



# the CATALYST

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# “MAKE YOUR MARK”

A publication of *The Catalyst*  
Volume 10 – Spring 2014

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WHAT WE ARE:

*The Catalyst* is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse English Club publishing prose, poetry, photography, art, music, and all other creative works by the students and faculty of UW-L. Each semester, the student editors pick a new theme and accept submissions about and outside the chosen theme.

## THIS SEMESTER'S THEME:

This semester, we are celebrating our 10<sup>th</sup> issue since appearing online in fall 2009. It is amazing how quickly the time has passed. College goes by almost as quickly as it comes. In only four years, we make connections, foster friendships, build a new life, and then move on when we graduate. Wherever we go and whatever we do when we leave, there will always be a part of us left behind as well as spread around in the hearts and minds of those we made in impact on. This semester's collection features pieces about the marks we have made on others as we live our lives, as well as how others have left their marks on us.

## WORD OF THANKS TO:

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## **Doubt**

*Sam Slater*

Art is an old Spanish woman  
Ruining an older painting of Jesus.  
Wisdom doesn't mean not thinking stupid thoughts,  
It means knowing not to speak them.  
And it never seems to take long  
To go from being the tallest guy on the court  
To the tallest guy at a concert.  
At least there's still music.  
Perpetually figuring we will fix it all tomorrow...or the next day.  
Ben Franklin worried he was fat.  
Michael Jordan is a terrible dancer.  
Marilyn Monroe had big feet.  
Still, it doesn't hurt knowing  
That all it takes to be a good person is an honest ear.  
And there will always be a young lady  
Singing her soft song,  
Making these same three chords beautiful again.

## Death of Names

Joe Reuss

Sitting alone in the back seat of his mother's 1997 Plymouth Voyager mini-van (grape colored) Jared Meyer decided he would never speak again. It was not as though he had any particular dislike for the act of verbal communication. In fact, three years ago in fifth grade, he had been appointed the dubious honor of reciting the Pledge of Allegiance every morning for a month. He was stripped of his duty when, two weeks in and already bored of his responsibility, he had replaced the word "flag" with "frog" and ended the whole thing with an enormous and (he thought) impressive croak. This is not to say, however, that Jared was a troublemaker of any kind, although he engaged in his fair share of hair-pulling and hallway-running. Rather, his report cards and parent-teacher conferences were filled with phrases like "adequate performance" and "does not apply himself fully." And so, between Middle and High School, Jared Meyer (frog-croaker and B student) with the last dregs of his childish willfulness, swore off speech simply because he could.

In a popular tidbit of pseudo-philosophy, it is said that a person dies two deaths: the first when the heart stops beating and the second when someone's name is said for the last time. Thirteen years old and possessed only of vague notions of mortality, Jared seemed to have found a peculiar kind of immortality because people said his name now more than ever. "Jared? Jared!" his mother had said insistently that same day as they were driving home, "Are you listening to me?" His response was, of course, a mute nod to her eyes in the rear-view mirror. With a youthful exuberance belied by his abject silence, he took to his pet project in the intense kind of way that children do for a brief moment before their interest is lost. Floating as he was, however, in the gulf between childhood and adulthood (or rather, the looming expectation thereof) this moment was preserved until the silence had become so usual that when he was addressed or otherwise felt words bubbling up to escape his mouth, it was no longer a challenge to keep them inside. *It's only a matter of time*, he thought, *before everyone becomes as used to this as I am.*

It was around the time his parents brought him to see an overpriced but highly recommended child psychologist that the

rumors started. Already a month into his experiment-turned-lifestyle, Jared mentally prepared himself for what he assumed would be the greatest test of his silence yet. The appointment was scheduled in a half-hour consultation block, but only lasted fifteen minutes. The shrink's initial question of "So, your parents tell me you've stopped speaking. Would you like to share with me why?" went unanswered, and the pair of them spent the remaining twelve-and-a-half minutes staring quietly at one another. Unprepared for the intensity of Jared's quietness, the psychiatrist awkwardly excused himself to ask his frustrated parents whether they would be willing to schedule another appointment, which they never did, and wrote Jared a prescription (placebo) which they never filled.

"I hope you're happy with yourself," his mother scolded when they were back home. "Because you won't be soon." Her threat was as vague as his transgression; too young to understand the nuances of consultation fees, he laughed inwardly at the idea that he could be punished for not speaking. But punished he was, with time-outs and groundings and withheld meals. It became common to see Jared sitting alone on the front steps of his parents' house while the two of them ate and argued loudly without him. From there, the rumors, emboldened by his solitary step-sitting surged forth from his neighbors.

"The kid's had an accident, or developed some kinda condition-"

"-had an operation and the surgeon nicked a vocal cord. I heard the family's suing for malpractice!"

"...And the poor boy's obviously terrified! I bet he saw something..."

"It must be the parents. I've heard of this happening before – it's a common side-effect of, you know, *abuse*."

So went the theories – on and on until Jared himself no longer mattered and it was really just the principle of the thing to talk about which juicy atrocity might have silenced him. The Meyers, mortified into a quiet of their own kind, weakly protested only the most egregious of suppositions, leaving the rest unchallenged because, really, their own explanation (or lack thereof) was just as unsatisfying.

Four years of high school passed. Among the raucous halls and busy classrooms, Jared was always surrounded by an aura of



stillness. Where he walked, his silence trailed behind him like a soft bridal veil and settled over the people whose conversations left off mid-sentence, almost as though they were embarrassed to speak when he was around. Initially, his teachers loved that this seeping power made their classes very orderly. Quickly, though, they found it even more difficult to get their students to participate in discussions when Jared was present, as if his silent presence was magnified hugely onto all of his peers. Anyone who attempted to speak to Jared immediately felt awkward and uncomfortable, and was left flustered and groping for words that always seemed to wait until Jared had left before coming to their minds. It was as though he had not only bottled up all his own words, but become a tear in the very nature of language – a hole in communication that left everyone it touched with a hotly irritated sense of *esprit d'escalier*. After the unsettling novelty of Jared's single peculiarity died down, the school seemed to reorganize itself to contain the anomaly and Jared was mostly ignored. Some people, though, found themselves with a sort of obsession with getting him to speak. Teachers tried to stir up some kind of inspiration in him with passionate critiques of his work and meat-headed bullies threw their sharpest insults hoping something would stick. The attempt that came the closest was from Nicole Zalbeck (prom queen runner-up, proud member of the *in* clique, and always last when roll was called) when she cornered him one day by his locker.

“Hey,” she said.

Jared glanced around, then gestured uncertainly to himself.

“Yes, you. Who else?” She smiled and adjusted herself in a way she thought was seductive. “You know, everyone talks about you. But you never talk to anyone. I thought, maybe, you might want to talk to me. It can be fun, you know? Don't you want to try it at least?”

He shook his head.

“Just one word. I won't tell anyone, I promise.” Her voice quickly took on a wheedling tone, and he started to turn away.

“I think you're afraid.”

He stopped.

“Yeah, that's right, afraid. I think you're afraid that if you talk, you'll be just like everyone else. You *like* being a freak. And you know that, without this, you're just *boring*.”

He spun in place and opened his mouth, although he managed to say nothing. The two of them stared at each other, Nicole looking a little embarrassed and unsure of where the words she had used had come from, and Jared surprised at how close he had come to speaking. They broke eye contact and left without a word. At home, Jared stood in front of his bathroom mirror and, guiltily, opened his mouth to speak only to find that he was unable. He spent the entire night mouthing words and screaming silently at his reflection, incapable of making a sound. Instead, he smashed plates just to hear them shatter. He turned music up so high that his neighbors (for the first time ever) complained that something from the Meyers' house was too loud. Jared's parents, shaken both from their sleep and their blithe acceptance of their son's behavior, hurried up to his room only to find him sitting on the floor among a mess of broken glass and porcelain. He looked up at them with a confused and terrified expression, pleading for them to help him somehow. But as always, his silence reared up to brush his parents with its awkward, feathery caress and they found themselves unable to do anything but shut off the blaring music, stammer a scolding not to wake the neighbors again, and retreat from their son's incommunicable presence.

Jared died his second death long before his first, sometime after he graduated high school. With no plans of higher education and no future beyond that, he got a construction job and moved out of his parents' house. Living alone suited him and he grew comfortable with his existence, taking a certain kind of numb pleasure in the fact that, even if he wanted to, he could not make a sound. Ascribing to a personal routine of self-discipline, he learned to withhold the edges of his soundless aura to keep it from unnerving his co-workers or interfering with his job, but it became a daily struggle to control the vast soundlessness welling up from within himself. Despite his active working life, he became paler and gaunter and it seemed that neither projecting nor holding in the silence could sate it. Eventually, rather than attempting to control the flow of silence, Jared began to drift along with its ebb and tide. He faded into the periphery of every life, even his own, with silent acceptance and even a feeling of slight contentment. Eventually, no one was surprised to see him anywhere, even people who had never met him before. Like a fly on a wall, he disappeared invisibly into the background of the universe, and slowly, with ineffable velvety calm, it forgot that he existed.



## Scarecrow

*Jillissa Reuteler*

Dew drops, floating, condensing  
On the faces of pallid, thin figures.  
Smiling, stitched lips mask fictional thought  
A full inspection by eyes as the day thickens  
Cloaked and dragged to the green,  
But looks more toward an inky gray at eventide.  
Limbs folded out as to give an embrace,  
But weeds for hands that cannot hold,  
That no soul would wish to hold.  
A pathetic skimmer on the head that is not.  
Patched and crippled,  
Bound to a single stake  
Never to stand alone.

## The Birds

*Alayna Stein*

The birds are carrying  
tiny cups of coffee in their beaks,  
dripping flocks worth of pots over the city  
and its sleepers –  
but workers  
who swim now  
through the caffeinated  
streets, like Venice.  
How else could their eyes grow so wide?

The birds pull the wires  
attached at the limp wrists of the sleepers  
that clack tirelessly over the keyboards,  
tugging the bodies  
through the seas of each other,  
towing the corners of their frowns  
south from their eardrums.  
How else could they hear the way these words work like waves:

The birds are waving wet wings  
to the music  
with oversized headphones  
pressed against their ear feathers,  
with their audios  
dangling down into the clouds,  
threatening to thrash through the landscapes;  
to be captured by the bluffs and condemned to echo  
through the earth and vibrate up  
through my bones.  
How else could this scene have been orchestrated?

The birds  
with all of their clashing feathers  
fan faces onto forest walls  
as the sunlight flashes through the treetops.  
And the birds peacefully peck  
at my eyelids so they twitch  
and I tremble as a  
broken image on a tree trunk.  
How else could the world have pieced me as one?

## The Wind

*Sabrina Bruehling*



The ship sails east  
The ship sails west  
Wherever the winds do blow  
'Tis the set of the sails and not the wind  
That tells him  
Where to go.

— Anonymous

## Blame

Sarah Kaun

I find myself sitting in the most uncomfortable wooden chair while the man behind the desk drones on about schedules and rules. I can't help thinking that a place like this should be able to afford more comfortable furniture. Then I realize they probably don't want you to get too comfortable being here. I focus my attention on the swirls of red, blues and greens in the carpet beneath me and follow the red in its winding path to a corner of the room and my eyes catch a picture up above. It's a girl in a small wooden boat, fog frozen in wisps around her and blanketing the pond below. The girl in the picture looks young, maybe 19 like me. She seems to be searching for something or someone in the distance. I can't help wishing I was in the boat with this girl instead of here, maybe I could help her find what she is looking for. I shake my head realizing it wouldn't matter, I wouldn't be happy there either.

"Allie?" I tilt my head up in response and stare at the man across the table; the nametag on his desk reads *Steve Johnson, Intake Manager*. He has a round baldhead and a mustache that looks like a fat caterpillar sleeping on his lip. This is all I see now and I bite my lip, trying not to giggle. I've always been good at laughing during the worst times and I know now is not a good time.

"I'm going to have to search your purse now." He says curtly with his arm out stretched towards me. He just finished searching my luggage and besides my shoelaces, a mirror for makeup and an eyeliner pencil everything else was allowed to stay. I guess I was just going to have to be sober and ugly the whole time I stay here.

I hand my purse over and glance at my mom. My mother, a once beautiful brunette with wisps of gray and whose face seems more weathered than it did just a couple years ago stares back at me. She sits with such precision, as if a board is attached to the back of her to keep her straight and proper. Wearing her usual beige colored pencil skirt and equally bland top, she fidgets with her cross bracelet that reads, *Strong and Courageous* along the outside. I imagine her praying to God right now, wishing he had given her a different daughter, one more like my sister.

I notice the wrinkles around her eyes, they are much more prominent than I remember. They look into me as if to say, "*Please tell me there is nothing in there, please tell me you wouldn't be that stupid.*" I look back at her rolling my eyes. Of course I didn't bring any

alcohol in with me, I'm not stupid, just lost.

Steve reaches inside my purse, his eyes shift and it reminds me of my sister and I, the way we looked when we were little and found our Easter baskets, "Oh yes, I will have to take *this*". He pulls out my small bundle of blue yarn and a crochet hook.

"Why?" I say loudly, attitude seeping from my mouth but I can't help it this time. I get it, some people try to do messed up things with stuff around them but what could I possibly do with some yarn? Then I realize it's the same thing they might do with the shoelaces he took from my shoes. A feeling of foreboding washes over me and I can't help wondering how bad it really is. Is getting sober so bad that people use their shoelaces and yarn to end it?

"Oh we understand; it's for safety, right Allie? You understand." My mom's eyes burn into me with a fierce intensity and I was propelled back into the moment I woke up in the hospital bed, realizing I was attached to wire and cords and beeping sounds. The first thing I saw were those eyes, that fierce intensity.

"What about drawing? Can I still draw?" I ask.

"Yes, we will have art activities scheduled throughout the week but these are supervised because of the sharp....err for safety" He corrects himself. Of course they are.

Steve leads me down a hallway to show me where my new room will be during my six-week stay with them. Pictures of inspirational messages and suns setting cover the gray walls in between doors that lead to other bedrooms. I hate these kinds of photographs, they're typical of a place like this, put here to try to make our pathetic souls feel better but all it does is give us a quick feeling of hope before it disappears again. A lot like drinking.

We pass a girl in the shortest shorts I have ever seen. Her skin is pale and her hair is so thick and curly, it bounces when she talks, shaking her hips and arms with attitude.

"Fuck you Gary!" She screams at a male nurse behind a desk. "I was told that if I had a full week with no arguments or *aggressive acts*", she says with a mocking tone while forming bunny ears in the air with her fingers, "I could have my phone privileges back!" As we pass her I can't help but stare, transfixed by the way she is talking to him. The man I am assuming to be Gary across from her looks unfazed by this current freak out.

She glares at me, "What the hell you lookin' at?"



“Um, nothing, sorry” I look away and squeeze my bag to my chest, thoroughly freaked out by what I’ve gotten myself into.

We walk into my new bedroom; it’s set up like a hotel room with two beds on either side of the room. A nightstand sits in between the beds and another near the window where my side is. My side is completely bare while the other is decorated in paintings from classroom art paper and water colors of ocean scenes, fields and one painting that looks like a girl from far away but as I get closer to it I realize the face looks like it’s melting, it’s terrifying. My new roommate is facing away, staring at me through a cheap plastic like mirror on the wall, distorting her face. I can’t help but look back at the melting face and wonder if this was her inspiration. When she turns around to face me I notice there are scabs on her face and I instantly think, *meth addict*. She’s wearing dark green cat glasses and cherry red lipstick, her face is long and I can barely see her brown eyes under her glasses and long bangs.

“Hi, I’m Casey” she says giving me a slight smile.

“Hi, I’m Allie” I reply. I can’t get over how skinny she is. I guess I’m small too, I’m probably 120lbs now after detox, before detox I probably looked more like Casey, she can’t be more than 85lbs. Steve instructs us both that we will be roommates and to get acquainted because we will be spending the next few weeks together and that the nurse will be coming around at 6am to get us up for group therapy and breakfast. Then he leaves us in the room and I feel awkward.

I lay in bed that night thinking about how I got here. My mom would say it’s because I was the only one in the family who inherited the *gene*. She may be right but it’s so much more than that. I’m good at running away from things. I always have been. Not to mention the anxiety doesn’t help. My sister and brother on the other hand, they’ve always been strong and independent. My sister Elise inherited the beautiful and intelligent gene; she’s graduating college this month and moving to California to work as a pharmaceutical representative. Jake, my 27-year-old brother, lives in New York City and just graduated from law school a couple years ago. He isn’t sure what he wants to do so now dad is paying for him to go back to school. We all pick on him and tell him he’s going to be a “professional student” for the rest of his life but why not, if your dad is willing to pay for it? My dad is a surgeon. His work is his life. Once the newspapers show that

your daughter is in trouble for underage drinking, two DUI's and the nurses' gossip about your daughter being in the emergency room after a night of binge drinking, I guess your job is to send her away. He despises me. I'm the leech that sucks the life out of his wallet and out of the family. I can't really blame him.

I start to think again, about the events leading up to this moment and I think about my Grandma, how I acted at the nursing home and how I didn't even get to see her before I drank myself into oblivion and ended up here.

A pit had formed in my stomach the moment I stepped into the nursing home hallway. I felt lonely and that sterile hospital smell hit me while the clear scent of icy hot and alcohol rubs from the nurse nearby intoxicated me. As I walked down the hallway, I saw name tags outside each room and attempts by families to mimic their parent's once welcoming home with furnishings and family photos; but it just doesn't quite work, not with that smell. TVs blared for the hard of hearing in every room and I could hear the familiar, "Cooooome ooon down!" in one room while a little old lady slept, her nametag read "Mable". *The Price is Right* is one of my Grandma's favorite shows, along with *Guiding Light* but that's no longer on the air. She doesn't like to talk about it. That's why we went there, to see my Grandma. A few nursing assistants walked by with a machine and a frail old man hung inside it, as if in a hammock. I watched as they pressed a button and the machine gently dropped him into his wheelchair, none of this fazed him. It scared the shit out of me though. I imagined myself hanging, drooling in that contraption.

Then it arrived. I wasn't surprised considering the mini meltdown that was already ensuing just from the sight of the old man. That feeling of need, it washed over me like molasses, weighting me down and seeped into my every being with such intensity I couldn't even think of anything else. I had to get out of there. I needed to drink. My mother had looked back at me, smiling hesitantly as if anticipating my emotions. She walked into what I assumed was my Grandma's room and I turned around. I ran. I ran out of that place, called a friend who brought me my fake ID and we drank so much that night, going from party to party and bar to bar. Then my dumbass ended up behind the wheel of my car, screwed up beyond comprehension. That's how I landed here, in this place and before this, the hospital bed. And that's all it took. It doesn't take much to

get that feeling anymore. That feeling of intense need for something to make it all go away. The idea of going to a job gives me anxiety, which ends in my drinking. School sends me into a tailspin of panic attacks which results in me getting put on probation and then deciding to move back in with my parents. Now apparently, nursing homes set me off too.

The next morning I wake up to Casey tugging at my blankets.

"Er, um, Allie? It's time to get up, the nurse just came by and we have to eat breakfast and get ready for group therapy." Casey walks back to the bathroom to brush her teeth and I moan my way out of bed.

"Seriously? It's still dark outside!" I grumble and stare out the window in our room. The Wisconsin terrain outside this side of the facility is almost all woods and an open field to the right, I see headlights across the field and I'm reminded that everyone on the outside is going to go about their normal, happy lives and I'll be in here.

"Yeah, you'll get used to it" Casey replies poking her head out the bathroom door.

"I don't want to get used to this." I say and I don't.

"So, *wha* you here?" Casey asks through her mouth full of toothpaste.

"I just drank a little too much and crashed my car."

Casey spits out her toothpaste and sets her toothbrush down. Her eyes narrow and her eyebrows go up.

"A *little* too much? Whatever got you in here was more than a *little* too much."

I don't understand why she even cares so I try to change the subject, "So what's group therapy like?"

Casey rolls her eyes and says, "Entertaining to say the least," and winks at me. I can tell we are going to get along well.

The first week is really hard. I have multiple anxiety attacks and with them come the need to drink, to make it go away but no alcohol to tame it. My new doctor prescribes me some anxiety medicine, which makes me feel extremely jaded once it kicks in. In group therapy yesterday, Tom, a 48-year-old father and husband, cried while telling us about how he gambled away his kids college savings and woke up in the back of a cop car in his underwear with cuts all over his hands. His wife left him and his kids hate him.

Normally I'd feel bad about this, but instead I find it extremely

uncomfortable. I don't like it when men cry and the medicine isn't helping my empathic listening skills.

Tomorrow our families are coming to visit, or those of us who have families willing to come visit.

"Are your parents coming?" Casey asks me while we sit down in the cafeteria to eat.

"Yes...both of my parents" That feeling starts to bubble up inside of me and I try to calm it, reminding myself that the medicine will kick in soon. I'm so scared for my parents to come. Now that I'm sober and actually have to face reality in my therapy sessions I'm realizing just how much damage I've done to the family and to myself.

"I'm happy for you that you get to see your dad tomorrow," I tell Casey. Casey is an only child and her mother left her and her father when she was little. Her father sounds like a great person. A father who can't understand why his daughter doesn't see how beautiful she is. Casey picks at her face and tries to see her reflection through the spoon in her hand.

"Casey stop it, you know you're not supposed to be doing that." I grab the spoon from her and put it down.

Casey sighs and makes a feeble attempt at taking a bite of her food. She has something called Body Dysmorphic Disorder; basically she hates her body and whenever she looks in the mirror she sees something awful. This is why she is so skinny and has scabs all over her face; she has issues with controlling certain compulsions, one of which is her obsession with picking at her face. She became addicted to laxatives, which is what landed her here, along with her weight. Unfortunately, Casey was born with a whole cocktail of problems but for all the nasty stuff she is going through she is a genuinely nice person.

"I don't want him to see me like this Allie." Casey says shaking her head and looking down at her lap.

"Even you told me you gained like 10lbs since you've been here, I bet he will think you look great...besides... he loves you unconditionally." I try to remind her. I can't help but feel jealous though at those last words and a pang of sadness surges through me. I can't imagine someone saying these same words to me about my own dad.

When I was 7, my mother bought my sister and me new

dressess for Sunday school. While my brother waited inside with my dad before church my mother took photographs of Elise and me in front of the garage. My face was beginning to hurt from smiling so much so I ran over to our dog Scruffy who was rolling around in the dirt. I understood his love for dirt. I'm drawn to a good mess as well. I jumped into the dirt next to him and began piling dirt clumps on top of him. Every time I did this he shook them off and they splattered on to me.

I jumped at the sound of my mother's voice, "Allie! You are filthy! Your new dress...oh my gosh...what is your father going to say?"

As if on cue, he came out in his button up and tie, pulling his coat over him, looking at Elise and smiling.

"What a nice dress Elise, you look like a little princess."

I stood straight up with a big grin waiting for my compliment but my father looked at me with stern eyes.

"Allie, we spent good money on that nice dress and look what you are doing. You are ruining it." He shook his head and headed for the car while my mother led me inside to clean up. My brother chuckled at the sight of me and I glared at him, angry; tears stinging my eyes. I can't remember a time my dad said I was pretty. No, I'm always just a big mess.

"Come on, we have to get to group." Casey says, bringing me back to reality. "Is your medicine starting to kick in? You're getting all zoney on me again," Casey asks putting her arms out in front of her, mimicking a zombie.

She's right. My medicine is kicking in and it's good timing too because I'm not sure I can handle Tom's crying in group again.

The light shines through the window the next morning and I'm thankful we were able to sleep in. Saturdays they let us sleep until 8am, which is something I never thought I'd appreciate. The grateful feeling doesn't last long before it's replaced with dread. It's family therapy day. Our counselor, Sherry, a nice woman, probably 35 years old, instructed my parents to come prepared to express how my addiction has affected them. I have to sit, quietly, while they tell me how much of a disappointment I am. Honestly, I'd experience detox over again if I was given the option instead of having to do this. I know I fucked up. I know I'm a failure. I don't want to hear it.

Casey and I walk together down to the lobby where I saw the girl yelling about her phone privileges the night I arrived. Her name is

Jasmine and she turns the corner towards us, eyeing Casey up.

“Yo red! You look like you’re finally gettin’ some junk in that trunk,” she says winking at Casey.

Casey gives a hesitant smile with her red painted lips and looks at me, “Great,” she says with little enthusiasm. I can tell she’s been struggling with her new body, but I’m hoping once she sees her dad’s face and how happy he’ll be with her progress, she will begin to feel a little better. She just really needs to stop looking into mirrors for so long. One night I caught her staring at her reflection for 3 hours in the window. Every time I woke up thinking maybe she’d finally gone to bed, I instead found her pushing and mushing and pinching every part of her body she detested.

Jasmine, who I found out is around 23 years old, sits down across from us, I’m assuming to wait for one of her own family members. Almost the instant she sits down her demeanor changes from cool and cocky to one of a child, cradling her legs up to her chest and biting her fingernails nervously. I guess even the rough and tough like Jasmine have weak moments like the rest of us. She glances at me and mouths, “this sucks” and rolls her eyes. I nod my head and realize that although so many of us are so different in age and personality we are all unified in our one weakness today and they just happen to be walking through the door.

I see my mom first, her brown hair pulled back by one of her many berets and she’s looking really nice actually. Instead of her usual boring shades of beige, she has on a yellow sundress and brown sandals. I never realized until this moment how much I need my mom. The sight of her made my heart swell and my eyes water and I find myself running to her.

“Oh!” She said in alarm at the force of my hug and then I feel her hand stroke my hair in an involuntary gesture of comforting that must come with having that motherly instinct.

I tilted my head up and saw him, staring down at me from my mother’s shoulder.

“Good, I see the advertisements weren’t just a marketing ploy and my money is being spent well.” He says eyeing up the neatly painted walls, expensive furniture and those awful paintings that drive me crazy.

“Yeah dad, your money is being spent well, don’t worry.” I say turning away. I’m immediately annoyed with myself for hoping that he

might actually have been excited to see me.

I watch Casey hugging her dad, a hearty looking man in stature and personality. He gives Casey such a hug that he lifts her off her feet. She looks at me and I laugh a little for her and give her thumbs up. It's easy to be jealous but it's easier to see a friend happy and that's what I consider Casey, a friend. A friend I am so thankful to have in this place because although we come from such different families we are mutually screwed up in so many ways. It's comforting in the strangest way.

While everyone else separates into groups with their own family and friends, Sherry ushers my parents and I into her office. I've become accustomed to this room because it's with Sherry that I get to splurge my issues during my one-on-one sessions and she gets to ask her favorite question, "So, how did you feel in that moment?". I could be peeing in the story I'm telling her and she'd probably still ask that question. She loves feelings I guess.

After introductions and instructions on how the session will hopefully go, Sherry asks my parents to, whenever they are ready, talk about how my addiction has affected them. My palms are sweaty and I feel my anxiety is the worst that it's ever been; I have horrible knots in my stomach. I realize I never went by the nurse's station to take my medication and I'm going to be braving this without it.

"I guess I'll go first." My mom says nervously. She grasps my hand, "From the day you were born I knew you were different. Actually even inside me you were different than your brother and sister. You were active all the time. I barely slept but I didn't care because I was so excited to meet such a boisterous baby. When your father and I saw you for the first time you were blue because of the cord and your father nearly took you into his hands himself to get the cord off your neck but the doctors told him to stay where he was and they were able to keep you alive. Oh and thank God because you turned into such a wonderful and adventurous child!"

I look at my dad, "You guys never told me that."

"Oh I'm sure we did!" My mom says excitedly.

"Allie you've always just remembered what you want to remember," My dad says.

"That's not true! I remember things pretty well actually. I'm glad you say you loved that I was an adventurous child mom but that is not my memory. I was getting yelled at for doing anything out of the ordinary."

“But Allie... don’t you see why we were so worried for you? Maybe we had an idea of what your adventurous personality could lead to.”

“We are your parents after all,” my dad says, “and you have to admit from where we are sitting it looks like we were probably in the right.”

“Let’s stick to the current if we can. Please express to Allie how her drinking and stealing at home has affected you emotionally and as a family.” Sherry interrupts in an attempt to lead the conversation in a different direction.

I ignore her, “Well dad, it’s hard to say if I even view you as a parent, yes you fed me and clothed me with your money and kept a roof over my house but did you ever actually sit me down and express how worried you were about me? Did you EVER express anything toward me at all?”

“Honey,” my mom interjects, those eyes once again burning into me “your dad works very hard for our family and if he didn’t care about you so much then why would you be in one of the best rehabs in Wisconsin in order to get better?”

“Mom! Please! Stop always trying to rescue dad from conversations and besides, you think sending me away to a fancy rehab shows how much you love me? Seriously? No wonder I drink in the first place! When I first complained about my anxiety problems dad told me that worrying is all in the head and that no one in our family needs medication. Isn’t that right *Dad*?” I turn my head to look at him and his face is burning red. I’m terrified but so angry that I can’t help it, “You guys want to blame my rebellious personality and some inherited gene because Uncle John was a junky but let’s face it, I needed a way to cope with my own mental illness, my anxiety, and I found alcohol. Ask Sherry! She even said so herself.”

My dad’s eyes narrow onto me. The last time I saw him look so focused onto something was when he was showing Elise and I how to stitch a cut, “See Allie, this is where you are wrong. We don’t blame you for anything. YOU blame us. I didn’t want you on medication because you were always the strong one. I figured you could get through it with sheer will power but I was wrong. I had no idea you actually had an anxiety disorder I just thought it was typical teenage angst. Regardless, it does not give you the right to disobey our rules, seal money from your mother’s wallet and get behind the wheel of a



car intoxicated. You are a child Allie. A child! And you could have killed yourself or someone else!”

I want to scream that I’m not a child, that I’m 19 years old, but he’s already stood up and walked out the door.

My mom is crying now and I reach over to hug her, “I’m sorry mom, he just makes me so upset. I guess we upset each other a lot.”

Sherry stands up and says that although it was an intense session that it was progress and that hopefully with each new session we will find resolution. I’m not so sure.

My dad is already out at the car and my mother and I are standing inside the doorway where the heat blares down on us in an attempt to keep the winter chill from outside at bay.

“I know he’s difficult Allie but he does love you. He just has a different way of showing it than most people. He’s never been good at social interactions or affection, believe me I know,” She puts her hands on my shoulders, “but you *have* to learn to respect him for who he is and he will learn to do the same to you. Just remember that you can’t make people who you need them to be only when you need them. Life is not that simple. We just want you better and we want you to *want* to get better and we aren’t sure you realize how serious this is.”

Her words leave me sobbing and I don’t want to let her go, I’m once again holding her so tightly, “I know it’s serious mom. I promise I do. I’m so sorry I’m such a failure.”

“You are not a failure. You never could be. Just a work in progress and so are we,” she says with a wink, “we love you,” and with that she hands me an envelope. “Just remember what I said to you about your father.” She walks out the door and gets into the car.

I shakily open the envelope, tears staining the folds. Inside is a picture of me, in the hospital bed unconscious after I crashed my car. Sitting next to me is my dad with his head on the bed asleep – holding my hand.

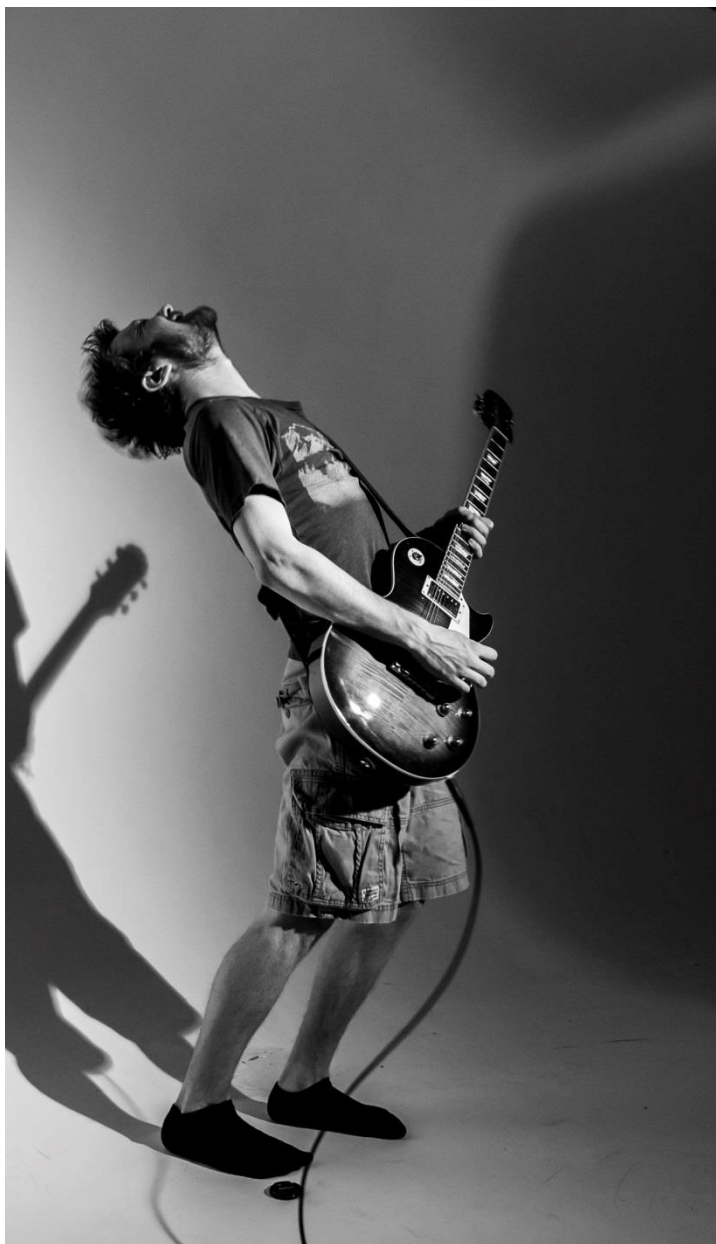
I look up and see my dad give a slight nod out the car window and my mother blow me a kiss. I hold the picture to my chest and walk back to my room. My mother couldn’t be more right about my dad and me but she was wrong about one other thing. People can be who you need them to be, just when you need them to be, and this picture proved it.

## Verbalize

*Liu Yandan*

In self-defense class,  
We group in twos to practice,  
one pretends to be the attacker and  
the other does the self-defense.  
I am the only Chinese student here.  
“Verbalize!” is what the instructor always says.  
How can I, a Chinese woman,  
whose first language is not English,  
yell at someone naturally, like  
“Get back! Get back!”  
or even “fuck!?”  
I didn’t grow up in this social context.  
To me, literally there is no difference  
between saying the word  
“fuck” and “awesome” maybe.  
How can I try to scare people away,  
especially they are English-Speaking attackers...

What if one day I actually meet some difficult situations like that,  
I probably will laugh out loud...  
Even though I don’t really want to.  
What if I make a mistake at that essential moment  
saying “Come on!” instead of “Get back!”?  
Or probably the attacker might go away,  
because I am just not a normal person.



## Like Patchwork

*Justin Michael Cooke*

A quilt is not perfect.

It can be dirtied, its threads may unravel, it may require mending as the years go on,

it may lose a patch. Or two. Or ten.

It may be too short, too big, too heavy, too thin,  
the dimensions may not be exact.

Yet, it is in these imperfections that a quilt becomes unique.

Personal. Your own.

Quilts all serve the same purpose:

To love. To protect. To encourage dreams.

Our first best friend, waiting eagerly for us in the crib when we come home for the first time.

Standing with us and holding our hand as we take our first steps.

It becomes the castle wall in the living room.

A gift of love given from one to another,

cut, positioned, and stitched by patient hands,

passed on from one generation to another with enough strength to last three.

It is simply thread that transforms the individual patches into a single quilt.

The more that I examine these patches,

the more familiarity I find in each one,

in the checkerboard of patterns, in each square of design.

I am right there,

between the flowers and the Cookie Monsters,

bordering the zoo animals rolling by on their skateboards.

In the other patches I see those that I love,

those I do not know yet,

and those I will never know.

Where I expect the stitched borders to clash,

where zig-zags meet polka dots,

they don't.

In fact, the patches embrace one another.

Despite the differences of each pattern,

the size and appeal of each square,

each patch shares a responsibility:  
To be the first best friend  
to share the first steps,  
to become the castle walls.

With enough thread they can do that, the patches.  
Be that.

With enough thread we are like that.  
Like patchwork.

a good woman is like a good whiskey

*Mitchell Spoerl*

neat, full-bodied, warm

but never hot

no ice

no water

no impurities

hugs you after a long day

kisses you like

your lips are the only ones she's ever kissed

stays on your breath for hours

bad for you

in the best of ways

makes you forget time

forget that it ends

and believe that it's a series of beginnings

her label does no justice

in describing what lies within her

everything that she is, is discovered

in that

first

sip

she doesn't look down upon me

but I look up at her,

bathing in soft amber light,

while I wallow in the nauseous neons

of the bottom shelf

## Thank You?

*Whitney Storvick*

I've seen too many lives packed  
    Away in the forms of  
    Collectable bells or  
    'A' Honor Roll Awards or  
Not enough pictures at a certain age,  
    With a certain haircut.  
I've known too many who have  
    Passed on, without knowing  
    The recipe to the best, yes  
    The best potato salad or  
    When exactly she stopped  
    Remembering my identity or  
    If it was the semi driver's fault.  
People feel the need to notify me of how  
    I've witnessed an unusual amount,  
    Especially considering  
    The few years I've had.  
Has this desensitized me?  
    I don't often cry  
    During movies anymore,  
    But I still feel every pain.  
Each time my shadow crosses a casket,  
    I am reminded of not only  
    Who is inside, but  
    An eerie deja vu of those  
    I've seen six feet under.  
    A reverse peristalsis  
    Of guilt crept up when  
    I thought of Abby  
    At Grandma Ollie's wake.  
I've seen too many, yet  
    I still have no reply to  
    "I'm sorry for your loss."

## Names Have Not Been Changed

*Spencer Anhalt*

### I.

I remember you spray-painted

“PROM?” on the pavement.

I remember she said, “yes,” and she meant it.

that pretty-people town had never known passion.

### II.

two of a kind,

and we waded through water.

we rearranged the rocks of a city,

for somewhere to sit,

and stayed within ear shot,

as the deserters jumped ship.

It’s been a pleasure performing with you, sir.

### III.

we were only blowing smoke,

and nobody knows.

and our odometer secret steal-aways:

an epilogue left unnoticed.





## **A Life Given for Love**

*Andy Davis*

I don't think they appreciate the stress I'm under. I feel like I'm about to burst out here on the dance floor. I know that someone has to do it; someone has to be the buffer, and I am perfect for the job; but I still hate it.

Our Lady of Everlasting Joy High School has a current enrollment of 263 souls, almost equally divided between male and female. During regular school hours the faculty, the father and the sisters and the lay staff, do an admirable job of separating the two groups. Boys are boys; girls are girls; and never the twain shall meet. Education and enlightenment, along with an appropriate level of maturity and civility, are rained down on them like manna from heaven. They are not, however, encouraged to fraternize. They may see members of the other gender as they file through the halls, supervised, from class to class. They may see them across the lunch room. They may even see them outside; after lunch or waiting for the bus. But they do not interact. Our Lady of Everlasting Joy takes no chances in that regard. There will be no untoward contact.

Our Lady is not, however, unaware that even the best educated and disciplined young person will eventually have to operate in the real world. At some point they may also need to interact with the opposite sex. Future members of the church must be created. A forward thinking member of the administration, whose name is lost to history, decided that four times a year the student body would be gathered and allowed to have a dance.

There is, naturally, a very stringent and detailed set of rules that governed the dances. All music is pre-approved. All decorations are inspected. All libations are regularly and repeatedly sampled. The environment is controlled, as is the behavior.

The boys are allowed to talk to the girls. The girls are allowed to talk to the boys. And they can dance, touching each other. It is not a free-for-all. That's where I come in. I'm a balloon.

A white balloon to be more precise. Early in the history of dances at Our Lady a creative sister decided that a white balloon, inflated to proper size, was the perfect buffer between a boy and girl as they danced. Not only did a balloon separate the dancers but it made a clearly audible squeak when the young couple put too much pressure on it. The white color, besides being a constant reminder of

purity, stood out in the semi-dark of the gymnasium. The patrolling sisters could easily spot them, or the lack of them. White balloons, purchased by the case, thousands at a time, were a necessity at Our Lady.

At the beginning of each dance a small cadre of eager students would, one by one, carefully pick a balloon from the case. Each volunteer would stretch the balloon this way, and then that. They would put the business end against their lips and blow, as hard as they could. The balloon would grow, and grow, and grow until it exceeded the minimum size. There was, of course, a minimum size but no maximum. At Our Lady the bigger the balloon the better. After passing a sisterly inspection the balloon soldiers were dropped into a paper towel box; a corrugated cardboard staging area.

I was in that box earlier; one in an army of latex soldiers, ready to defend innocence and purity. I was buried, halfway down the box. I lived to serve, to do my duty. I waited.

I felt Sister Margaret's fingers grip my skin and pull me out of the box. I squeaked a little. Sister Margaret is not a gentle person. She is firmly in the service of The Lord. She handed me to a young man.

It was hard to tell much about the couple I had been drafted to protect. Almost instantly I was suspended between them, separating their torsos. She wore a blue cotton jumper. It wasn't much of a surprise; they all wore blue jumpers as freshmen. He wore a red sweater; wool but not too heavy, with brass buttons. Well, not real brass but they were supposed to look like brass.

"I like the ribbons in your hair," he said.

"Thank you," she said, "My big sister helped me with them."

"She did a good job."

If I could have I would have smiled.

"I picked out the color," she said.

"It's wonderful, matches your eyes."

I felt them put a bit more pressure on me. I felt them try and get closer. I fought it, but I squeaked just a little.

"Is this your first dance?" he asked.

"No, I danced with Billy Thompson before you."

I felt him stiffen, straightening his back.

"But I was hoping you would ask me."

He relaxed a little.

"And you are a much better dancer."

He all but fell down. Steady, young man.

"Thanks. My mom taught me," he said.

In another time and another place a balloon like me would have been tempted to make a snarky comment, to make fun of such a silly admission. I couldn't. Even though I was just taut latex and the restless breath of a junior high school girl I still had feelings. I couldn't help but sense their tender honesty.

"She did a wonderful job."

Placed where I was, just above the diaphragm on both their bodies I could feel every breath they took. In the very few minutes they had been dancing the respiration rate had increased. Had it not been for me they would be matching breath for breath.

"This is very nice," she continued.

"Really nice," he answered.

"You're really nice, too."

He sighed.

You understand that I have not been a defender of virtue for very long. I haven't been anything for long. I understand clearly and completely what my job is and I am fully prepared to do my duty. But I'm not so sure about my duty.

I am tucked against them, between them. Between them. I was between them. And that didn't feel right.

"Sometimes I watch you at lunch, and outside," he said.

"I know," she said. "I see you, watching me."

"I hope it doesn't creep you out."

"No, it's nice. It makes me feel...special."

"Well, you are, special."

I have no idea how she felt, but his heartfelt admiration made me want to smile. If I had lips I would have smiled. I could feel nothing wrong, nothing bad or dangerous, in their conversation, or in their bodies. Nothing at all.

"Sometimes," she said, "Don't you wish we went to public school?"

"Sometimes."

"Cause, you know, we're supposed to feel bad about this, and I don't."

"No," he said, "Me neither." His breathing went shallow for a second. "I actually really like it, dancing with you."

She didn't answer him, out loud. She answered by pulling him closer, and by squeezing me. I squeaked, loud and clear. My voice

rang out through the room. Involuntarily they pushed apart. They didn't separate, just pulled apart as far as their arms would let them. It was enough. Enough to let me slip and slide, just a bit. I was lower now, just above their waists. I could still feel their breathing, and something else. I could feel how much they wanted to be closer. They didn't push any harder, but there was a pressure; something basic and pure. Pure. That didn't fit. I was charged with protecting their purity, but I felt like I was doing the opposite.

"Stupid balloon," he said.

She just sighed in agreement.

I didn't feel stupid. I just felt in the way.

"I've been thinking about this for weeks, waiting for the chance to dance with you," he said. "Every day, all the time."

She stretched, she strained, and she managed to kiss his cheek.

I was the odd balloon out. I didn't belong where I was.

I could feel, rubbing against my underside, his belt. It was hard and stiff, and right in the middle was the buckle.

"I wish this balloon was gone," she said.

"Or that it would bust," he added.

We balloons have very few things we can do. We can drift in the breeze. We can stick to you if there's static electricity. We can bounce and fly across the room. And we can burst. We can, for a variety of reasons, suddenly and eternally empty ourselves of our air and, for all practical purposes, disappear. Bang. We are gone. We no longer take up space. It is one of the few things we can do. All we need is something hot, or sharp, to throw ourselves against.

And belt buckles are sharp.

**Last Bath**  
*Tia DeHaan*



## Reflection Eternal

Eric Steffen

“Those were the good old days, the good old days...,” Gérard soliloquized in a melancholic voice after dwelling on the black and white photos his father had stored in a wooden box in the far corner of their decayed attic. It struck Gérard that he had not noticed it before but the lid must have gradually accumulated enough dust to conceal the notation “Family photos.” His father used to be a passionate photographer for the renowned science magazine *Science et vie* at the time, travelling all around the world, exploring and capturing all kinds of significant natural phenomenon and geographical locations. Every time his dad went on an adventurous trip across the globe, Gérard and his mother would always eagerly await his arrival at the Port-Royal metro station in the heart of the city. It was only a matter of time until he would inherit his dad’s passion for photography. Gérard can clearly recall his twelfth birthday when he was given his first camera, a Pentax K1000, a highly conceptualized camera that he would brag about to his classmates.” The good old days...,” he sighed in a joyful manner until he heard his mother’s troubled call from downstairs, abruptly awakening him from his sweet memories.

“Gérard, would you come downstairs? I have no clue what this man here at the door is talking about.”

“Oh no, here we go...,” he mumbled in a belied way as if he was still hoping for a miracle to happen.

As he slowly got up on his feet, he made his way to the tiny triangular attic window. The thick mist that rested upon the city for several days made it hard for him to look further than the surrounding building blocks. In the far distance, only the peak of the Eiffel Tower burst through the white layer. Gérard hesitatingly peered down at the bottom of the apartment building, spotting a couple of “Jacque’s Cleaning Company” workers unloading their material out of the big white van that was placed in the restricted parking area.

“Gérard, did you hear what I said?” his mom catching him while he was still observing the workers’ motions.

“This so-called landlord down there passed me this form I am supposed to sign, but I do not know what he wants from us, nor did I ever see him before. Also, you still have not told me why you are clearing the entire house, are we moving out?” she asked in a puzzled state of mind.

"No need to worry, I will take care of the formalities. Yes, we are indeed moving out. Let me just grab this last box and store it in the trailer. I'll explain everything to you later, again. By the way, you might be interested in what I have just found up here", Gérard replied to his mom as he put their family photos and the undeveloped film canisters back into the wooden box.

"Bonjour Monsieur Lecomte, I hope you have removed all your furniture and other belongings from the flat by now," the landowner inquired strictly. Gérard consented by nodding his head unobtrusively, his mom standing next to him in disbelief.

"Fine. I will re-read the policies to you just to make sure we are all on the same page: According to Bylaw 4.8.3, if a tenant fails to comply with the rental agreement...."

"I know," Gérard gave in reluctantly, like a brave soldier who just could not resist the obtruding countervailing force, "let me sign the consent sheet," as there was not much of a choice.

"Thank you for your understanding Mr. Lecomte. These types of situations are not easy for me either, but following certain policies is just part of the business I run. Nonetheless, I wish you and Madame Bouillon all the best. Have a good day," the landlord concluded before striding up to their flat.

Gérard walked down the stairs one last time, carrying his precious memories under his right arm while the cleaning workers rushed inside the building to restore the rundown place before the next lodgers were moving in. One last glimpse at his birth house made him give in to the excruciating pain he felt deep inside as he could no longer hold back the tears.

"Gerry, please do not cry. I hate to see unhappy people. Everything is going to be alright," Madame Bouillon unknowingly asserted whilst embracing her son.

"If you only knew, if you only knew....," Gérard sighed in dismay.

Both drove off, the red backlights of his Peugeot 306 slowly becoming nebulous until they vanished completely in the dense fog.

Never could Gérard have imagined that he would once spend the rest of his life in a narrow ticket window in the vast sea of subway stations in Paris. At least, he was quite lucky under the circumstances of abandoning his high school, since soon after he was offered a low-paying job at the same metro station that had sponsored his dad's



past expeditions, a business concept looking to boost their small number of passengers, although their efforts barely bore fruit. Although very reluctant to this option, even his mother approved of this temporary solution as she was desperately hoping for the job to take Gérard's disillusioned mind off things.

However, he struggled enormously to focus during his tryout period as he was persistently accompanied by the thought of encountering his dad again, at the same spot he and his mom were always waiting at when he was a kid. The odds were constantly growing smaller and smaller from day to day, just like his once so prevailing anxiety.

"Would you take over for a second? I'll be right back," he inquired hastily as he pulled a pair of pictures out of his drawer.

"Is it that time again?" Marie responded irritated. "Sure, but hurry up. The next train is coming in very soon."

"How soon?"

"Two minutes to be precise!"

"You got it."

Gérard stepped out through the rear the door of his ticket window and rushed over to the salient advertising pillar in the middle of the platform. Although located near the centre of Paris, Port-Royal subway station was considerably idle compared to the surrounding stations, for whatever reason. The once so plain white walls were blotched with colorful caricatures, offensive gang phrases, encouraging quotes. The constant irregular flickering of the lights above the waiting area would dislodge passengers from their seats. For Gérard however, they had a soothing effect on his mood, just like the calm sound of the ventilation system fading away in the gloomy rail tunnels.

Right after he stored the old pictures in his back pocket, he carefully pushed the drawing pins through the top corners of the black-white pictures, hanging them amongst the brightly colored mosaic of advertisements in the middle of the station.

A loud gong echoed in the station, followed by a soft voice, Marie's voice.

"Dear passengers, Line 4 in the direction of Châtelet is now coming in, please mind the gap. Train number 4 is coming in," bringing her brief announcement to an end. On his way back behind the cracked screen window, he notices the jarring shrieks of the brakes.

"You really must have archives full of these, seems like you never run low on them," Marie uttered inquisitively while Gérard stored them in the drawer alongside the photographs that had already fulfilled their duties earlier.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Sure, what is it"

Port-Royal was brought to life again. Loud, unintelligible voices roared through the packed hallways; businessmen, ordinary people, students got off the train quickly so as to make it to their commitment on time. This overpowering upheaval always reminded Gérard of an anthill, exasperated through an exterior force nobody could influence. Separated from the masses, he felt quite at ease behind his barrier, sometimes attempting to discern what went on in people's heads based on their facial expressions when examining his, their family photos on the advertising pillar.

Marie blew the gong.

"Line 4 is ready for departure. Please mind the gap!" her sweet voice echoed in the subway station. Shortly after, the anthill quieted down once more.

"What exactly is it that urges you to do that?" she asked once both had a couple of minutes off.

"The pictures?"

"Yeah. Shouldn't you keep them in a safe place?"

"Maybe you are right," Gérard replied thoughtfully, "but maybe I am right."

"It's not about who's right or who's not right. Why, what's the purpose behind it?" Marie kept on demanding.

"I don't know... I feel like his work should be honored and admired by the people these days. His work should be kept..." he ceased suddenly.

"Alive?" bursting unexpectedly out his colleague's mouth, freezing the blood in his veins. Gérard frowned at her, staring her right in the eyes. Marie instantly turned beet-red, noticing that she had just used the most inappropriate word.

"Just to be clear" he whispered while slowly facing away from Marie to pile the tickets up in stacks of ten, "up to this day, nobody knows what happened during his last expedition... the case has not been solved, so please never use that word again." he responded, slightly raising his tone in the end.

"I am sorry," feeling remorse for what she just asked.

For years now, Gérard had stubbornly refused to acknowledge his dad's disappearance and the fact that he might never be able to welcome him again at Port-Royal, although a small but bright glimmer of hope deep inside still made him pin the photos in the middle of the metro station, hoping to be able to identify his father within the wild anthill one day.

"I didn't mean to be rude or anything, I just wanted..." the words coming out of her mouth bit by bit.

"You are fine" Gérard responded in a recollected manner, "How can you know? How can anybody now?" he said, lightly hiking his shoulders.

Both resumed their work in awkward silence, Gérard piling the tickets in his unchangeable, modest manner whilst Mary got back to going over the departure timetable.

Her room was located on the very end of the hallway, far away from the aisles that were a little busier than hers. When Gérard was asked to fill in Madame Bouillon's registration form, Doctor Dupont was adamant that she should be accommodated in a calm room, as it was supposed to have a soothing effect on her being, even if the costs were a little higher. Gérard approved without any further hesitation, having had no regrets as he caught a glimpse from the fifth floor down at the idyllic garden and the pond that surrounded the institution. The murky days were finally over, beneath him was a juicy green meadow with sprouting blooms, the bright sun rays pierced through the semi-open blinds, a mild late-autumn breeze swept across the balcony into her bedroom.

"After all, this might be a better place for you." he concluded reasonably, facing his mother who looked up to her son, pointing at the picture she was holding in her hand.

"This a really nice photo you have brought me...have I ever told you the story of how your dad proposed to me during our stay on the Côte d'Azur?" Madame Bouillon joyfully smiling at her son when Doctor Dupont suddenly made his way inside her room to reveal the lately acquired results of her state.

"Bonjour Madame Bouillon, Mr. Lecomte, good to see you again," Dupont said in a deep voice, pressing both of their hands quite intensely.

"We have come up with a few new insights on Madame's mental condition. Would you please accompany me to my office? You might want to remain here for a minute, we will be right back," addressing his mother.

"Certainly." Gérard replied, as he left his newly developed photos on the dresser for her to examine.

"Please have a seat," Dr. Dupont assigned while dropping the file onto his desk, "I am not the type of doc that beats around the bush, so this might come across a little harsh..." taking another deep breath before continuing his speech, "...but Madame's disease has developed up to a point where our pharmaceutical treatment can longer inhibit her cerebral cell death. My team and I are still in the process of conceptualizing a new psychological intervention, but that process might drag on indefinitely," he concluded, lowering his tone. Gérard kept his composure, to his own surprise. Although he had constantly been accompanied by an unconscious sense of foreboding, he did not know what to say and just remained silent for a couple of seconds, until Dr. Dupont's beeper resounded.

"Dr. Dupont, you are required to assist Dr. Fellonie for Monsieur Cassidy's treatment on the fourth floor, he is showing first symptoms of uneasiness again," a shrill and unintelligible voice assigned.

"Please excuse me," putting on his white kittle while he was getting up in a hurry, "my assistance is needed. We will continue in a bit. If you do not mind, you can go back to Madame's room and I will pick you up later on." Dr. Dupont suggested while leading him out of his office.

So he did what he was assigned to, finding his mother still in the same spot, eagerly dwelling upon the pictures that were scattered over the table.

"You are back again? Now that was a brief talk between you and Dr. Dupont," she claimed quite astonished.

"We were interrupted; he will get back to me later on..." Gérard responded with a downcast air.

"Oh. Okay, I guess we can then look at some of your father's pictures. By the way, have I not told you the story about how he proposed to me during our holidays on the Côte d'Azur?" she unknowingly asked with the exact same excitement as the first time.

Gérard, not wanting to spoil her pleasure, decided to lie although very reluctant to it.

"No mum, you have not. Please let me hear it." he answered wistfully as he observed the sun go down steadily.

He thoroughly missed Marie's absence in the metro station. Not only because he barely managed to carry out two different posts simultaneously, but also because he realized that he had no one to share his thoughts and stories with. All the more relieved was Gérard when Marie returned to her old spot after spending two weeks with her aunt in the French Alps.

"I have never seen these before," she asked with the same old curiosity whilst Gérard buried the pair of photographs in the drawer in an unchangeable manner, "The Acropolis? Where did you get them from?"

"Well, you know, he did not get to develop them, so I had the chance to do so," he responded with a light smile on his face.

The last train of the day came in at Port-Royal, putting an abrupt end to their conversation. The mass of people did not seem quite as intense and wild as in the mornings as most of the passengers made a weary and exhausted impression on Gérard, but still relieved enough to leave a hard day of work behind them. As usual, all of them walked by the advertisement column following the exit signs up to twilight, except for some that caught a glimpse of the advertising events and sales clipped on the pillar.

"Would you mind if we went over to the Café des 2 Moulins one day? I would most definitely like to see his collection," Marie asked politely with a broad smile on her face as she looked Gérard in his eyes.

"I mean, yes, I would be glad to," Gérard consented, showing again first signs of joy after all the grievances he had gone through.

"Perfect, tomorrow at 2?" she continued while both packed together before the metro-station was going to be locked.

Rather than uttering odd things, he just nodded his approval, not trying to reveal his internal excitement. It has been a while since Gérard last dealt with a female person away from his work. He was not the type of guy that would take the initiative arbitrarily, so much the better that Marie made the first step, he thought.

"I am looking forward to it," her eyes slowly moving to the empty center of the station, observing a rather tall man studying his father's photographs in depth.

“Seems like someone’s really interested in them,” gesticulating towards the man who looked like a typical businessman, wearing a long black coat, shiny shoes, a black hat and a grey briefcase right next to him. Gérard caught up, immediately moving his sight in the direction of the advertisement column.

“Is this not what you have been waiting for so long?” addressing him directly, “Why don’t you go over and chat with him, he does not seem to be in a rush. I will be waiting for you upstairs.” Marie grinned as she went off.

Although his memories of his father’s appearance did not match the man’s look at all, he still rushed over, mostly because nobody had ever examined them as carefully as he did. Gérard slowly made his way over to the center of the station, as his mind was not yet ready for this unannounced confrontation. When he was close enough to approach the old sir, the latter looked up to him.

“Oh, excuse me. I will leave right away so you can close the station,” he expressed himself hectically as he picked up his briefcase from the ground.

“I find these photographs quite interesting. The motives and the format remind me strongly of some old friend’s pictures... Do you know who attached them here?” he asked curiously.

Astonished by monsieur’s unexpected statement, Gérard took some seconds before he managed to gather himself together.

“You said you knew my father?” he asked in strong disbelief.

“Excuse me? Did you put them up here?” answering the question with a question.

“I did. I found these at home by chance...every two weeks I am attaching a different pair of his photographs.”

“Oh at home you said...” Monsieur pondering with a little frown on his face, “so is there chance that you are related to Laurent Lecomte?”

“Yes, I am. I am his son, Gérard Lecomte,” were the only words that came out of his mouth whereupon Monsieur reached for his hand.

“What a coincidence! I am pleased to meet you. My name is Christophe Besson, I used to work very closely with Laurent at the time, in fact I was one of the editors of *Science et vie* before it was shut down in 1989!” Christophe claimed passionately and nostalgically at the same time.

"So..., you knew him well?" Gérard inquired hopefully, as it was the first time after 16 years that he was on to something.

"Indeed, I did know him very well. After all I was one that was most familiar with his work. I still remember him very clearly, he was so passionate about his job. It's a shame that..." he all of a sudden ceased to speak, not trying to dig too deep into the past, "Anyway, why do you pin such wonderful photographs amongst these poor ads? "Well, I was hoping for the people to recognize them and to admire them, I would say. But you are the first person that did not just run by," Gérard replied modestly.

"Hmm, I see. Look why don't you stop at my office tomorrow at around 6.30? I have got to make a suggestion to you about how we could expose his work a little stronger, if you do not mind. I am busy tonight, so I'll just give you my contact details." Christophe proposed eagerly.

*Centre "La Recherche", Rue de l'Aqueduc, 75010, Paris.*

"It would be a pleasure for me," Gérard answered highly delighted before Monsieur Besson walked up the stairs right into the brightly colored orange-red twilight.

In a calm and serene state of mind, he sat outside on the balcony, enjoying every sip of his green tea with great relish. The brisk shower put an end to the oppressive hot and humid late summer weather that rested upon the city for two and a half weeks now. Crisp puffs of wind made Gérard drink his cup of tea faster than usual, which however did not throw him off. Right next to the cup lay the renowned *La Recherche* magazine, issue 143. He could not resist the temptation and re-opened it on page 25, not just one random page, but *Besson's monthly column*. A broad smile came upon his face when he saw his father standing at the top of the Great Wall, or in front of the Kremlin, or at the historic sanctuary of Machu Picchu. All absorbed in his thoughts, Dr. Dupont entered the room, waking Gérard from his sweet memories.

"Those were the good old days, the good old days..." he concluded joyfully as he shut the magazine.

**Muvattupuzha**  
*Justin Cooke*

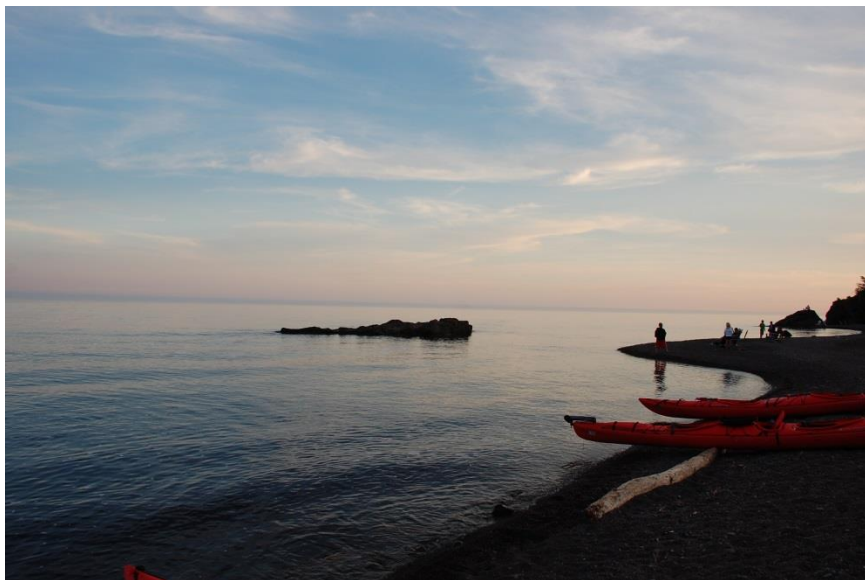




## Destiny

*Matthew Leitner*

It was a good movie  
one of those classic romantic  
tales of a prince and a princess.  
True love, of course, conquered all.  
As we lay there though,  
all I could think about was  
how much I wanted to  
slowly, gently reach out my hand  
to hers. Grasp for her fingers  
and intertwine. Then she would grow  
bold, confident in her emotions,  
so she nestles her head on my chest.  
She can hear my heart beating.  
I can feel her smile.  
My arm wraps around her; the world  
couldn't harm her if it tried.  
She reaches back and tugs  
my arm, pulling it closer.  
I can feel her breathing.  
We're both calm on the outside,  
but inside we're shouting out loud.  
My heart races, and she knows why.  
Turning towards me she places  
her hand softly on my chest.  
We stare – for eternity.  
Then finally close our eyes,  
as our lips meet for the first time.  
I really wish that would've happened.  
But honestly, it was a good movie.



## **Water**

*Mariah Maras*

All the water I used to get me through my day took time:

Wake up and flush the toilet.  
Take a shower and brush my teeth.  
Pour water into my coffee maker and  
have some coffee to wake my mind.  
Drink a glass of water to hydrate.  
Eat breakfast and wash my dishes.  
Go to the bathroom again.  
Wash my hands before I go to school  
then arrive home  
after drinking water at the fountain  
at school.  
Hand-wash some of my clothes  
because I don't have time  
or a car to go to the laundromat.  
Wash vegetables and fruit for dinner.  
Wash the dishes I used for my dinner.  
Drink more water to stay hydrated.  
Boil water for my evening tea.  
Get ready for bed and brush my teeth,  
wash my face,  
flush the toilet  
and wash my hands.

And those who don't have water spent half their day getting the water  
that seemed to get me through my day.

## Circadian Torture

Alayna Stein

*"We are the reckless  
we are the wild youth,  
chasing visions of our futures.  
One day we'll reveal the truth,  
but one will die before he gets there."  
- Daughter, Youth*

The world smells like coffee in the morning  
and he tells me he'll buy me mountains  
where the trees will be draped with a green  
that's not just a label on a whole food's bag,  
where we'd be just as lost if it wasn't our driveway.

The mist haunts our lake at dawn  
and the birds sound happy to wake beside one another.  
But we're looking through windows  
that are made to show what's out there –  
but not what's inside, and all we can do  
is share a tired smile  
because we're really not the inside kind of people.

The trees stand tall and hover over us at night  
with the moon peering between them  
streaming through the lifeless windows  
and he tells me he'll buy me mountains  
and runs his hands through my hair.

The sun grips its set, dreading the fall into evening  
holding longing arms to us.  
Our chests break as we reach  
and heave through helpless lungs.  
Hand in hand, we implore  
the mountain veil.

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We were younger when  
we sat dreaming in our backyards  
with our arms outstretched behind our backs.

I was lost in search for the perfect finish line.  
Our hands had hardly touched when  
he found me and told me  
he'd buy me mountains.

## Perpetual Cursor

*Mikka Nyarko*

Blink-blink, just watching that cursor blink on a brand new fresh white page is compelling. Inviting you to type one letter, one story, something, anything; just start on your journey. But where do I begin? You ask it. Who knows with the usual dreadful essay that is due in only hours, you start to weep as the cursor blinks to the beat of each second of time passing, wasting away into the abyss never to return to you again.

Blink-blink...it's waiting...blink-blink...just stop staring...blink-blink... fingers are poised above the keys, back is slightly reclined and the cursor takes the blinking action right from your eyes as they water and swell. Surrender to the cursor. Be the cursor. Cover the emptiness until it is black with metaphors and double meanings. Are they deep? Are they concise? Are they even your own? Who knows but only that the blinking stops with every fluid finger pounding motion on the fresh white page. On the brand new fresh white page where the cursor is your focus as it goes forever in eternity: blink-blink.

## **This is an Open Letter**

*David M. Briggs*

I'd like to take a moment  
and talk to all the students  
with disabilities that you can't see  
or issues you don't want to talk about  
or problems no one else thinks are real.

You might have noticed that  
this isn't working out

Maybe you aren't getting it  
as easy as you should  
like no matter how hard you studied  
suddenly everything flies  
out the window once you stare  
down that regiment of bubbles that  
you have to fill out  
exactly right or you won't pass

Or you can't even get out of bed and go to class.  
Or you can't start your papers and can't even ask  
your professor for help or  
an extension because you're  
so damn scared  
of letting them down.

And you don't even know  
why you bother anymore  
and nobody expects you  
to succeed anymore  
and you can't do anything right  
and you're practically worthless  
well I need you to

Stop  
Right  
There

and listen

to what I am about to say.

None of this is your fault.

See, the thing is that school  
wasn't exactly designed  
with people like you  
and me in mind.

We've got problems.  
Not laziness, not attitude  
but honest-to-God  
medical problems.

And that doesn't make you  
a slacker or an idiot  
or your head up your ass

And it doesn't make you  
a freak or the r-word  
and it sure as hell  
doesn't make you worthless

And if you think that you are worthless  
because someone has told you, "You are worthless"  
well let me tell you something about that person  
that you should keep in mind:

They are an asshole.

I guarantee it,  
and the way I see it,  
that completely invalidates their opinion.

And I know it's so hard  
to tune out the voices  
coming from all sides,  
and maybe you can't.  
And that's only natural.



But right now  
you need to care for yourself.

So here's what you do.

Step One:  
Stop blaming yourself.  
Because these problems  
are not your fault  
and if anyone has  
their own problem with that  
don't you dare listen to them.

Step Two:  
Look for help.  
There are systems in place  
to let people like us succeed  
to open up doors that slam in our face.  
Let someone know. Find what you need.

Step Three, and this is the hardest part:  
Live your goddamn life  
and live it for you.

And I know it's a challenge.  
I know because I've been down that road  
and I stood in the middle of it  
and waited for traffic to take me away

But if you can -  
and I hope and I pray  
and I know that eventually you can -  
it will have made all of this worth it.

And that's what I have to say.

I love you.  
We all love you so much.  
Let's kick some ass.



## THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**SPENCER ANHALT** is studying English Education at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. He hopes to teach high school English when he completes his undergraduate schooling. Also an avid writer of poetry, Spencer has hopes to be published sometime in the future. Spencer is a house cat who, in his spare time, enjoys watching movies and drinking lattes or Red Bull; he is constantly searching for new music and people to share it with.

**DAVID M. BRIGGS** As a frequent contributor and former editor of *The Catalyst*, he hopes he has made as much of a mark on the publication as it has made on him. His poem was originally conceived for Awareness Through Performance, as sort of a summations of the things he has learned in college and about himself and his own mental illnesses. In writing, performing, and publishing this, he hopes it makes it stay with the people who hear and read it. These are the things he wishes someone had told him back when he started school. For what it's worth, dear reader, he believes in you.

**SABRINA BRUEHLING** is a second degree student at UWL. Even with all her paintings around the house staring her in the face, she didn't realize what she wanted to do until she finished her first degree in Biology at Viterbo University. Finally, she's majoring in Art and Philosophy and cannot wait to keep learning as a student and growing as an individual. *The Wind* is an acrylic painting she completed during a painting class this semester in response to an anonymous poem about a sailor controlling their destiny by the set of their sails and not the wind.

**JUSTIN COOKE** graduates this semester from UW-L with a BA in Theater Performance, Music Performance, and Arts Administration. He has been involved in numerous UWL Theater Productions, productions around the La Crosse Community, and has been a member of various music ensembles on campus. He was also a student organizer for the Creative Imperatives festival held on campus this semester. With help and support from his partner Eric, the UW-L Theater Department, and the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Committee, Justin has traveled to London researching contemporary children's theater and to India with Eric where together they researched ancient Indian dance drama, where his photo *Muvattupuzha* was taken. This is Justin's first photographic and creative writing publication.

**ANDY DAVIS** was born a long time ago in the black dirt country of central Illinois. After wandering in the wilderness of the Upper Midwest he ended up near La Crosse where he has a family, a day job, and responsibilities. He also attends an occasional college class, writes, and publishes under a variety of aliases.

**TIA DEHAAN** says, "Summer 2013; Volunteering in Ghana, Africa. My greatest adventure, my greatest challenge. This trip profoundly impacted my life and left a permanent fingerprint on my heart and soul. I encountered this ten year old boy while on a tour of an old slave fort - slaves here were allowed to have their 'last baths' before being executed or sold. He was awaiting my departure, so he

could bathe in a river, which also served as his faucet and toilet. I believe every moment we are impacting those around us, and I am thankful I had the chance to connect with this child.”

**ABBY HEGLAND** is a junior at UW-L studying Elementary Education and Spanish.

**SARAH KAUN** is a senior at UW-L and is continuing to Winona State this fall for School Counseling. Before coming to La Crosse, Sarah lived in various small towns throughout Wisconsin and Minnesota. She loves drawing, museums, movies, reading, her dog, and spending time with her fiancé and her family. She loves to devour what she can about odd subjects and people, most recently Judy Garland. Judy’s short story is a reflection of Sarah’s experience with her best friend who has battled addiction and who has left a mark on her life.

**MICHAEL KNAPIK** grew up in Huntington, New York and still maintains at least a little bit of long islander in him. In the last three years of his college career, he has devoted his efforts to studying photography originally as a hobby but now is a minor at La Crosse. Photography has been a passion of his for some time and it continues to inspire him to do better. What has heavily influenced his artistic side is his love of music. Heavy metal, rock, and blues are major sources of inspiration for him, especially when playing them on the guitar.

**MATTHEW LEITNER** is a sophomore at UW-L majoring in English Rhetoric and Writing. His dream job is to become a screenwriter, but he writes poetry and short stories as practice and just in order to never stop writing. One of his goals is to get published multiple times before he graduates. He has been a viewpoint reporter for *The Racquet* and a radio host for RAQ Radio. His poem “Destiny” is a humorous piece on what a lot of guys go through in their minds when they’re with a girl they like, but don’t know how they should make the move. It’s a combination of the overdramatic style of old romantic poems with a modern, realist twist at the end.

**MARIAH MARAS** is a senior at UW-L and is double majoring in Philosophy and English Rhetoric and Writing.

**MIKKA NYARKO** is a freshman planning on majoring in the field of Biology and minoring in Spanish. Even though the sciences have always been an area of focus for her studies, the fine arts have always been a great love of hers. Poetry, drawing, and instrumentation is what she partakes in. She thinks it’s important to have many ways of finding an escape from surroundings every once in a while. Her short story “The Perpetual Cursor” was something that she wrote literally at a time when she had pages of essays to complete in a short time, and she decided to relax her mind with writing something entertaining.

**JOE REUSS** is a third-year student at UW-L from Waukesha, Wisconsin. His major is English Literature and his minor is Stage Management. He hopes to pursue a graduate degree in English Literature and would like to thank his friends and family for all their love and support. His favorite book is *The God of*

*Small Things* by Arundhati Roy and he thinks getting caught in the rain is a great way to mess up one's hair.

**JILLISSA REUTLELER** is in the Therapeutic Recreation program at UW-L. She enjoys working with many types of art, such as photography, poetry, and painting, and she plays the djembe for a local church.

**SAM SLATER** was born and ruckussed in Madison, WI. He had a dog once.

**MITCHELL SPOERL** is a third year English major at UW-L. His piece "a good woman is like a good whiskey" was inspired by the works of Charles Bukowski.

**ERIC STEFFEN** is a 21-year-old transfer student from Luxembourg (University of Luxembourg). This is his first year in the US. He is an English Literature major and a French Literature minor. Besides his studies, he was also a part of the UW-L basketball team. "Reflection Eternal" is his first short story.

**ALAYNA STEIN** is in her second year at UW-L studying English and Psychology. She has been writing poetry for a long time, but only this semester discovered a voice that engages her interest in creative visual representations of her dreams and fears.

**WHITNEY STORVICK** is from Waseca, MN. She is currently in her second semester at UW-L and is majoring in Psychology.

**LIU YANDAN** is a senior Chinese student studying at UW-L. She comes from Guilin, which is a tourist city in the south of China. She is majoring in English Rhetoric and Writing, minoring in Professional Writing. Outside of school, she likes traveling and experiencing different cultures. This is her first publication.

