to be punched in the face. No excuses.

I went home with Mike after our discussion at the café. I entered the house and dropped my bag by the door. I headed for the kitchen to drink from the only glass in Mike’s cupboard, a relic from a family trip to Disneyland in 1982. I drank while he stared at me in the hallway.

As I stepped toward him, he shouted, “Careful! Don’t step on that box. My frogs are in there.”

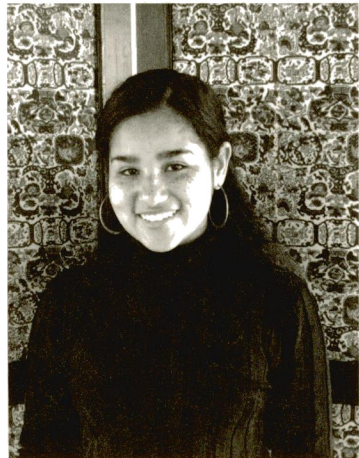
“What? Why do you have frogs in your living room?” Two large frogs were inside a large white shoe box.

“I rescued them from a bio lab. They had too many, and they were gonna kill them, so I took two of them.”

I tried to ignore this. I just smiled at him. I put down the glass, walked around the frog box, and went into his bedroom. He followed me and lay down next to me. We had been in this state before, but it always felt PG-13. I let him kiss me and take off my top. I unbuttoned my pants, and his hands grew frantic.

“Easy,” I told him.

He moved slower, but his lusty roving hands would not obey me. He had protection nearby. Almost as soon as he was inside of me, it was over. About twelve seconds, tops. It might have been longer, but I doubt it. He looked at me, said “Sorry,” and then proceeded to fall asleep. I remained wide awake. In the next room, two frogs croaked their criticisms while Mike snored in my ear.



Portia White, a senior creative writing major, is a member of Sigma Tau Delta. “Mike” is part of a nonfiction collection, *Play List*.

Sleepers

Lane

I live in an optimistic generation.
Broken homes and drowning debt
continue to raise the youth, and
as the world burns to the ground,
everything smolders.

Childhood, security, and an understanding
of right and wrong is lost.
We seek love and comfort in strangers,
fear the release of an embrace,
and remain fearless in our pursuits.

We don't require heat from another body
or the hesitation of affection.
Our cautionary steps and diligent
treading keeps our heads
above consuming water.

Only hope remains.
Hope that we are not our parents,
that we can rebuild this world,
and stand together through experience,
through technology.

I am a piece of bread in India,
a chicken leg in Alabama.
Borders
only exist on maps.

There is no
number one.
My tears for perfection
fall through my hands
and tell me:

“You are good.”



Lane 23 Poetry

In addition to writing poetry, Lydia Lane, a senior digital filmmaking major, loves punk rock documentaries. After graduation, she plans to move to Los Angeles to pursue a film career.



Always Seventeen

Taylor Grant

“What is this?” Brett asked.

“Calm yourself down, Ash,” Pickman said. “You coulda been driving a lot straighter.”

“I haven’t even made it home yet, and you’re stopping me?”

“Recognized your truck,” Pickman replied, his flashlight cutting through the darkness to shine on Brett’s face.



"That's no reason to pull me over!"

"Get out. Don't make me say the lines."

Brett climbed slowly out of his black Chevy, smirking in annoyance. He stood on one foot, cleared his throat, and sang the alphabet backwards. It was a routine he knew well. When he finished, he kicked out a few steps of an Irish jig for good measure.

"Quit bein' funny," Pickman said. "I'm going to ask you to pay more attention to the road from now on. Next time, I'll call you on reckless driving."

"Whatever floats your boat, Pick," Brett answered as he ducked back into his truck.

The flashing red and blue lights died as Brett pulled back onto the highway. He pushed his foot to the floor, releasing the pedal only when the speedometer hit five miles over the speed limit. The police car didn't follow him.

Brett Ash hadn't been home in almost a year. Not since he'd turned twenty-one, quit his job with the local excavators, and left with the intention of finishing community college or joining the army. He didn't do either but had ended up running a backhoe on a highway job in Texarkana. Six days a week, sunup to sundown. The money was better, he decided, than finishing school or running from bullets. He still had his old truck but had bought five acres and found himself a girl who lived just over the border in Marshall. She was a spunky redhead who sang to his music and liked it when he got them lost on drives.

He crested the hill that overlooked Miner, the southeastern Oklahoma town where he'd been raised. Miner sat in a valley between peaks of the Ouachita Mountains,

and right now it was lit up like a lone star in a black sky. The lights of the Conoco station glinted off the half-dozen semis parked in the resting area. Farther away were the restaurants, the courthouse, and the school. Brett stayed on the highway, passing the cluster of lights. Once he'd gone a few miles, he turned onto a gravel road that cut through a large field full of cattle. He took note of them, thinking that he'd like to have a place like this someday.

He slowed down to a crawl. The moon was nearly full, so he turned off the headlights and looked at the pastures and river bottoms that lined the road as he drove. He rolled down his window and breathed deeply. The dew was heavy, and every tree and blade of grass reflected the night light.

When he finally pulled into his parents' drive, three dogs jumped out from under the porch, snarling and barking. All three were Bluetick Coonhounds, two of which Brett had raised. The third he didn't know; it looked only about a year old. None of them recognized him.

"You're all right," he said, stepping out of his truck. Brett's mother, Joyce, opened the screen door.


"Kids! Enough," she growled, and the barking ceased. She turned to Brett. "Hey, kiddo!"

"Hi, Mom," Brett said, climbing the porch steps to scoop her up in a hug.

"Mmm, mmm, mmm," Joyce hummed, squeezing him hard. She let him go and grabbed his hand. "Come on in!"

They walked into the kitchen, and Brett looked at his mother.

She was a tall, slender woman, her hair still the color of honey despite her age. Her dark eyes bore a hole through



him as she took him in. Joyce Ash could win arguments with her eyes alone; the curved, slightly raised shape of her left brow had been enough to scare off some of Brett's more questionable high school friends. They still avoided her when they saw her in town, ducked behind aisles if she was in the grocery store or turned to face the corner when she entered the diner. But when Joyce's mouth smiled, so did her eyes.

"Where's Dad?" he asked.

"He'll be up in the morning. Let him sleep."

Brett looked at the clock on the stove.

"It's only 10:30. The dogs didn't wake him up?"

"I don't know, hon," she replied.

They talked, catching up on months' worth of news. They had always talked like best friends. She told him about the new bank, the failed attempts at ice cream shops, the new law that prohibited boat motors over a certain horsepower on the river. The locals were pissed about that. Brett chuckled.

He told her about his job and how the coordinators were thinking about expanding the project. He'd stay on with the contractors for five years now instead of three. He told her about the growth happening in Texarkana. He even mentioned his redhead, Samantha. When he looked at the stove again, it was two o'clock.

He let her show him the bed she'd made for him; it was in the guestroom, not his old room. He assumed his parents had turned it into something. A workspace, maybe. He kissed his mother goodnight.

"See you in the morning, Mom," he murmured.

"Night, sweetheart. So glad you're home."

The sound of his father clanking pots and slamming cabinet doors in the kitchen told Brett that it was about five in the morning. Once the smell of coffee filtered through his door, he stood and dressed. His father had made coffee an hour before dawn for nearly Brett's entire life, and Brett knew he wouldn't come home again until late afternoon. He would leave soon, so Brett forced his head through the neck hole of his T-shirt and headed to the kitchen.

Jacob Ash knelt with the refrigerator door open, searching for lunchmeat. Brett thought he looked about the same, if a bit more salt-and-peppered than before. He was only about four inches taller than his wife, but he had broad shoulders and good bones. No breaking him, Brett had always thought. His father pulled out a plate of ham wrapped in tin foil and shut the door, noticing Brett as he turned to grab the bread.

"Well hey there, son" he said, a small smile visible beneath the black bristle of his beard.

"Hi, Dad."

His father set the ham down to give him a brief, one-armed hug, and then began untwisting the tie on a loaf of wheatberry, his eyes scanning him with the intensity of ten months' deprivation.

"Looks like you've been taking pretty good care of yourself," he said.

"Wash my own underwear and everything," Brett replied.

Jacob reached up and extracted two mugs from a cabinet. He filled them with coffee and set one in front of Brett. Jacob cut ham and spread spicy mustard on bread. Brett didn't know what to say to his father. They weren't strangers

or enemies, but in the absence of speech Brett felt the presence of a relationship that hadn't gone anywhere in years.

Finally Jacob spoke: "Got big plans while you're back? How long are you staying?"

"I don't know, maybe just a day or two. It's too wet to work right now. And no, not really. Thought I'd just hang around a little. Catch up with a few people," Brett said.

"You staying here?" Jacob asked, his voice a little sharp, as if he already expected Brett to have packed his bag and set it by the door. Brett's words caught in his throat at the unconscious hostility in his father's voice.

"If you'll have me."

Jacob glanced up at his son.

"Well of course we'll have you. I just know you've probably got friends ready to see you," he said. He sliced pepper jack cheese and put it on the sandwich. That was true, Brett thought, and had he told any of his friends that he was coming home, his phone would have already been ringing.

"I'll be sleeping here," Brett said. Jacob nodded, slowly.

"Your mom'll like that," his father said.

"Come on, Dad" Brett replied. His father often said hurtful things with innocent words. Other people hardly ever caught on, but Brett could hear the thoughts that accompanied what he said. He could sense the feeling that prompted Jacob's words but didn't cross his lips.

"What?" he replied. "Me too. It'll be nice to have you eat dinner with us. I bet we can even get your mother to fry some apples." He winked and clicked his tongue in the back corner of his mouth. "We'll milk this for all it's worth," he said, dropping the sandwich, cookies, an apple, and a

frozen water bottle into a small lunch cooler at his feet. He grabbed his cooler and his cup of coffee and turned toward the door. He paused.

“Just make sure you come home in a good frame of mind, hmm? She can always tell.” He didn’t wait long enough for Brett to respond, but nodded goodbye and quietly pulled the door closed.

Twenty minutes later Brett pulled onto the highway. He forced himself to stay relaxed, resting one hand loosely on the wheel. Every other minute or so, however, his foot jerked, and the engine roared. Brett turned off the four-lane, heading for Skyline. Skyline wasn’t Miner’s nicest restaurant, but it was guaranteed to house at least one group of cigarette-smoking, coffee-drinking old men at any hour of the day.

He parked in the front and went inside. Despite its promising name, Skyline was dimly lit and had few windows. It hadn’t been redecorated in twenty years; the same mounted fish and longboat nets, cracking with age, hung from dark green walls. Still, the iced tea was strong and the buffet was cheap. Brett walked inside and immediately noted the visible cloud of smoke that marked the old men. Just as he suspected—they were the only ones in here. He sat down at the counter and waited, not minding the bad service. He lowered his head and raked his fingers through his hair, sighing out the last of his frustration from the encounter with his father.

A cup of coffee was set down in front of him. Brett looked up to see Nancy Chitwood, waitress-owner of the place. She was a curvy woman with pale skin and light brown

hair. With so much gossip coming in and going out every day, she could always be trusted to know what was going on. The more she knew about the lives and mistakes of the people around her, the more self-satisfied she became, and the bigger her smirk got as she waited on those same people day in and day out.

Nancy laced her fingers together and rested her chin on them, leaning across the counter to look right at Brett. She could be sociable when she wanted to.

“What’s up, Nance?” Brett asked.

“Trying to remember the last time I saw you. Was it at Christmas, maybe?” Her eyes were narrowed and she glanced toward the ceiling, thinking.

“No, I left before that,” Brett answered.

“Well, whatcha doin’ nowadays?” she asked. Her face was intense as she zeroed in on him.

So he filled her in, sticking to what sounded important. The job, the land he’d bought, his plans for the next few years. Her eyes grew wider as he spoke, and when he was done she smiled broadly, her coffee-stained teeth contrasting with her fair skin.

“I’ll be damned,” she said, slapping the counter lightly with the flat of her hand. “Good for you, Mr. Ash. That sounds like a good deal. I was primed to hear something a lot worse than that.”

“What do you mean?” Brett asked, confused.

“Oh, you know. You see all kinds of kids grow up and graduate and leave, and then they come right back and stay until they’re as old and shriveled as these rock stars over here,” she said, nodding in the direction of the smoke cloud.

"I had you pegged as a mechanic when you were about a junior in high school."

"Thanks," Brett said, unable to come up with a comeback.

"Don't take it personally. You had us all thinkin' something along those lines when you didn't go off to college."

"Nancy, I went for a full year to that school in Tahlequah. Three times a week," Brett said, his neck starting to flush with embarrassment. Nearly every conversation he'd had since returning to Miner had been packed full of ridicule for things he hadn't done.

"Really? Huh," she replied, wiping down the counter with a paper towel. "Seems like we saw you around a lot. Heard lots of stories, you crazy little shit."

Brett rubbed his hands through his hair again. "I guess that's why I only went one year." She didn't respond but continued wiping the already gleaming surface. His post-secondary education had been a joke, a time in which he avoided worrying about the future by drinking with friends from his class, depressed adrenaline junkies seeking a reprieve from the disappointment their lives had been since birth.

"But that's good," she said, "good for you. You stick right with that."

Brett left Skyline even more tightly wound than when he'd entered it. Stop drinking so much coffee, idiot, he thought as he drove away from the restaurant. He didn't want to go home, but he didn't want to talk to anyone, either. He spent the rest of the morning driving through river bottoms looking for caves, trying to get lost within the maze of dense

trees. He needed a drink, but thought of Nancy and sighed. He didn't have any cigarettes, either.

He found a clearing and parked. The sun was warm even through the shade of the surrounding foliage, so he lay on the hood of his truck and closed his eyes. The smell of pine sap and leaves lingered in each breath he took, and every so often a bird called. He drifted, letting his senses fill his head and push his thoughts aside.

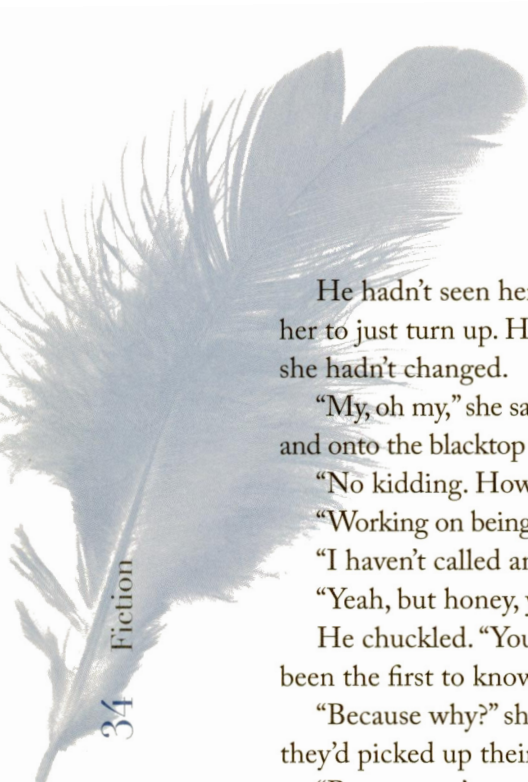
“She had been his connection to sanity since life had become complicated enough to go insane.”

“Hey!” a voice rang. Brett sat up and looked around; sitting on his tailgate was a girl with thick, dishwater blond hair down to the middle of her back and eyes that looked green even from

where he sat. He grinned, slow and wide.

“Thought this was you,” she said.

It was Bliss Carter. She had been his connection to sanity since life had become complicated enough to go insane. More than once he had woken up with his head in her lap; she was there on his worst mornings, rolling her eyes and shaking her head. He didn't know how she found him on nights like those. Once he had been so strung out on some blue pills that he'd driven his truck out of gas on the back roads of the Ouachita Mountains, after which he stumbled through the woods until he passed out. When he woke up, he'd been in her Jeep, riding back to town. She didn't speak to him for three weeks, but he'd bought her all the chocolate she could stand.



He hadn't seen her since he'd left last winter. It was like her to just turn up. Her hair was longer, but other than that, she hadn't changed.

"My, oh my," she said after he backed out of the parking lot and onto the blacktop that led to the highway.

"No kidding. How the hell are you, Bliss?"

"Working on being offended that you haven't called me yet."

"I haven't called anybody."

"Yeah, but honey, you see, I'm not just anybody."

He chuckled. "You're right, you're right. And you would've been the first to know I was back."

"Because why?" she asked, grinning at the ease with which they'd picked up their usual banter.

"Because we're soul mates."

"That's right."

He steered the truck away from the highway and into the mountains, rocks crunching beneath the tires. He shifted into four-wheel drive as they began to climb.

She appeared unconcerned with learning what had happened to him in the year he'd been away. He knew her lack of conversation would irritate him eventually, and he would end up telling her more than he wanted her, or anyone, to know. She had been doing this to him for years, and he couldn't understand why it worked. He sighed, smiling a little at her proven method of persuasion.

"What do you want to know?"

"Nothing," she replied.

"Dad's being his jolly old self. Although..."

Bliss nodded and began braiding her hair over one shoulder.

"Bliss."

“Oh, he just wants to see you more, Brett,” she said, finally turning to meet his eyes. “You know, it’s not just since you’ve been gone. It’s been, like, since you could drive.”

He started up an old log road, a pig path with water ruts two-feet deep. He kept the tires on the banks of the ruts, climbing slowly.

“Let’s talk about you. It’s more fun,” he said, and she smirked. Although keeping up with him had forced her to be the more grounded of the two, Bliss had forever declared that she wanted to live in Australia for a few years, or follow a band, or be a carnie. She was hungry for something. It was the same need to move that he felt, but her reasons were her own. He doubted that she understood them; he didn’t understand his.

“Let’s not.” She laughed. “Don’t know if you could handle hearing all the great things I’ve done since you left.”

Most of Brett’s class had elected to start their lives at Tahlequah, not knowing what they wanted from life. They all took the same general education classes and it had been like going to high school again, except with kids from rival schools mixed in.

Now, Brett had thought, things were different. They were no longer a part of those communities that ate together and learned together, that maintained their own military squadrons of basketball and football soldiers, ready to protect the name of the establishment they called home. The rules didn’t exist anymore. Now they were being tested to see if they could make it on their own out in the world.

“You’ll tell me eventually,” he said.

They sat in contented silence as the truck crawled upward

and Brett found what he was looking for – an outcrop of rocks bulging near the top of a cliff that overlooked the River. He parked above it and sat down on a rock while Bliss climbed a nearby Post oak. Once she neared the top, she stopped, her legs dangling in the air.

“So what’s new, my friend?” she asked, and Brett remembered the day he’d been having before Bliss had found him.

“Pickman stopped me yesterday. I hadn’t even made it to town yet.”

“What for?”

“Nothing better to do on a Tuesday night, I guess.” Brett watched the wind rustle the tree she was perched in. “You know,” he said, letting out a breath he’d been keeping locked high in his shoulders, “this has really sucked.”


“Don’t be mad about Pickman,” Bliss said. “You are easy prey, you know. He’s slightly justified.”

“It’s not that.”

“I know.” She climbed down, branch by branch, and then swung onto the ground, landing like a cat. As she did, Brett saw again in his head the astonishment on Nancy’s face, heard again the surprise in his father’s voice, and he kicked the rock under his feet in frustration.

“Well, go on,” Bliss said. Brett looked at her, not knowing what she meant. She flung her arms at him. “Go on!”

Brett picked up a baseball-sized rock and hurled it at a tree, growling his sudden anger. It hit the trunk of a pine with a resounding crack and ricocheted sharply onto the ground. He picked up another rock, and another, and threw them into the woods, letting his frustration roll down the



cliff and into the flowing water. He threw until his shoulder became heavy; until he accepted that the course of the water below would not change from the stones he cast into it. He turned to Bliss, panting and breathless. She was smiling.

“I didn’t even think about calling anybody. I just wanted to be home for a few days.”

“I don’t know why they’re so interested in our lives, Brett, but it’s like a movie, you know? They want a character to succeed, but the whole time they’re hinged on the excitement, the possibility, of failure.” She climbed up the rocks to stand beside him. “They’re old and jealous. They probably won’t stop seeing you as seventeen until you’re about 30.”

Brett hugged her and thought about what she’d said. It was only now, in this in-between time in his life, that he had become a stranger in his hometown. When they were young, he and his friends could do, in a sense, whatever they wanted. A blind eye was turned. They were the pride and joy of the town, expected to do big things. Go places. They were the football players and the science award winners, the future of the world.

It didn’t matter if they bought an ounce of marijuana here and there, didn’t matter if they stole road signs to decorate their bedrooms; they were young, and they were forgivable. Once they got their diplomas, however, they unknowingly let go of the public’s love and protection. Now, bets were taken on who would live in a mansion and who would live in the pen.

“Old and jealous. And bored,” she whispered.

He would go back to Arkansas, his Texas redhead, and



work for a few more years. If he came back, he thought, it wouldn't be until he could buy a house and a few hundred acres on which to raise cattle. It wouldn't be until he could look at himself and see that he was right where he wanted to be. Then others would see it, too, and they would see that it was he alone who had gotten himself there.



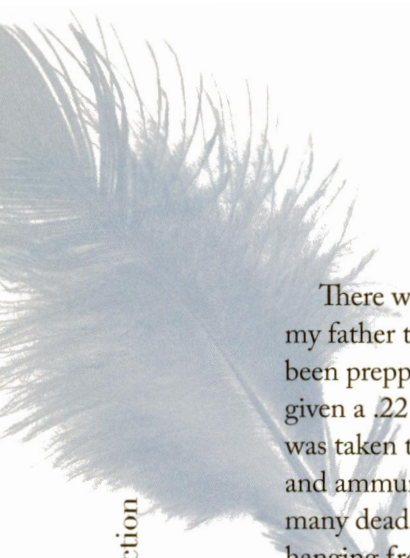
Taylor Grant whose work appears for the first time in *Harbinger* plans to travel to Guam and meet up with relatives.



Food Wars

Sela Freuler

My war with food began at age three.



There wasn't a special occasion. Rather, it was the first time my father toted me along with him on a hunting trip. I had been prepped for this adventure from the start, having been given a .22 caliber rifle on the day I was born. Soon enough, I was taken to shooting ranges and exposed to all types of guns and ammunition. It was the way of life in Alaska. I had seen many dead grouse laid out on the basement table and deer hanging from hooks in the backyard. By all accounts, I should have been prepared.

Late August meant two things: I had just turned three years old, and it was caribou season. My dad took his rifle out from the safe in the basement, dressed us both in hunting gear, and off we went to Copper Center, a remote area twenty minutes away. We found a spot where caribou frequented and waited.

Within a half an hour, a beautiful young bull appeared on the horizon. The excitement was palpable. My father aimed his rifle, narrowed his eyes at his target, and fired. The bull went down.

I screamed, and then dashed through the leaves to the still creature lying a hundred feet away. I fell to my knees, caressed his face, and begged him to wake up. My father pulled me away within seconds, knowing that the caribou might not be dead and could easily do serious damage to my tiny body. I kicked, shrieked, and pounded my fists into my father's arms, tears streaming down my cheeks. He handed me over to his hunting partner and started the process of clean up.

I refused to eat for two days, frightened that my mother or father might slip some caribou meat into my meals. It was my first strike against food, and it certainly wasn't my last.

My love for animals never went away. Shortly before my

seventh birthday, my parents purchased a dozen Rhode Island Red hens. Before long, we had also acquired four geese, a duck, five goats, and quite a few more chickens. These creatures became my pets just as much as my cat and dog, and I cared for them as lovingly. The chickens and duck were mostly used for eggs, the geese for protection, and the goats for clearing the underbrush on our property, but the threat was always there that my parents would have a few of them butchered for meat. At the time, we lived in Maine; our area was densely populated with foxes, coyotes, and coydogs, and many of our chickens often went missing. As a paranoid child, however, I was suspicious that my parents had killed the chickens. Every time one of my dear little hens went missing, I wouldn't eat for days.

My battle with food didn't always involve animals, though. My mother had Type 1 diabetes and had been on a diet since she was young. My father was a doctor who worked hard to keep his patients from becoming obese. As a result, I grew up in a home where the fear of being overweight lurked.

Whether it was softball or soccer, gymnastics or swimming, my mother had always involved my older sister, Stephanie, and me in sports. Stephanie thrived in all of them. I, however, did not. I was the writer and the reader, burying myself in a book on the bench while my sister led her teams to victories. At the time, my parents weren't too worried, because despite the amount of exercise Stephanie got, I remained the thinner one. While she was curvy and short, I was tall and lanky, an attribute my parents appreciated. When we moved from our home in Maine and Stephanie remained behind, however, I became the larger one in the family, and my parents turned their attention on me.

My younger sister and brother were both naturally thin, as were

my parents. I, however, had always been of average weight until I developed depression at age ten and was placed on antidepressants. My parents noticed my weight gain, and my mother intervened. She rid the house of anything that contained sugar. The Kool-Aid I'd been raised on was changed to a sugar-free version. She signed me up for a membership at a local gym and made me exercise daily. Anytime we went to a restaurant for a meal, she would order a low-calorie entree for me, and a diet soda or water. During those years, I lived in a constant state of hatred of myself and my body.

When I was fifteen, I entered boarding school; shortly thereafter I gained even more weight, despite joining the soccer team and conditioning several hours a day. The amount of food I ate was ridiculous, but I didn't care. My mother wasn't there to make me feel terrible about my food choices or body size, so I ignored it. At my heaviest, I was one hundred and seventy-five pounds at only 5 feet 3 inches.

Then one day, I looked in the mirror and realized what I had done.

I panicked. No one would want to be my friend or date me. *I would be alone for the rest of my life.* I was wearing a size thirteen and looked puffy, roly-poly, and just plain fat. I began training harder in soccer, but nothing was working. At some point, I realized there was only one way to drop the weight I wanted in a short amount of time: stop eating. It was simple. It became a sort of punishment; I relished the pain of a hungry, rumbling stomach. I would eat a bite for breakfast sometimes, hardly ever touching my lunch, and perhaps a small forkful of whatever was

During those years, I lived in a constant state of hatred of myself and my body.”

for dinner. Other than that, I ingested absolutely nothing, while at the same time conditioning harder than ever in soccer.

People began to notice my weight loss. They complimented me and mentioned how my pants were becoming baggier and my shirts looser. One of my teachers even commented that every day I looked slimmer – my weight loss was that dramatic.

There were a few who caught on to my eating habits. My English teacher, in particular, became increasingly worried and spoke to my guidance counselor about it. But I carefully promised that I didn't have an eating disorder, that the conditioning was responsible for the weight loss, and that my stomach was shrinking, so I wasn't that hungry anymore. She believed me, and the subject was dropped.

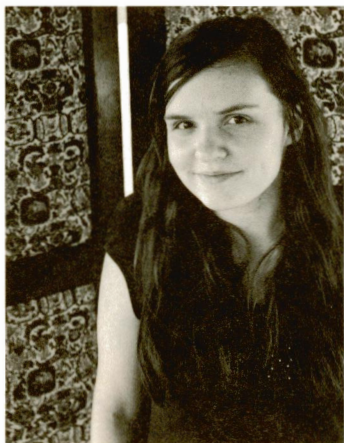
That was in the fall. The following spring I returned to live with my parents, a slim fifty pounds lighter and two inches taller. At the same time, my best friend, Breanna, decided to become a vegetarian. It was something that I had always wanted to pursue but hadn't been successful with in the past. The few times I had made an attempt to "go veggie," I had been met with opposition from everyone around me. Vegetarianism was not something that was supposed to make an appearance in a family like mine; I had been conditioned since birth to love meat, hunting, and raising livestock. I had always thought hunting a macabre sport, and hand-raising a calf only to butcher and eat it struck me as heartless. I couldn't stand knowing that so many innocent animals suffered in factory farms. Perhaps, though, the final push came from the fact that I knew my parents would not approve of my choice to rid my diet of meat. Now I had Breanna to support me through the difficult process of saying goodbye to many of my favorite foods, and we embarked on the new lifestyle together.

My conversion to vegetarianism began only weeks before I returned home, and my diet was carefully watched by the cooking staff at the boarding school to make sure I was receiving adequate nutrition. My parents were informed, and they continued the practice at home, making me eat in front of them at the dinner table. It was no longer possible to avoid eating, but being a vegetarian, it was difficult to gain weight. My weight stabilized to a healthy number, and it has stayed that way since.

The day-to-day difficulties of being a vegetarian in a largely carnivorous world have led me to be assertive in both my food choices and my body image. The majority of the population is judgmental toward anyone or anything that differs from the norm, and currently, vegetarianism is not the norm. I learned neither to care what others think of my choices, nor take insensitive comments to heart.

I do not know if I will ever be entirely happy in my skin, but I am content. I have to be.

My war with food has always been a significant part of my life. I have won some battles and lost others, but I have come out stronger every time.



Sela Freuler, a freshman psychology and pre-law major, has a passion for travel. She has visited six countries and all 50 states.

Calabazas Means Pumpkin en Español

Emily Petrie

I always get stuck
on the 101, going north,
leaving the smog-dense
L.A. Basin, the Lakers, team spirit, Angeleno pride,
taco stands, and stray Mexicali children,
pushed by leaf blowers, scooped
up like Pinkberry.
Celebrity fad diets
are making the city bulky. The mountains
can't retain the valley's phat
beats, Orange Line dilemmas, recalled Prius pileups,
or Kim Kardashian's ass.
Union Station's where we used to
get off.
HOLLYWOOD lost illumination
in the 90's
like backwards caps and Malibu Barbies, sipping Juicy Juice
and
playing jump rope. "My grandma and your grandma sittin' by
the fire."
Hip-Hop. Margaritas
are what we're downing now, what we are hitching
to the posts at Sagebrush Cantina.
Our horses are backyard commodities, eye candy.
Harleys get ridden. Clubbers, celebrities,
gay hairdressers get ridden.

Petrie 45 Poetry



The rivalry here is between the 805,
310, and 818,
Coffee Bean and Starbucks,
the border.
Ventura County doesn't want our baggage,
our Gucci or Chanel.
This is a pumpkin patch of plastic,
perky pedophiles,
promiscuous, and pantyless
people.
The paparazzi know
I have a hand-to-mouth
sushi habit.



Falling Asleep

Paige Kesner

Outside, the lamp posts
buzz madly.
Angry fireflies
struggle to stay lit
in the stillness of a starless night.

My pillow wrinkles
into silence, singing
movement into my ears.

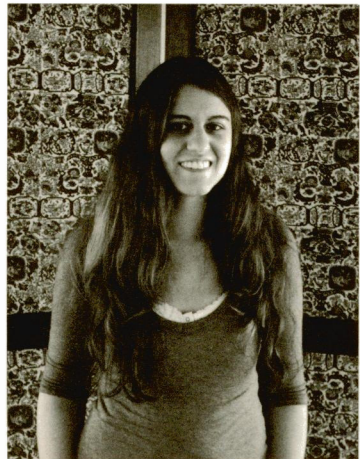
Breaths push rivers off course,
as wind rushes
through the room
and floats like vessels
lost in space.

Wood planks creak;
sighing, stretching,
groaning in unison.

Leaves sail on anxious air,
sweeping across pavement,
and creatures of the dark
watch the bodies mourn,
mimicking trees.

Poetry
47
Kesner

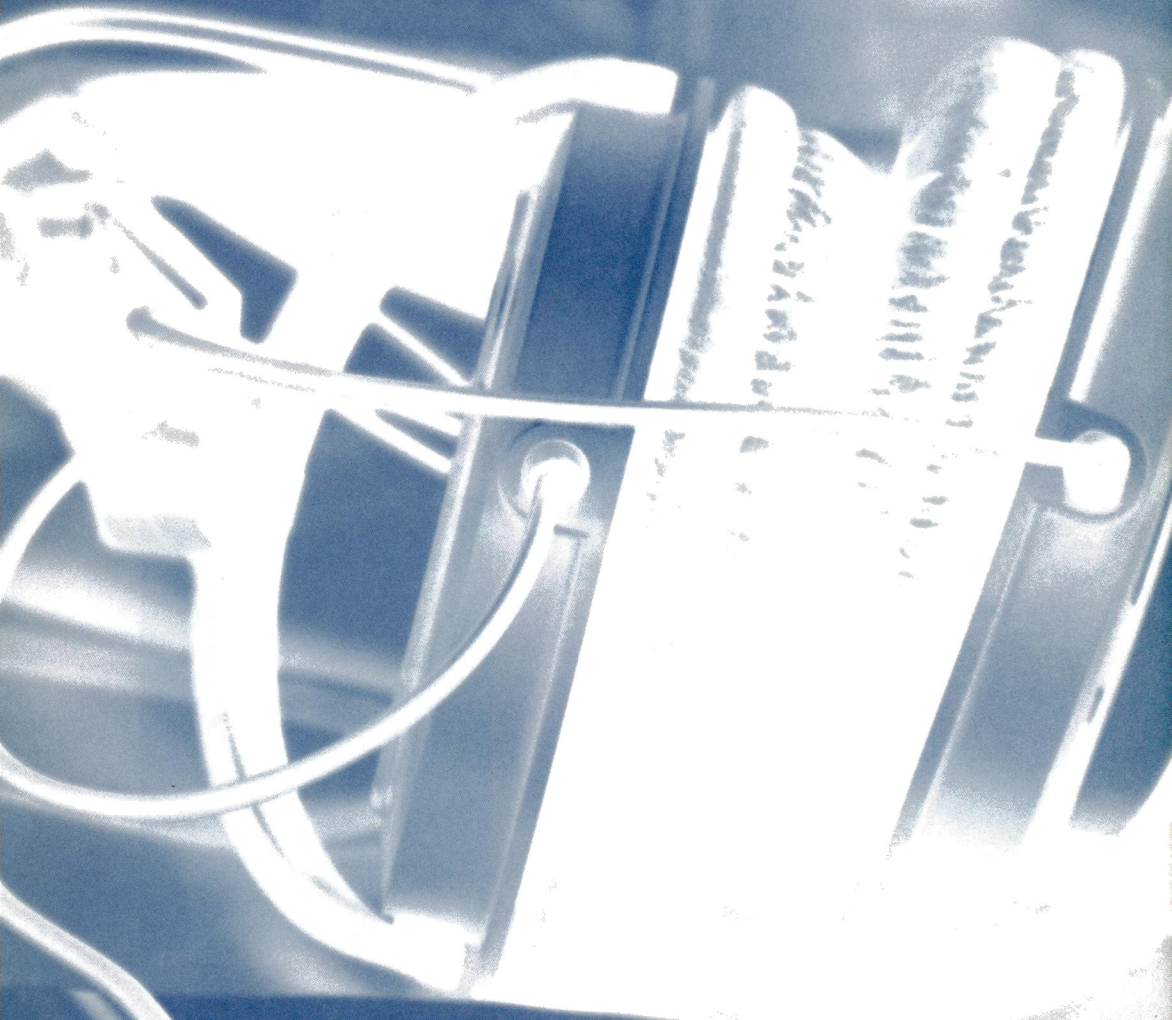
“Falling Asleep” is junior Paige Kesner’s first publication. She enjoys writing in multiple genres and taking photographs.



Creight

Paige Burton

Creighton Hart. The boy with thick dark curls and caramel skin who moved here when he was thirteen. The boy whose family owned several houses, on both coasts and abroad, but somehow ended up in the middle of nowhere in the formerly vacant mansion outside of town. The boy who never fit in with the rest of us and never tried to.



Creighton Hart, who everyone called Creight, shrouded in mystery, the boy I barely even noticed until he sat across from me in Spanish class the last semester of my senior year.

Creight, who smoked and wore too much black. Whose parents would host high school parties where kids could admire an original Picasso while they guzzled beer. His father was an artist who rarely socialized, and his mother worked at the salon, the first woman in town to offer waxing in the darkly lit backroom. They were bathed in scandal and speculation from the get-go.

Creight, who wasn't really the type I associated with, who I had almost forgotten existed. He was the perpetual new kid, and if I saw him in the hallway and noticed, it was more out of surprise that he was still there. Until one day, when I noticed him for good.

"*Ay Dios Mio!* I forgot to take the lunch count to the office. Can someone deliver it, *por favor?*" Ms. Rubio looked around the room like a vulture seeking weak prey. "Perhaps you, Mr. Hart?"

He didn't look up, just stopped scribbling in his notebook, stood and grabbed the paper. Before he walked out the door, Ms. Rubio looked over at me through her spectacles.

"Go with him."

Creight with whom I had never exchanged glances, much less words with, studied me, his dark eyes obscured by curly locks. I glanced over at him, unable to match his gaze, and frantically tried to think of something to say, when he finally looked away.

"You like *Catcher in the Rye?*"

His voice was deep and smooth, like a slow jazz number, and I looked at him in surprise.

“How’d you know?”

“I saw it drop out of your backpack the other day in class.”

“Oh, yeah. Have you read it?”

“A few times. It’s my favorite book.”

“Me too.”

“Really?” He studied me again, skeptically. “Doesn’t seem like your kind of book.”

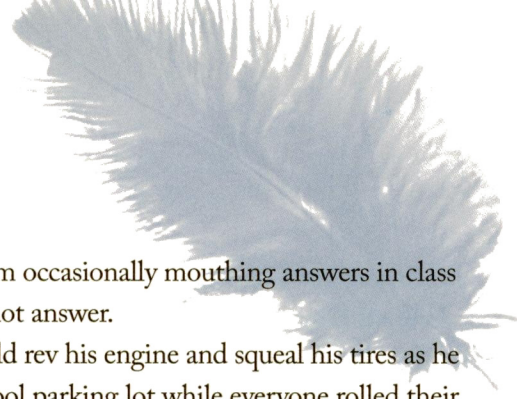
I smiled. “No, it probably doesn’t. But you don’t really know me.”

He stopped and turned so his body was blocking me, looked me in the eyes, and gave me a charming smirk.

“Well, maybe you’re not such a phony after all.” He winked and walked away. My heart got whiplash.

Creight Hart, who had seemed like someone worlds apart from me, quickly became my secret obsession. I began watching him. I wanted to know who he was, who he really was, not just what I had learned about him from gossip.

Creighton Andrew Hart. The only guy in our class man enough to own a leather jacket. Who said everything by saying nothing. A deadly combination of stealthy sexiness and a tinge of vulnerability, all wound up like a ticking clock, counting down to destruction or deliverance, I didn’t know which. A mother’s worst nightmare. Or maybe her secret fantasy. A guy who seemed to have a past; who pretended not to care, who would shrug his shoulders or sit silently when asked a question,



even though I saw him occasionally mouthing answers in class to questions I could not answer.

Creight, who would rev his engine and squeal his tires as he peeled out of the school parking lot while everyone rolled their eyes, but who I found reading a book on the bleachers of the practice football field one Sunday, and every Sunday thereafter. Who, I started to realize, was interested in me, too. Who left a note in my locker one day: *Anna, come by my house today. I have something for you.* See what I mean? Everything in nothing.

Creight opened the door to a house whose foyer was larger than my bedroom; our footsteps echoed in the looming silence. We were the only ones there. I followed him into the kitchen where he mixed a couple of drinks, and I desperately wished I could be as cool as he was at that moment and every moment.


“So, what do you have for me?”

“It’s upstairs in my bedroom.” *Ay Dios Mio.*

The upstairs hallway was lined with black and white photos – snapshots from around the world, wedding and family portraits. I lingered behind, not knowing how far I was supposed to follow.

“You coming?” He disappeared into a room at the end of the hall. I desperately tried to collect my nerves as they scattered in a dozen different directions.

In his room, I found the unexpected. It was bare except for a bed in one corner, a full bookcase, a desk with more books and CDs, and boxes against one wall with their contents spilling out of them. It looked like he had just gotten there and hadn’t had time to unpack.



“Did you just move into this room?”

“What? Oh, no, I just don’t like to get everything situated and then have to pack it all up again. We move a lot.”

“Well, you’ve been here for five years. You could probably hang up a poster or something. It seems like your parents like it here, God knows why.”

“Yeah, I’ve thought that many times, but I’m a little wiser by now. I’ll wait to hang my Backstreet Boys poster when I have my own place.”

Creight, exotic and strange, made me feel alive, as if I were tingling with electricity.”

“Oh, ok,” I said and laughed.

“Here it is.” He hands me a CD. “Heard of them?”

“Are you kidding? I love The Shins. They’re amazing. Is this their new stuff?”

“You haven’t heard it yet? I figured you or one of your friends had it already. Here, I’ll put it in.”

“No, I haven’t. And my friends definitely haven’t. You’re the first person I’ve met who even knows who they are. My friends are more Garth Brooks types.”

“You’re disturbing me.”

“Tell me about it.”

Creight put on the CD while I took a seat on the edge of the bed. He sat down next to me as the music started. We slowly nodded along, smiling, and then our eyes locked.

Creight, exotic and strange, made me feel alive, as if I were tingling with electricity. Creight, who could be familiar and

unfamiliar, secretive and open, mysterious and transparent, all at the same time. Creight, who, after a few weeks, knew me better than anyone. Creight, who sat too close, who looked at me in a way that told me all I had to do was reach out and take what I wanted, what I had been yearning for but couldn't tell a single soul about.

But I couldn't do it. It was too easy, too convenient, and at the same time, too hard, required too much on my part. I looked down.

"I think I saw a wedding picture of your parents in the hall. Will you show it to me?"

Creight took after his mother, except he had his father's reserve. It was a lovely picture, his mother laughing at something behind the photographer, and his father admiring her.

"Your mother is gorgeous. She looks so happy. They were young, weren't they?"

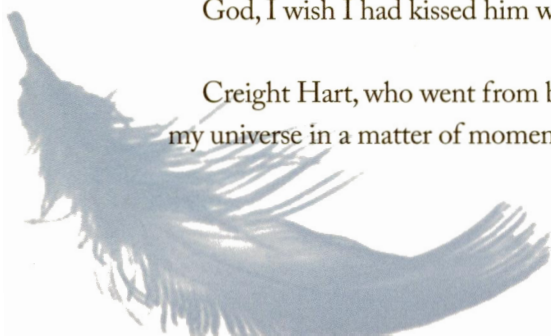
Creight didn't look at the picture. Hands shoved into his pockets, he looked uncomfortable and remained silent.

"I'm sorry – did I say something wrong?"

"No, just...a photograph is a photograph. People put up the things they want to remember, the things they want others to see and judge them on. Nobody puts up the shitty moments in between."

God, I wish I had kissed him when I had the chance.

Creight Hart, who went from being nobody to the center of my universe in a matter of moments. Who was never a threat



to my boyfriend because he was at college and never knew about the reclusive artist's son. Who would be gone two weeks after he showed me his room, back to California after his father found out that his mother was spending time with another man in the salon's backroom.

On his last Sunday in town, I drove by the football field, and for the first time, parked my car. I walked over to where he was sitting, no book, just fingers intertwined as he sat stooped over in contemplation. At the moment, everything I thought about saying seemed inadequate, so I just sat, letting the silence say all the things I couldn't. Before long, he took my hand, and it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

"You know, Holden Caulfield headed west. Some even think he ended up in California. So it can't be that bad."

Creight looked at me in bemusement and then broke into a smile.

"Well, if I run into him, I'll give him your regards."

The sun was setting, and as we stared out into the dusky haze, we both felt the anxiety of the unavoidable moment when we would have to say goodbye. I wanted to do so many things, so many irrational things, but I was unwilling to risk ruining what we had – a perfectly good, tortuous, intimate friendship, the kind that people remember with longing, but often wish they could forget.

"I...I mean, you..." I tilted my head away, quickly fought back tears, and pretended to clear my throat. "Send me a postcard or something when you get to California, ok?"

Creighton Andrew Hart, perfect in every word and gesture,

put his thumb under my chin, guided my face toward his, and then placed his lips gently on my cheek, a kiss that lasted forever but was over in an instant, a moment in which I felt like a grown up and a child at the same time.

Creight Hart, the boy who caught me up in a whirlwind and let me go, but left me spinning. Who will forever haunt me as the one person who truly understood me. Who I have no photographs of, just the burning memory of a single moment caught in time: a boy in a leather jacket, head bent as he walked away into the distant somewhere. Here, and then gone.

Senior Paige Burton won the Society of Southwestern Authors writing contest for memoir and the 2010 Clark/Dillingham Critical Essay Award. She is Stephens' Sigma Tau Delta president and a member of Mortar Board.




Interview with Jen Woods

Portia White

White 56 Interview



Jen Woods is the founder of Typecast Publishing, an independent publisher of fine books and the award-winning design/literary magazine *Lumberyard*. Woods graduated from Stephens College in 1997 and began her career as a magazine editor for Gannett. After two years, she left Gannett and took up employment as a whitewater raft guide, waitress, personal trainer, bookstore clerk, legal writer, and lobbyist before settling firmly on a career in publishing at Sarabande Books in 2004. In 2010, Woods made the leap to Typecast and hasn't looked back since. She currently resides in Louisville, Kentucky, with her husband, Bill, and two beloved dogs.



Portia White: After graduating from Stephens College, what were a few of your goals?

Jen Woods: Those days were longer ago than I'd like to admit, and so I'll try to represent them as honestly as I can. As I recall, my primary goal was to go out and start living life. Having been raised in rural Missouri, and having stayed in state for college, I felt ready for new experiences more than anything. I remember feeling a lot of pressure to head straight to graduate school for an MFA, but I had fast-tracked my undergrad to three years, and I was, in a word, exhausted. I do clearly remember the pressure of 21+ hours each semester plus extra curricula. I turned down my spot at UNC-Greensboro's MFA program and got a job at a little bookstore in a tiny mountain town. I learned to whitewater kayak, sat on mountaintops, got lost in the woods, and traveled around Europe. I think my choices disappointed a lot of people who believed in me early on, but it was what I needed to do. Looking back, those moments of independence taught me so much about the courage I would need to do all the things I'm doing today. Now I know how to trust my gut, how to move confidently ahead when everyone around you says you're going the wrong way.

PW: What is the best thing about starting your own press? What is the worst thing?

JW: I don't know that I can narrow the best things down to one. The authors I get to work with, the intimate way I get to know their work. Supporting artists is not only a sacred job, but it's a total blast when you see them achieve their intent. I've had plenty of jobs in my life of various stripes and being




an editor has to be the coolest. I would say the worst part is that you've got no one to blame but yourself when something goes wrong. But, in a way, that's the

best part, too. As with any job, there are good and bad days, but I wouldn't trade my worst day at Typecast for my best day anywhere else.

PW: Why was it important for you to find good poetry and package it for the average reader?

JW: It's important to me because I love poetry so very much, and I've watched it turn into an art form that is primarily consumed by other poets and academics. People in this country at least have lost their connection to it and that devastates me. There are lots of great poems being written that can enrich anyone's life, not just the lives of those who spend hours in a classroom studying poetry. When I got my first job at a literary press, I was so excited to work on some of the books, but when I saw how small the readership was for those books, I wanted to share that work with friends and family outside of my literary world. I wanted to show them there was something here for them, too. I've been flabbergasted, I have to say, at how resigned the poetry community is to obscurity, both among writers and publishing houses. It's almost insulting because the implication is that everyday Americans don't have the intellectual capacity to appreciate poetry anymore. That's bullshit, plain and simple. Our magazine proves that every day. Typecast is a for-profit company that receives zero institutional support, so for everyone who says that people



won't pay for poetry, *Lumberyard* is there to show that yes, they sure as hell will. Everything else is just excuses.

PW: What type of art does *Lumberyard* showcase?


JW: The visual art in our magazine is my brother's aesthetic: modern, fun, tangible (in the sense that it comes from the world of "real things" that you see every day). The visual art sets the tone and allows the reader to relax. We try to put readers in the mindset that they are about to have a great time as soon as they open the magazine.

PW: Do the poetry submissions to *Lumberyard* have any common themes?

JW: Because of the nature of *Lumberyard*, we get submissions of every color and stripe. I can't really say there is a whole lot of commonality from one submission to the next. That being said, ever since we published images from vintage medical textbooks, I've noticed a lot of work that lends itself to that. Someone recently told me in Brooklyn that those textbooks are the hip things right now, so I guess we were about a minute ahead of the times on that one. But, one issue of that is probably enough. I doubt we'll go down that road twice.

PW: Have you published any good books lately?

JW: We just published two books I'm very proud of. The first is a poetry collection by Matthew Lippman, *Monkey Bars*. The book is just the tenor we look for at Typecast. He is clearly a thinker who does not need to be pretentious or overly esoteric. He writes good poems that allow you a way into them. *Coldfront Magazine* awarded *Monkey Bars* Best Cover



Design for a poetry title in 2010, and the book itself was well reviewed and made some Best of 2010 lists. The second book is a collaborative project called *Oil + Water*. Last summer I decided to try making a book that would inspire people to think about the oceans and fossil fuels in really simple, basic ways. The Gulf oil spill disaster was so complex and the issues surrounding it so overwhelming, I wanted to put forth poems and essays about both things, but not in a way that would make your head spin or force a certain ideology. The book features some great work by Robert Pinsky, Matthea Harvey, Tony Hoagland, Thomas Sayers Ellis, and many others. And each book comes with these beautiful, letterpressed postcards that state basic oil and water facts. All the money we make on that title goes to Gulf Coast restoration, so we get double feel-good with each copy sold.

PW: Name one thing that, as an editor, you can't live without.

JW: The outdoors. It's where I do all my best thinking. Being an editor is kind of like solving a mystery, and when I'm outside, in the elements, my mind is clearest, and I can begin to see the natural patterns in things, etc. I often joke that I'm solar-powered, but I believe in some way I really am.

PW: Do you take time away from the press? If yes, what do you do during that time?

JW: I try, but it's pretty hard right now. It's true what they say about owning your own business—there's no such thing as a day off. But, when I can, I like to turn off all my electronic devices and go backcountry camping, hiking, snowboarding, and I'm hoping to take up mountain biking this spring to

relieve some stress. Like I said, anything outside makes me happy. And if I can't get away, I love to chill with my husband and our two dogs. Without them, I would be a wreck.

PW: *Punk Magazine* called you an editor, publisher and rock star. Do you embrace the third title?

JW: Gosh, no. It's a little embarrassing really. I'm still the same geeky girl from Missouri that I've always been, still as awkward and insecure and uncertain as ever. I'm not really sure what

labels like that even mean, but I think at the end of the day, it's just good people being kind and supportive of the press, and so I try to just go with it and appreciate the many blessings this adventure brings. After all, people could (and have, I'm sure) just as easily label me an asshole, an introvert, a know-it-all. Best to take kind words

with grace when you're lucky enough to get 'em.

PW: My family lives in Tennessee. As a resident of Kentucky, how do you like your iced tea?

JW: I love the South, as I've lived in the region exclusively since graduation, and so I hope this answer doesn't get me chased out of town, but I'm not much for iced tea. I'm a coffee drinker, tried-and-true, and would pass on an iced tea for a nice, hot cup o' joe every time.



Suburban Shadows

Kristin J. McCowan

It is almost lunchtime, and I'm in art class with fifteen other seventh graders. I'm sitting at a wooden table that is covered in crusted paint blobs, carved symbols, and graffiti that reads, "JJ was here" in four different places.



I stare down at my horrible attempt at a still life, and then back up at Ms. Dean, my art teacher. As I run my finger around the circle I've drawn, I keep a mental note of the time. It is almost noon and soon all of the kids will rise out of their chairs and rush to the lunch hall, while my mother will be cuffed and carried away to a federal prison for up to five years. I'm not hungry.

The clock is mounted on the wall in front of me. The wall's surface is covered in paintings of King Tut's head and drawings of the night sky. Some of them are impressive; others could have been painted by my three-year-old brother. It's the first day of school, and I wonder why these pictures are still on the wall. At the beginning of the year, the teacher is supposed to take everything down and start fresh with new artwork, right? I read the clock again. 11:52. My heart beats faster, and my stomach aches. I have to poop. I'm hot.

I try to focus on my shading, but it's useless. I visualize my mom entering the courtroom through heavy oak doors with golden handles. She walks past the matching oak pews and through the short swinging doors near the front of the room. I hear the heartless judge say, "Take her back." Then Ms. Dean interrupts my daydream.

"You all need to finish up and start putting away your materials."

I stay seated. All of the other students carry their fat pencils, block erasers and artwork to Ms. Dean's desk. My body is catatonic. I'm glued to the metal chair. I'm breathing faster, and my hands shake. I try again to compose myself. I straighten my spine and clear my throat.

“Take her back.” The judge’s voice remains in my head. I see my mom’s hair covering her saddened face that is buried in her large breasts. She feels exactly what I feel right now. Scared. She is crying, and she misses me. I’m on her mind; I can tell. I hear her thoughts: “It’s ok baby. I’ll be fine.”

Plop! A wet spot stains my artwork. I can’t brush away the tears with my lead-stained fingers. I rub my eyes on my shoulder instead, and then stare at the clock. 11:57. In three minutes, Mama will be unreachable until she can send me a letter. That is the first thing she told me she would do as soon as she was situated in her cell. Her cell! My mama is not a murderer, not a kidnapper, not a criminal, but she will be locked away in a cell. More terrifying thoughts fill my mind, but I have to stop them because it is 11:58, and I have yet to put away my materials. My legs refuse to move. I need something I can rely on. I can no longer rely on my mama to tell me what to do or how to handle myself. I’m just a kid, a kid with tears rolling down her cheeks. I’m alone in a class

“I’m alone in a class swarming with wanna-be gangsters and girls with too much jewelry and make-up.”

swarming with wanna-be gangsters and girls with too much jewelry and make-up. No one knows me or my

situation. All they know is that a light-skinned, baby-faced girl with French braids sat there for an entire hour not saying a word.

The bell rings, and I still have not put away my materials. Chairs screech across the tile, and the floor begins to vibrate. My classmates stampede out the door and into the hallway

like a herd of wild animals. Don't these kids have any home training? Didn't their parents teach them to be graceful? My mom taught me to be graceful. "Act like the sweetheart you are," she'd tell me. She taught me how to fend for myself and take shit from no one. She taught me how to be strong, but currently being strong is not an option. As I think about everything my mom has ever done for me, my mouth opens for the first time and I weep.

Ms. Dean approaches my table and places one hand on my shoulder and the other behind her back.

"Hun, are you ok?"

What a stupid question. Of course I'm not ok. If I were, I'd be joining the herd. If I were ok, I wouldn't be sitting here crying, staining my masterpiece with tears. Finally, I decide that I should answer her question. My mom taught me that when an adult asks a question, answer.

"No. I'm not ok. I'm dealing with a personal issue, and I don't want to move."

"Is there anything I can do for you? Can I walk you to the counselor's office?"

Ms. Dean is a plump woman with boobs the size of my head. Her red blazer matches her lipstick. The hems of her tight black slacks don't quite reach her ankles. She smells like my grandma.

"Yes please."

Ms. Dean takes my paper and my pencil and walks to her desk. She grabs the box of tissue from beside her computer and hands it to me.

"Thank you," I say.

She leads me down the hall lined with orange lockers. I follow her loafers and keep my head low to hide from the kids that are running late for lunch. The white tile is scuffed with fresh marks. Ms. Dean is walking fast; I can hardly keep up. I walk slowly because my new white Adidas will get wrinkles in them if I don't. I have to take care of them because Mama will not be able to provide me with all the nice things that I'm used to. She told me that my dad and stepmom live different lives. She explained that most of the money they make goes to paying their mortgage and providing for their three kids.

Ms. Dean opens the door to the counselor's office and tells me to have a seat. She pokes her head in one of the inner offices. I take a seat in a plush armchair and wait. Before Ms. Dean exits the office, she says that one of the counselors will be with me in a moment. The kid that the counselor is currently talking to has on all blue and looks really angry. I see his body jerking forward as he speaks. I guess he is trying to make himself seem "hard." The counselor looks at me through the glass that reads, "Mrs. Nelson-Graham, Guidance Counselor." She returns her attention to the little gangster, and I sink farther down into my seat.

The night before, Mama dropped me off at my dad's house. We pulled into the driveway and sat there, unmoved. Mama opened her door first, got out of the car, and then stood in the rain. She looked at me through her window, and then I got out, too. Silently, we walked toward the trunk to unload my baggage. My face hung low and my eyes watered. I felt fear rise up into my throat. My voice quivered when I spoke.

"I don't want you to go."

“Why didn’t you cry before? We knew this was coming for three months.”

“Because now it’s real.” Raindrops slapped my face, and every tear inside me poured out. Mama moved closer and wrapped her arms around me. I buried my head in her chest.

Several minutes passed and nothing from the car had been unloaded. I wiped my face, sniffled and turned to face the trunk. Mama understood that I didn’t want to talk about it anymore and opened the trunk for me. I reached in, grabbed my blue Contico chest and placed it on the sidewalk. Mama took the smaller, matching chests and walked them to the front door. I remained unmoved, facing the trunk. Were there other twelve-year-old girls who had to live without their mothers? Where are they, and can they help me? Why does she have to go now? Couldn’t it wait until I at least got my period? Or until I had my first real boyfriend? She won’t be there to teach me how to become a woman. She won’t be there to tell me that everything is all right. I’m going to turn thirteen without a mother.

Mama reached around her neck, released the clasp to her golden cross necklace, and then held it in front of me. “Don’t lose this, ok?” She fastened the chain around my neck.

“I won’t, Mama.” I rolled my blue chest to the front and turned to say bye. “I love you, Mama. I’m going to miss you. Be careful in there.”

She kissed my face and hugged me once more.

My new family was standing in the foyer waiting to greet me. I walked through the glass doors, dropped my trunk in the middle of the foyer, and went to my new bed. I sat there and





replayed the previous moment in my head.

"Why are you crying now?"

"Because it's real"

"I'm going to miss you." I wiped my face as the memory played over again. After a while, I was numb.

My butt hurts from the cheap chair. I wonder what is taking so long. Why isn't there more than one counselor? The office has a total of four doors. The other counselors are "out for training," according to the signs on their doors. After thirty minutes, I wonder whether I even need to see a counselor at this point. All I can do is deal. I wait for another fifteen minutes. The counselor is still in the office talking to Lil' Bow Wow. I grab my bag and walk out. I turn down the hall and find the large burgundy doors that lead to the playground. My eyes are glued to the door as I walk faster and faster to freedom and fresh air. I walk out to the farthest corner of the playground where the trees from the neighboring woods hang over the fence. I'm alone here. The other kids are still stuffing their faces with stale fries and overcooked hamburgers. I drop my bag on the grass and plop down beside it. I pull out my journal and begin to write:

Dear Mama,

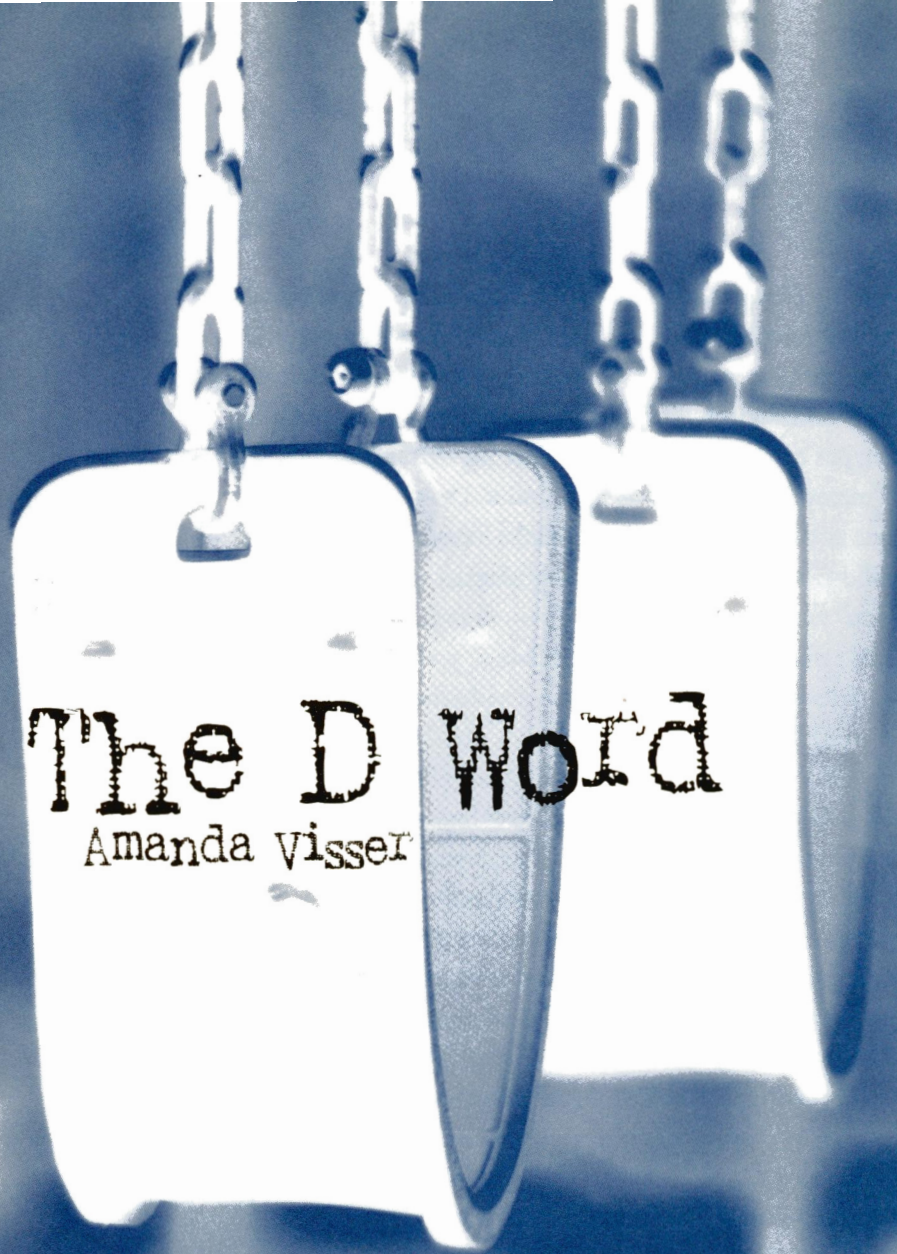
It's the first day of school, and I skipped lunch because I'm not hungry. I'm a little worried about you, but I know that you can fend for yourself like you taught me. I didn't lose your necklace yet. It's still on my neck. I think it helped me work through my emotions because all the time I knew it was there. I feel it hanging there. It never left. It is the only thing that I have control over and the

only thing I know will stay with me. Do you think that it makes a difference because it has a cross on it?

The ruthless stampede of kids run onto the field. I close my journal and sit, watching them laugh and make fun of each other, get bullied, and beat each other up. I touch my necklace and remember that as long as I have it, I've got a piece of my mama and a little symbol of God. As long as this necklace is around my neck, I can handle anything.



Senior Kristin J. McCowan is a dual English and psychology major from St. Louis, Missouri, and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta and Mortar Board.



Three hard, unyielding chairs were lined against the wall. We were in an alcove away from prying eyes and loose lips. The place was dismal, unfriendly, and gray. The outside of the courthouse looked the same.

The place screamed “uninvited.” I had entered the doors, clutching my mother’s hand, trembling. A lady leaned down toward us, not caring, not soft, but all business. My palms hugged the chair, asking it to enfold itself and protect me. I didn’t dare look into her eyes, but instead chose to look to my right where my sister, not much older than me, and brother, our protector, sat. I was five years old.

“Who would you rather be with?” the lady lawyer asked us, as if we could easily choose between those we loved. As if the answer was as simple as picking between two outfits.

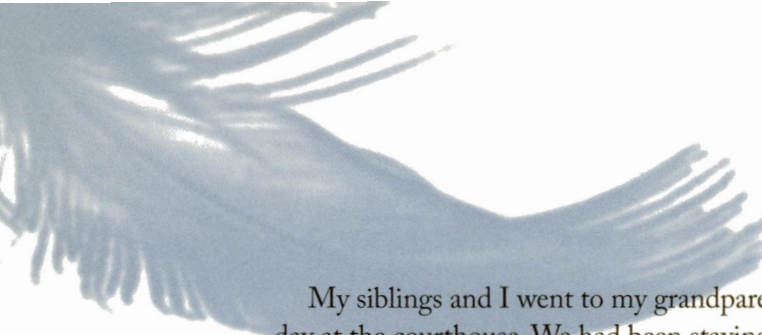
“Mom,” David said confidently. It was easiest for him. He understood the situation, and he had never gotten along with our father anyway. David wasn’t interested in hunting and shooting. He wasn’t reckless. He would rather stay indoors and play video games or build forts with action figures than be outside with our father.

“Mom,” Laura said, after hesitating.

I knew what my answer had to be. I didn’t say it grudgingly because I loved my mother dearly. And I didn’t say it to hurt my father.

“Mom.”

I felt someone should’ve picked my dad just to let the lawyer know he was loved. That answer wouldn’t have been what she wanted to hear. After all, she needed every advantage she had to fight for my mom. My mom smiled down on us, her arms folded over her best outfit, a faded peach skirt and jacket, but her eyes revealed a broken heart. Her lips didn’t curve as she tried to smile and her eyes were flat and dull. Maybe she realized what an impossible position she had put us in. Maybe she was asking us for forgiveness. Maybe she just wanted to know that what she was doing was right.



My siblings and I went to my grandparents' house after our day at the courthouse. We had been staying there since the separation. I was nervous. I didn't want to be torn away from my dad, the one who swung me on his arms, gave me piggy-back rides, and dared me toward adventure. I didn't want to be torn away from my mom, the one who sang me to sleep at night, told me stories, and took care of me physically and emotionally. I didn't understand the ramifications of divorce and neither did Laura.

My mom came home later that night. She walked in, looking haggard, and hugged each of us. My grandparents had been waiting in anticipation as well, though their concern throughout the day had been for us. We celebrated as best we could. I knew that we were given into the hands that were most capable of loving us the right way.

"It's going to be okay," my mom said. Her lips alternated between smiling and trembling. "Your dad gets to see you every other weekend and during the summer. The rest of the time you'll be with me."

The next week, we were in the "Courthouse News" of the *Autogram-Sentinel* where everyone in the town of Tuscumbia could read about our misery. Now we'd be those kids with the divorced parents. People would ask, "Where are you staying this weekend?" "When's the last time you called your father?" "Do you like having divorced parents?"

"The following divorces were granted in Miller County District Court, according to Clerk of Court Office records: Samuel Jay Visser, 26, and Priscilla Ruth Visser, 30, were divorced..."

My mom has always been independent. Her two sisters died at a young age, so she was stuck between two brothers. She was unwed and pregnant with David at the age of nineteen in a household that didn't tolerate "fooling around." My grandparents are strict and believed in chastity before marriage. My mother preached it to my sister and me, not because it was ingrained in her, but because she didn't want us making her mistakes. She did end up marrying my father five years after my brother was born. I wonder how often she was happy during her marriage. I wonder if my sister and I helped or hindered the relationship. I wonder if any of it would have mattered or if divorce was inevitable. My dad wasn't kind to her. I never knew if he beat her; I've been too cowardly to ask. His words were enough of a whip. My mom raised me, Laura and David even before the divorce. She clothed us, read us stories and sang to us at night. She also worked two jobs and paid my dad's debts.

My father was her opposite. While my mom was strict and

His idea of a fun time involved
recklessness, booze, and apparently,
women on the side.

unyielding, my
dad was happy-
go-lucky. He
was a daredevil

and dared his kids right along with him.

We rode a car hood during the winter as a sled and jumped off bridges into creeks in the spring. One time, around the Fourth of July, he handed me a lit bottle rocket that I held in my hand; as it neared the end of its fuse, he finally told me I needed to throw it. It barely made it out of my hand before it exploded and jetted off. His idea of a fun time involved recklessness, booze, and apparently, women on the side. He had a temper, too, and not just with my mom. When he raised his voice, you listened.

One summer afternoon, Dad, his post-divorce girlfriend, Chery, Laura and I were spread out in Chery's kitchen. We stayed at Chery's house for a good part of our younger years before he moved on to another girlfriend. Laura and Dad were standing by the bar, each on opposite ends. Chery was sitting in a chair next to the bar and had a hand locked around my arm. I don't remember how old I was, but it was somewhere between the ages of eight and thirteen. Dad and Chery were arguing, which wasn't anything new. We were contemplating going to the bar, again, because Chery wanted to. The bar, Buddy's, was located conveniently across the street from her house, and every weekend our time was spent there. Mine and Laura's salvation as my dad and Chery drank and gossiped was playing pool and shuffleboard. The main thing we enjoyed was that we got to order Shirley Temple's "with extra cherries, please." This time, however, my dad didn't want to go to the bar. He wanted us all to stay home together. Chery didn't. I don't remember if it came to blows before Chery grabbed me and set me in her lap for protection. Dad was livid, and Chery knew he might come after her. She wrapped her arms around my waist and trembled beneath me.

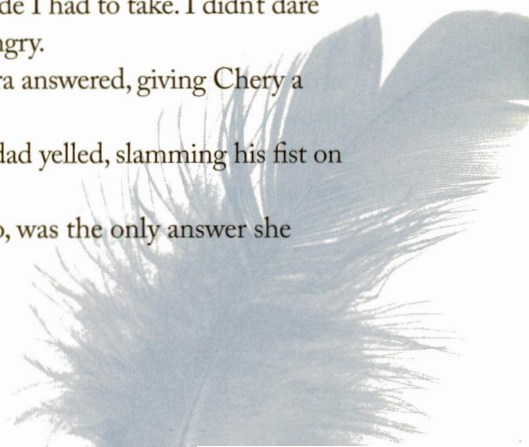
"Do you want her to go to the bar?" my dad asked my sister and me.

"No," I said, knowing which side I had to take. I didn't dare defy my father when he was so angry.

"She can if she wants to," Laura answered, giving Chery a way out.

"Do you want her to go?" my dad yelled, slamming his fist on the countertop.

"No," Laura responded. It, too, was the only answer she could give.



Truth be told, neither of us cared whether she went. Going to the bar was an escape from the constant fighting in the house, and if Chery went, Laura and I would raid the pantry for sweets, snuggle up together on the loveseat, and pick whichever movie we wanted to watch on Dish Network.

Spending time with Dad also enhanced my vocabulary. My father would tell others to “Take it easy when using the F-word around my kids.” Apparently, his limit was to use the word every few sentences instead of one right after the other. I tried to expand my vocabulary according to my father’s rules, but I learned real fast that those words were unacceptable.

Before long, David started stepping up as the authority in our house. He had taken over the role of father, since ours was so rarely around and hardly ever responsible. David had also taken over his responsibilities: cutting and chopping wood, watching over me and Laura while my mom worked, but mainly making sure my mom was coping. Sometimes I hated him for it; sometimes I just wanted him to act like a brother. But I understood that he was trying his best, taking on responsibilities that weren’t his and shouldn’t have been until he was an adult.

It’s weird how we hurt the ones we love. After the divorce, my mom made it on her own, and along the way I think she might have found her true self. I wonder if she ever really loved my father or just got in a bad situation. If she did love him, does she still? As for my dad, I think he found out that no matter how many women he dated, he was still in love with my mom. He knew he had done wrong by her.

“Priscilla is a great mom. I love your mom, you know? I always have. I did her wrong but I’m trying to set things right.

Priscilla's a great mom," said my dad numerous times while he was inebriated. He always softened up when he was drunk.

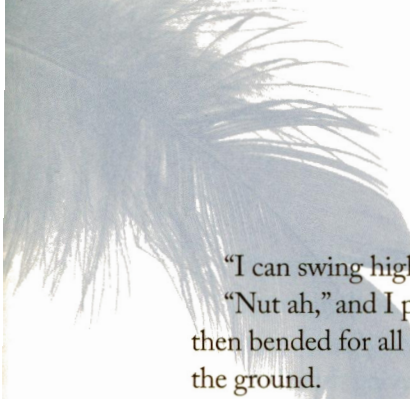
Years later, I remember my dad talking about the day of the divorce hearing. He was seated by the bar in Chery's kitchen with my Uncle Leon, who was down for the weekend from St. Louis along with his son, Austin. They always came down for deer season. Leon and Austin were my father's audience. I happened to walk in on the middle of the conversation.

"Yeah, Priscilla was crying and begging the judge not to take the kids away from her. She didn't even want me to have them. Their father. I just let her have it out, then stood up and told him my piece," he said while I stood off to the side of the room.

I hated him for presenting a weak picture of my mom, weeping and begging. He was too much of a "man" to admit how much that day had affected his life. Instead, he told his story with glee. I resented him for making me remember that day. It was my most vivid memory of the divorce. That day, with all of the tears, fighting, and yelling, still sticks with me.

"Go outside." My mom urged me and my siblings toward the door of the trailer.

My father seethed by the kitchen table, wearing thin the already worn linoleum with his pacing. His back faced us. My mother's eyes were wide with fear, but her mouth was set in a demanding line. We hustled outside, my brother comforting us with a hand to our backs. We hurried down the rickety wooden steps and across the yard to the swing set. The swing set was our refuge. Back and forth, back and forth squeaked the metal chains. It was a beautiful day, perfect temperature, bright blue sky. My sister and I made a game of swinging.



“I can swing higher than you,” she taunted.

“Nut ah,” and I propelled my feet forward, straight as a board, then bended for all I was worth, pushing myself near parallel to the ground.

My brother slouched against the metal pole that held the swings, arms crossed with a dour face. He was our protector. Yelling came from the house. The voices were muffled enough that what they were saying was unclear. I don’t remember the outcome. Maybe I blocked what happened next from my mind, it being either emotionally conflicting or insignificant. Perhaps I didn’t want to remember.

Divorce is a word everyone views as ugly. The word, when uttered, evokes looks of sympathy and pity; anyone involved is considered forever broken. I’m not trying to diminish the effects of divorce, for there are definite effects. But sometimes divorce isn’t pitiable, it just is. Sometimes living life the best way you can is okay, even if the outcome means being split in two. Sometimes divorce is the right way.

I don’t know that divorce really defined me. I was more influenced by the nature of my parents, not their divorce. I gained my faith and independence through my mother. Her love of nature influenced my outlook on life, but her small-town prejudices helped me avoid judging at first glance.

Ironically, my father probably shares some of my mom’s views. He’s about as country as they come. He taught me how to shoot, fish, and drive a stick shift. Unfortunately, because of my father’s short fuse, anytime someone starts yelling, I get nervous and start to cower. Yet, all of these instances would have happened with or without the divorce because they’re the personality traits of my parents.

I have gleaned a few facts from divorce: You can't change people, no matter how much you want to, unless they want to change themselves. My mom hoped to change my dad, and for a while, it worked. She married him, believing that their passion was enough. I also know that my brother, my sister, and I have had it a lot easier than some divorced families. My childhood was a lot brighter than others, and for the most part, I remember it with happiness. Every family struggles with their own issues, divorced or not. But the most important thing that has happened regarding my parent's divorce is that, after thirteen years of crying and holding my hands over my ears from age five all the way up to age eighteen, there is quiet. The yelling has finally ceased.



Amanda Visser, a senior creative writing major and journalism minor, is Vice President of Sigma Tau Delta. Her short play "Two Women, Two Fishin' Poles, and A Boat" was performed at Stephens' New Short Play Festival in 2009. She hopes to travel to Ireland and haunt cafés and write.

Kristin J. McCowan

Through the backseat window
city lights vanished behind us and
cars raced down the freeway.

Holding my cup steady he poured the vodka
and we drank up

not knowing that
he would abandon the corner of Goodfellow and Laura,
the place where he'd poke his head into the cars of strangers
and come out a little richer,

not knowing that
he would abandon the back porch where he slept
the day when gangsters swarmed the fence,
index fingers pressed tightly on triggers.

We didn't know that I'd sit in a red velvet pew
while strangers came to shake my hand
and smash their lips on my cheek.

We had no idea that this would be the last time
we'd see each other,
so we said, "cheers"
and drank up.



Over Easy

Emily Petrie

I like breakfast in citrus jam
spread on my Saturdays,
when I read into
the things you asked me to do
on the fridge.

I have sticky yellow in my pockets.
Words requesting me to pick up
eggs, flour, raspberries,
the *L.A. Times*,
and lattes.

I keep the burners on
simmer to avoid burning
buttermilk short-stacks
drizzled with maple.

The O.J. is freshly squeezed,
on the table,
like my offer
to make breakfast every morning
for a while, at least.



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