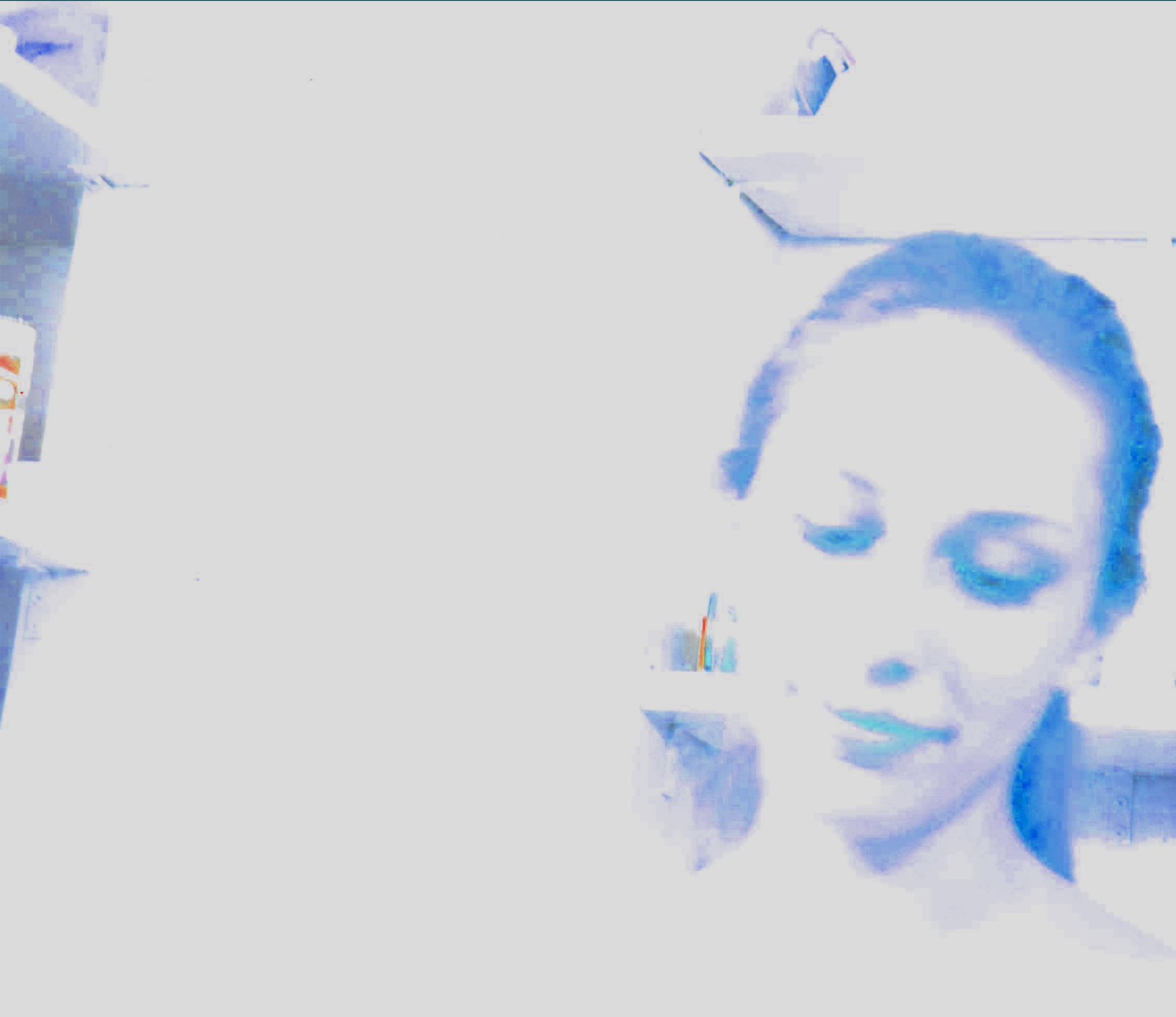


The Catalyst



Volume 12

Spring 2015

“WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?”

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Volume 12 – Spring 2015

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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 SEMESTERS THEME:

It has been 12 semesters since *The Catalyst* was taken up by the UW-L English Club. This semester's theme asks the creative minds of UW-L to look at themselves as individuals, and tap into what makes them hold back. College is about finding yourself and figuring out the rest of your life. At *The Catalyst*, we want to help 'speed up the process', so to speak, and ask you, "What are you waiting for?"

- The Editors

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Black Lamb

Sylvia Neumann

It is the mother who suffers most
At a daughter's abandoned innocence
Smoke in her eyes and fire on her tongue
She learns again to smile
With the ocean in her throat
Watches her lily drift away in the rippling wake
Waver her away, father sees
Braids and a lunchbox
Wedded or no
The golden thread has been snipped
Child of laughter
And he, eternally
Lost in a whirlwind of sunlit memories
Rain strums the harp
Cannot tears of happiness pool silver?
Mere ghosts of misery
Slide silently by when one discovers
After much suppressed sorrow
They are the black lamb
I plead to you mother
If I did not love the melodic song of youth
Your hands tremble, you knit with care
A shimmering scarf dappled in sunlight
My precious thread
Oh, I could not have cut it then!
I would never watch the moon
Nine steps into the silver sea
He would have your emerald eyes
But it shan't be so
Till I sheath my dutiful dagger
Red from the throat of the lamb

The Puppy Dilemma

Dani Weber

At the pet shop, I can't stop staring into the puppy's eyes. Those eyes shout things at me, like "Take me home!" and "I'll love you forever!" and "Why are you such a dick?!" It's the last question that causes me to look away. I feel the puppy's eyes still on me as I walk toward the door, my face the prettiest shade of pink. This was the stupidest idea I've ever had. I walk to my car. An hour ago it had seemed like the best, most obvious idea in the world: tell Amy I kissed her sister then give Amy an adorable puppy. Amy loves puppies, so she'll forget all about the kiss. A foolproof plan if there ever was one.

Now I know that nothing will lessen the blow when I finally have to admit to my total dick-ness. And my excuses are the most cliché excuses on the planet: I didn't mean to get that drunk, she came onto me, it didn't mean anything. They are all true, but that won't stop me from getting dumped. I know what will happen.

Amy won't listen to a word I say. Then I'll drive back to my apartment, alone and ashamed. I will call Amy to apologize and to explain myself further, and I will hear her answering machine over and over, until I can talk along with it: "Hi this is Amy. Sorry I can't come to the phone right now, but I'll call you back if you leave a message after the beep."

I will leave twenty-two messages after twenty-two beeps. She won't call back. Not until it's time for me to pick up my stuff from her apartment. Although even then, she may just have a friend text me saying, "Your stuff is in a box outside Amy's door. Hope you can pick it up before it gets stolen, dickwad." Or worse, maybe she will have the

box delivered to me by her new boyfriend, Jeff Something. Jeff Something is hotter, smarter, and has a bigger penis than me. He also just finished vet school, so at least the puppy will be in good hands.

But I'm not getting her a puppy, I remind myself in the pet store's parking lot. The best case scenario would be that she dumps me, dates Jeff Something, and the puppy lives a happy, healthy life until it passes away in its sleep. Amy and Jeff Something will have to explain to their kids why their family pet is being sent to a special farm, and Amy will remember that I gave her the puppy that her family loved so much. She will regret dumping me, make plans to buy a new puppy, and continue to make love to Jeff Something.

The worst case scenario would be that she dumps me, names the puppy after me, and then has the puppy neutered so that she can watch my namesake lose his balls. She'll then give the puppy to her sister and say, "Now you can live with him too." She'll still meet Jeff Something, and I'll be the dick who she never talks about who kissed the sister she never talks to.

Or...I could buy the puppy, get dumped by Amy, and then keep the puppy so that I'll feel less lonely as I call Amy's voicemail twenty-two times. I could name the puppy Jeff, and I will definitely have a larger penis than him.

I arrive at Amy's apartment with a golden retriever puppy in my passenger seat. "Stay Jeff," I say as I get out. "I'll be back soon." Jeff responds by chewing on my steering wheel cover. I walk up to the

apartment building. I ask Amy to buzz me in at the door, but a male voice answers over the intercom.

“Hey who is this?” he asks.

“It’s Amy’s boyfriend. Who are you?”

“I’m the guy who didn’t make out with her sister last night.”

“Oh. So she saw that.”

“Everyone at the party saw that. She doesn’t want to see you.”

Neither of us say anything for a minute.

“Do you still want to come up?”

“I guess not...Could you just tell her to call me?”

“I’ll tell her.”

I can hear Amy yell in the background, “Fat chance, dick-head!”

“But she’s probably not going to call,” he says.

“I figured. What’s your name, by the way?”

“Joey.”

“Okay. Have a good night, Joey.”

“You too, dude.”

I walk back to my car to find the front seat is covered in pee, so I make the puppy ride in the back seat on my way home. “That could have gone worse,” I say conversationally. “His name could have been Clint or something.” Joey doesn’t respond except to pee in the backseat. I spend all night cleaning out my car and buying pet supplies. I don’t call Amy once, and Joey turns out to be a girl puppy. Jenny licks peanut butter off my fingers, chases her tail, listens to everything I have to say, and doesn’t call me a dick. It really could have gone worse. Jenny poops in the corner of my living room.

Embrace

Jessica Fanshaw

His lips press into my forehead
As his arms hold my body
In a close embrace
His nose nestles in my hair
 After a time
His lips leave and are replaced
By his chin
I fit so perfectly here
It's practically a sin
 We breathe as one
 Deep and steady
I listen to the beat of his heart
We're more than friends
But less than lovers
He leaves one hand
On the small of my back
The other comes to
Gently caress my head
His fingers getting lost in my hair
 I'm going to miss him
 When I leave.



Winter and Cactus

Mikaela Kornowski

Cactus does not like to watch me shovel winter.
She blinks her pink flower out the window and sighs.
She extends her pricklers, sometimes she frowns.
The furnace is up, she says, the sun is down.
The wind is out and everyone else is roosting indoors.
But Cactus, I say. Winter! The test of hardship!
The drudgery, the exertion, the pulsating body aches
that heal and reappear and build into perseverance or discipline

Winter? says Cactus. I saw one in a movie once, and it was enough.
Come inside.

from infancy to clarency; womb to tomb

Rhiannon Fisher

but, truthfully, we are never without home, in the larger scheme of things. and, perhaps the definition of home changes within each indefinite moment; within the consciousness of our own dilemmas, our own surroundings, our own individual definition cloaked behind each word.

i erupt in the light of day, tuning slowly through each complete home freebase station. i fold to good graces, a sucker for elegant words; beautiful familiarity seeps like sludge through distraught corneas. it bores me. this city is my wreckage...idle hands. infancy to clarency; womb to tomb, born into belligerence. i seek the life most loath because of dystrophied diagnoses. i am the impoverished monkey dining at the wheel of fortune; i perpetuate the umbilical cord of dominance; days stacked like pancakes before an overstuffed belly. releasing the resurrection of my treetop, star-spattered, freedom fall to beggar's chance; in simplicity's hands; within God's fan club incubator. my home is where i am as free as possible from the nonsensical malignant tumor of society's lasting imprint. hard to conquer freedom in lawful territory; when the culture is monitoring whether or not i went to confession. my life is plagiarized from different sources, and i hope that the instances i take from ideas constantly morph magnificent; welding together and breaking apart in different ways to keep my everchanging mind the epitome of chaos. ideas rejecting one another; combining and creating wisdom within my home base, attic space continuum. home... i wonder if i'll ever find it in this life. i staged Hope as lead in this play; backed by Integrity's willpower. we aren't taught to fend for ourselves in the wilderness...we are taught literature, writing and mathematics instead. we are taught to fear what we don't know, what we do know, and what we have no experience with. language keeps us in awe at the threshold of the television screen or the mall doors. home in this society is any shopping mall or convenience center. whoever dies with the most shit wins, right? without Things we become nothing (according to this mentality). dirty is bad; although, science has found a bacteria in dirt that helps depression and increases learning behavior. nature is our refuge and cities our slums.

let us choose in which way we define "home"...without force or persuasion. the future is coming...and i stand before it, arms spread and eyes peeled. ready to embrace catastrophe.

horizon's sunrise address slips west
continuous exertion
lavender cast-away
drip, slip, fade



It was a calm sort of chaos.

There was a crowd of slow swimming goldfish in an aquarium resting
at the end of a hallway of

fish supplies-ceramic translucent pastel blue pebbles, water filters,
and plastic plant life.

The girl waited for me to decide which fish I wanted to bring home
with a look of confusion, “ Mostly we use them as food for other
fish” she said.

I poured him, and his world, into a pitcher and gingerly carried him
with me all the way to the car realizing I might finally empathize
with the moon-who has no control over causing the currents in the
ocean.

I wonder if the moon cries for every organism lost in the selfish pull
of the riptide- the little boy in a black and white striped shirt
building a sand castle just a little too close to the wave break.



Photo of Mom and Dad at Cousin Tommy's Wedding

Mikaela Kornowski

Mom's never looked so fierce in a \$1.50 frame.
Little black charms on her choker necklace
dangle as tiny captives
between bare, striking shoulders.

Grey-brown hair
is heightened stylishly
like a crown on the experienced huntress,
her predatory skills polished with age.

Lipstick glossed on thick
in Revlon's ravenous red,
outlining her ivory teeth,
two canines sinking into the bottom lip.

Her collar bone juts out while she howls
up towards Dad's lunar face—
that round, plump, white as light head.

His two crescent cheeks
rising skyward, only slitty eyes peeking out.
The dark beads under droopy lids
avoid the camera's burst and screech.

I guess that's the way the moon
would look as it retreats from a fireball Nikon flash.
I guess that's the way anyone
would look at Uncle Dennis,
as his stocky body teeters after four rum and Cokes,
barely balancing to take a snapshot.

But that murky dress of Mom's—
her starless velvet cloak doesn't seem to mind
as it leans into Dad's inky loosened tie,
slowly stalking closer towards her midnight man.

She's waited long enough
to tango her male victim

into more shadowy corners of the dance floor
to re-spark the adrenaline of the chase,
to ignite new savagery into a carcass couple.

The God, The Drone, and The Dead

Rhiannon Fisher

i am the taste of joy slip serve to salty tears. i am a neverending wave to serenity's peak performance, shift back to low tide. i am the monster in your fitful sleep; the horizon stitched in dreams. i am both and all. i am the freefall student; the highest climax to thought. i am the social loner. i am the irreplicable rebel. the nonconformist void stereotypes. a muse if you so choose to use this potential; this mortal mind. i crave millenia's dissident arrival. i am patience's push forward. i am a life force; living as a hurricane contender. i will spark first and dwindle last. i am the lullaby; the static source of confusion. i am a million answers to every question. i am the question. i am the god, the drone and the dead. i orchestrate odd magnificence. i am not your scapegoat. i am not the depressed bloom during rain storms. i am the rolling thunder; the perpetuating breeze. the backyard symphony. the listener; observer. i am functioning curiosity. i am the whisper past the scream. the unknown--the never known. i am the configuration of change.

ancy.

ill prepared.

unfolding.

dredge on...

6

Molly Duggan

Long, slender fingers, tiny fingernails and
skin so pale the blue veins show through—
the hand which outstretches to pick the
ripened fruit.

Plush pink lips wrap around the skin
and teeth dig in; juices gush forth, and
a lamb is slaughtered in the garden.



Three Waters

Jennifer Glasgow

One summer, my family went on vacation
before my brother left for college.
We travelled to Canada to see the falls,
whose roaring waters mesmerized me
and made me feel so insignificant and small.

And it was so hot that day.
We baked inside our plastic ponchos
when we rode on the Maid of the Mist,
like potatoes in a roasting bag.

Then we went to Maine.
Where we ate lobsters, watched whales,
and my father flirted with hypothermia
in the coast's aquamarine undulations.
Not a shimmering pool of gemstones
could be more beautiful than that ocean.

And our last stop was Redbank, New Jersey,
to go swimming at the shore with my peculiar family,
whose oddness compared to the ocean that day.
Those slate gray, choppy waves paled in comparison
to the others many miles away in Maine.

There were disturbed winds floating through the air,
and the undertow tossed me as a giant would flick a fly away.
I remember thinking in that moment,
tossed and turned and disoriented,
how amazingly formidable the power of the ocean was.
It is so indifferent.
So unaware of its potential to harm
And I was so small, so easily spun like a leaf in a hurricane.
It was indescribable.
As if even my words are too small.

And when I surfaced from that water,
my lungs searing,
gasping, stunned,

I heard the voices.
“Where is Evan?”

When my dad brought my brother back,
he collapsed in the sand,
arms spread wide, heaving.
His body was decorated with large red streaks,
burns from the rope that saved his life.

Which he clung to as the mighty ocean,
in increments too quick for him to breathe,
forcefully washed over him,
unconcerned about the jetty of rocks
a few feet away.

And in a week or so after we returned home,
my aunt sent my mother an email.
A news article reporting the death
of a young man
who died swimming in that same water.
And I wondered if he too was taking a vacation before college
to commemorate the beginning
of the rest of his life.



7

Molly Duggan

You'll find an antique store
On the glass hill by the moon.
Whereupon a windowsill
rests an old silver spoon—

Stuffed rabbits in collared shirts
in polite conversation
holding teacups in the air
a Walter Potter creation.

Amongst these things antiquated
you'll find a little girl
brown tendrils clung to her cheek
in a dampened dainty curl—

Inside this tiny museum
She is emperor of delicacy
Encapsulating friend cicada
whose life she mourns empathetically

Dyspepsia
Samuel Fischer

The putrid yellow walls infuriated me. A lamp hanging above the end of the counter flickered on and off every time a train passed outside. A man in the corner mumbled to himself—he had been there since I arrived an hour ago. When I walked past him he smelled. I was on my third cup of coffee and had reached the point near the bottom of the mug where it had cooled down to a nauseating temperature. At this point my only ambition for finishing it was for the sake of finishing it. I don't even like coffee; it's bitter and at first it's too hot to drink. It burns your mouth and then by the time it's finally drinkable it's lost all of its appeal.

I drained the remaining coffee in one large gulp. The waitress who was behind the counter at which I was sitting asked if I wanted another one. I really didn't want one—I hadn't eaten anything since this morning and I could feel the acidic coffee reacting with my stomach. I said, "Sure."

When she poured it a few drops splashed out and onto the white linoleum counter top. She walked away as if she hadn't even noticed them. I sat and stared as the warm, dark pools expanded and slowly covered the cool, white space. As I watched, my mind began to return to moments of my youth. This diner reminded me of one I had visited as a child—I hated it then.

Steam was rising from the top of the freshly poured mug and as I brought my face closer I could feel the heat radiating off of it. I grasped the handle and one of my fingers touched the hot ceramic side. It burned but I couldn't react or otherwise I would risk spilling

the full cup. I had already brought past my chin and I didn't want to set it down for out of looking foolish.

I took a sip and the coffee seared the inside of my mouth. My reaction was to spit it out but I couldn't—not with that mumbling man sitting back in the corner. So I held it in my mouth for fear burning my throat. I could feel my tongue start to go numb and the roof of my mouth swell. My eyes were tearing up a little from the pain, and the putrid yellow walls along with the flickering light faded for a brief second. After a second or two I was able to finally swallow. I gasped in for air and the cold rush soothed my burning mouth, simultaneously reminding me of the pain I was in.

I realized that as I gasped for breath I had made a rather loud obnoxious noise that alerted the man in the corner. I feared to look around and find that he was staring back at me. I stared ahead at the horrible yellow walls until I noticed through the silence that the man had stopped mumbling. When I couldn't take the burning sensation the yellow walls created in the back of my eyes I was forced to look around. The man had passed out in the seat along with his belongings.

Now that he was unaware of his surroundings I had a minute to evaluate him. He appeared to be homeless. Greasy, thinning hair covered the top of his head which stuck to his face and eventually turned into long, scraggly beard. This man had not touched a razor in months. His clothes were unmatched, dirty, and too big for his body. He turned over and a bottle of vodka fell out of his coat and clattered onto the floor, rolling back under the seat. I turned back around,

relieved to have known that I had avoided any potential embarrassment at the expense of a stranger.

Another train passed outside and my coffee rattled around on the table only to spill the hot liquid onto my pants. I quickly grabbed a napkin off of the counter and hid the stain. I could feel the liquid seeping in and soaking my undergarments; which consequently began to stick to my inner thigh. It was an uncomfortable feeling as I felt it gradually begin to cool.

I lifted the napkin to reveal a large brown stain on my grey dress pants. I looked up to see if the waitress behind the counter had noticed anything, she didn't seem to be paying attention. I kept my gaze on her as she moved behind the counter. During the large fiasco that had just ensued I had failed to notice that she was quite beautiful.

It had been hard to notice because her long dark hair was tied on the top of her head. Her makeup seemed hastily done as if she had been running late for her shift. The bright lighting and horrible yellow walls didn't do her any favors, but I imagine taking her out to a nice dinner in some low light and she might look quite pretty.

I began to think about asking her out. I knew I could be a desirable figure to her. As the Assistant to the Regional Manager of a large chain of convenience stores, I could offer that comfortable sense of security that all women are looking for. Running my fingers through my hair, I made sure that it was combed back and no pieces were awkwardly sticking out.

She was at the far end of the counter; I knew she would come around to ask if I wanted a refill at the sight of an empty coffee. I

looked down and despite the chain of incredible mishaps that had just occurred, a good two thirds of my cup remained. It appeared to have cooled down enough for me to safely drink it without the risk of burning my mouth yet again. Although the thought of drinking any more of that awful acidic drink made my insides churn. I was already on my fourth cup. *Or was it my third?*

It didn't matter because the more I thought about it the more I felt sick. It appeared that she was finishing her task at the other end of the counter and I quickly consumed the last of that bitter drink. I could feel it snake its way through my insides and inevitably reach my stomach where it seemed to eat away at the inside lining.

I wasn't sure if I could take the sensation. However, I couldn't get up from my seat due to the spreading coffee stain on my pair of grey dress pants. She appeared to have turned my way and spotted my empty mug sitting on the white linoleum counter top. I began to sweat profusely as she made her way towards me. I wasn't sure if it was out of nervousness considering her presence or the terrible burning sensation that was taking place in my bowels.

At this point we had made eye contact and she began to ask if I would like another refill. In the middle of her sentence I interrupted with an aggressive "No!" I couldn't hold it in—the sensation in my stomach along with uncomfortable wetness in my pants made me want to evacuate the situation. I said the "No" with an unintended amount of force, as if it would shatter the current reality of my situation. As if it would dissolve the putrid yellow walls, the flickering light and all that plagued me in my most dire situation.

Yet, I sat there in front of the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, in the most vulnerable and dismal circumstances I had ever experienced. The room's horrible qualities intensified and another train rolled by outside. I feared her reaction.

She responded with a simple "Ok". It crushed me. My outburst had done nothing to stir her insides or emotions. It made me feel infinitesimally small and the room appeared to have grown bigger as I shrunk down into my seat. I mattered nothing to her and the feelings that I had built up for her over this time imploded. I could feel a pit begin to open in my stomach. I tried to tell myself it was the coffee but I had a hard time believing that lie.

I felt the urge to go smoke a cigarette. I had given up smoking recently—I'm not sure I ever really enjoyed it. Smoking was really just something to do. I got a bit of a rush off of it and my wife hated it.

I quickly got up from my seat, made my way past the horrible smelling homeless man, and into the bathroom. Pushing open the bathroom door I was met with my reflection in the mirror above a dripping sink. I quickly glanced into my own eyes and then lowered my gaze down to my grey dress pants. I had noticed that I forgot about the coffee stain still seeping deeper down into the fabric and now running down my leg. It was now just a reminder of my defeat, I didn't care about hiding it. I wanted the world to see my misery and laugh in my face.

Turning toward the bathroom stalls, I opened the middle one and sat down on the toilet seat. I sat there and admired the phallus graffiti that lined the sides of the stall. As I looked around, the same horrible yellow walls continued in from the outside and enclosed me

in the bathroom. I could still hear trains rolling by outside which made the fluorescent lighting above me flicker.

Grabbing the old pack out of my coat pocket, I lit one up and took a long drag. It had been awhile so I coughed immediately after inhaling. I forgot how much I hated smoking. It gave me a headache, my sinuses filled up with mucus and my lungs burned from the hot smoke. I could feel the minutes being shaved off of my life. And at the same time I loved it.

I felt immediately better. I didn't care about my embarrassing defeat and the horrible conditions of the room. The pain and uncomfortableness that the cigarettes brought upon me drowned out my thoughts and numbed my hurt ego. It seemed to cure the acidity of my stomach, or at least cover it up. Another train passed outside and the light flickered across the room. I didn't care.

At that moment I heard the bathroom door burst open and could smell that horrible stench of the homeless man. I could see his feet stumbling around outside my serene enclosure and could hear him mumbling to himself. Swinging the stall door open beside me he mumbled incoherent words, fell to his knees in front of the toilet and began vomiting into the water. In between his heaves I continued puffing on my cigarette. I leaned back into the seat and pondered to myself. I realized that I had now become the man beside me. So overrun with life that I no longer had any ambition. I drowned my pain with substances and murmured to myself about the horrible things I had just gone through and the reasons for which I was in this place. It was wonderful.

Feeling a new surge of life at this realization I sprang up from the toilet seat and pushed open the stall door. I put out my cigarette on the wretched yellow wall and left the butt to simmer on the ground. I exited the bathroom and b-lined for the white linoleum counter. Taking a crumpled 5 dollar bill out of my pocket I slapped it on the table along with the spare change I had. I slapped it down with so much force that the light at the end of the counter flickered on and off.

Startled, the beautiful dark haired waitress turned to look at me with a traumatized face. I stood there for a minute breathing heavily while staring at the money I had so deliberately placed. I turned my gaze and met the waitress's beautiful brown eyes. Unblinking I stared wide-eyed and deep into those dark mesmerizing pools. My fears and insecurities had dissolved—I drowned them deep down within those depths.

She then broke our gaze and turned quickly to go in back through the kitchen door. I felt empowered and reveled in my moment of triumph. Broken and alive I headed towards the door of the diner and swung open the large glass frame into the night. I stepped outside and took a deep breath.

To my right the railroad crossing bell began to sound along with flashing red lights. In the distance I could hear the rumble of a train. Fumbling around in my pocket I found my pack of cigarettes and opened it to find one last crumpled cig. Casting aside the pack, I placed it in my mouth and put a match to the end. Stepping forward I teetered on the edge of the tracks and inhaled a large amount of disgusting smoke.

I held it in, burning my lungs to the point of tears. Drawing closer I heard the horn of the train in collaboration with the persistent crossing bell. I closed my eyes and exhaled the smoke from my lungs. The train began to rumble the ground beneath my feet. It permeated through my body and made every miserable inch of me awaken into reality. Taking one last puff of smoke I stepped out onto the tracks. The horn blared, the crossing sign rang, and the rumbling intensified until the point at which all of it dissipated. There was no more horn, the ringing had stopped, and the rumbling quieted. My body felt free... this was peace. I floated throughout empty space devoid of yellow walls, acidic feelings, and flickering lights. I wished to stay here forever.

Until faintly, in the distance I heard mumbling. Soon a familiar stench started to fill my awareness. Wafting towards me it grew stronger. Meanwhile the world started to fade back into existence. I found myself standing on the tracks. Looking around, down the line the tracks had switched, I realized the train must have just passed by me. I turned around to find the homeless man stumbling out of the diner in his vomit stained clothes.

Climbing off of the tracks I headed back into the diner. It was empty, the waitress was nowhere to be seen and the only other patron had left the premises. Surveying the room, I walked over to where the mumbling man had first been lying when I arrived. I reached under the seat and felt the bottle of vodka that he had dropped after passing out. Picking it up, I sat in the seat and took a pull from the bottle. I felt nothing. My mind was quiet now and I felt

truly comfortable in my place. Taking another pull from the bottle, it went down easily as I laid back and fell asleep.

In The Garden
Molly Duggan



The Doorbell

James Groh

I stood in the door frame of my room, as the sound of the doorbell still rang in my ear. Not many postmen or delivery trucks are out at six in the morning. My mind went back to the night before when my dad talked about my brother. We had only been receiving emails from him every now and then because every time someone was killed all internet and communication to family members was cutoff for 24 hours. Back in October, a month after Dan was deployed, we did not hear from him for three weeks—this would end up being the most deadly period of his deployment. Ever since then our family tried not to talk about the things that could happen. This didn't stop my dad.

"They never come in the middle of the night," my dad said as we sat around the dinner table "only between five AM and midnight." My mom and I stared down at our plates. We knew how families were notified if their loved one was killed. We just never talked about it. I pushed the mashed potatoes on my plate back into a neat pile. "There'll always be two Marines at the door whether they're wounded or killed." This spoken reality drained the color from my mom's face leaving it a whitish grey. My dad had always been a down to earth kind of guy who was always prepared and honest. Maybe this was his way of preparing for the reality of what the remaining four months could bring until my brother returned.

My heart was beating furiously now after being triggered by the doorbell. I waited. My parents will be get it, I told myself. They always do. Only they didn't. I quickly noticed that I was the only one

who heard it. My mom was in the basement putting clothes in the washer and I still heard the water running in the shower where my dad was. I knew I had to answer the door.

Dan joined the Marine Corps right out of high school and signed up for the infantry meaning he was the action on the front lines. His unit, the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, was deployed in September 2010 to the Sangin District of Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Sangin was the last district where the Taliban could freely process opium and heroin to fund their insurgencies. I knew with my brother there the Taliban wouldn't stand a chance. Dan was a hunter since he could walk. I remember when I was five we played hunting games where I was a deer and my brother the hunter. Armed with a plastic blowgun, Dan would go hide somewhere in the house while I crawled on my hands and feet grazing the carpet, sniffing the couches in our living room, and grunting as if I actually were a deer. I always ended up getting shot by the red dart with a blunt plastic tip and just as the deer fell to the ground when my brother shot them so did I. And just like I fell to the ground I knew the Taliban would too.

I had absolute faith in Dan's instincts and marksmanship but the Taliban placed improvised explosive devices (IED's) in the dirt and covered them with rocks and brush. When nine people from his unit died in just four days I knew he was hunting in a different place with a different target and for a different reason.

I made my way from my room to the front door having to force each step I took as my legs lost their strength. I looked out the window but only saw darkness and drifting snow just as any other snowy January morning. I decided to prepare myself for who might be

on the other side by looking through the peephole. As I peered through, my view was blocked by a wreath that was hung on our front door. It was Christmas a week ago—the first Christmas that our family was not together in one room next to the fireplace. The first time that my brother did not hang his own ornaments on the tree. The first time that my sister and I made stockings with gifts inside to send to a desert village where sand replaced snow. This was the first time that hundreds of yellow ribbons replaced garland on our evergreen tree. Despite all of the first times that came with missing my brother, our already close knit family became closer even while one of us was half way around the world. We were a unit of our own. A unit that found resilience and solace in each other, and God, during a time when my brother was on the front lines of a battlefield as well as our minds.

I couldn't feel my heart beating anymore but I knew it was pounding harder than it had been. I grabbed the door handle and began to twist it. The door opened slowly and I could feel the coolness from outside. It was silent. The kind of silence you hear when watching the snow fall from a dark sky at night. The same snow that you played in when you were little, the kind that my brother and I would build forts out of or go sledding on down the hill in our front yard.

Six and a half years before hand I was ten and the grass in our front yard was crispy brown with a small patch of green underneath the shade of the large maple. July was hot and dry. I was walking back from the mailbox, looking through the letters when I noticed one addressed to me. FREE MAIL written on the top right

corner where a stamp would be and I was numb inside like I would be on that January morning opening the door.

I loved getting letters from my uncle. He was in Mosul, Iraq training local police forces as part of his deployment. He had written to me regularly telling me about what he was doing, how it was living in barracks, and how he missed grass after living in so much sand. His letters made me feel like I was in the action, just as any boy would want to be at my age. On that day though, numbly reading my name in his handwriting, I did not feel the same as did when I received his previous letters. Earlier that morning, July 2nd, 2004, my uncle had been taken off of life support, unable to overcome his injuries from eight days earlier. In his last letter to me he wrote about the comfort he felt walking by the tomb of Prophet Jonah every day on patrol.

At his funeral family from the people whom he had been deployed with called him a hero for saving their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, and husbands and wives. Although my uncle would never have wanted to be called a hero, he was. The day he received his injuries my uncle was sitting in the mess hall eating breakfast when there was an explosion. Although the explosion was not nearby, he and a couple of others went to the rooftop of a building next door to have a look. In the distance they saw the black smoke rising against a clear blue sky, marking where the explosion had been. Just as his eyes spotted the smoke in the distance the front gate of their base had been broken down and a truck, with several fifty gallon drums in the back, sped towards the mess hall. Without hesitation my uncle took aim with his rifle and fired a couple of rounds through the windshield killing the driver. The limp body

slouched over the wheel sending the truck veering into the building that my uncle and the others were standing on. Exploding on impact, the blast made shrapnel out of the wall and upper part of the roof which my uncle could not avoid.

When he came back home we met him at the airport. From the plane his body was carried to the hearse. Together, with my uncle as close to us as he had been in the past nine months, we were escorted in a procession of police and state patrol vehicles. Red and blue lights cut through the dark night as sirens broke the silence. We sped down the interstate as witnessing cars sounded their horns in appreciation. A hero's welcome that no family wanted but a country needed as a symbol of sacrifice and freedom.

Was my brother about to become a hero? Would we welcome him home with flashing lights and sirens? I didn't want to think about not playing baseball with him in the summer. I didn't want to think about having to walk by an empty room or not being able to spend another Christmas with him. I didn't want to think about seeing his scarred body in box or hearing twenty one shots or listening to a lone trumpet as his body would be lowered in the ground. But I did. I couldn't stop thinking about what life would be without him in it. I wanted my brother, not a hero.

Through the silence and the darkness I saw a figure. Only one, not two. This figure was small and thin. It took me longer than it should to recognize my grandma. I was still expecting to see two Marines appear out of the darkness.

"Is Lauren here? I've got to see Lauren, I have to apologize to her." My grandma looked as though she had been up all night. She

had bags under her eyes and tears running down her cheek. My sister was in her room, still sleeping before her day of nursing clinicals.

“What? What’s going on grandma? Here, come inside.” As my grandma stepped inside my mom had come up the stairs with an empty clothes basket.

“What’s the matter?” my mom asked unsympathetically, not knowing how to react to seeing my grandma in our house at six in the morning. She took my grandma and had her sit down at our kitchen table before going to tell my dad that “your mom is here.”

Numbly I went back to my room, my heart still beating from the adrenaline and what just happened. My Grandma’s dementia had been getting worse for the past couple of years especially after my Grandpa passed away. At first her episodes were mixing up people and places from the past with the present but then they started to get worse and she became paranoid that we were trying to sell her house and steal everything she had. Once, my Grandma even called the police because she believed that my dad stole a bottle of bleach from the basement.

Getting ready for school that morning my room seemed unrecognizable as if someone had moved everything in my room before putting it back to the way it was. I looked at the picture of my brother hanging next to the letters from my uncle. My brother was wearing all of his equipment and holding a rifle outside of an Afghan house built with sun-dried bricks. He had on sunglasses to shield his eyes from the sun and probably the sand. I bet he was missing grass.

THE CONTRIBUTORS

SYLVIA NEUMANN has been a student at UW-La Crosse for two years. She is majoring in art education, so she is always working on some sort of artistic creation. She also writes prose in her free time, which can vary from short poems to lengthy stories, many of which are left unfinished. Her art is influenced by nature and her own dreams, but sometimes an unexpected spark will have her sketching through the night! She hopes to later teach grade school children, inspiring them to create and have fun with their work.

MIKAELA KORNOWSKI is originally from Waukesha, Wisconsin. She will graduate this semester from UW-L with her BA in English: Rhetoric and Writing. Although her academics and career focus mainly on professional and technical writing, she enjoys writing creatively in her free time. After graduation, she hopes to continue her professional writing career in healthcare. She would like to extend a special thanks to her roommates for putting up with her furious typing habits.

MOLLY DUGGAN

JENNIFER GLASGOW Jennifer Glasgow is a senior majoring in English-Rhetoric and Writing and plans to graduate in the spring of 2016. In her poetry and short works of fiction, she draws inspiration from her real life experiences, but she also enjoys writing fantasy novels as a hobby. Aside from creative writing, she also loves composing piano music, painting, cooking, and working as a tutor at the UW-La Crosse Writing Center.

JESSICA FANSHAW I am a graduating senior theatre performance major/music minor. I've always had a passion for poetry so I'm very excited to have my work in this year's Catalyst.

DANI WEBER is a third year student planning to graduate in December 2015 with a major in Rhetoric and Writing and double minors in Creative Writing and Professional Writing.

RIHANNON FISHER

SAMUEL FISCHER

JAMES GROH is first and foremost a science nerd. Currently he is studying biology with a concentration in biomedical sciences while also finishing up minors in chemistry as well as creative writing. Writing has been a hobby of his since high school. He mainly writes poetry but has recently begun to explore prose and the short story. Inspiration for his writing comes from all aspects of life including the mundane and the magical. Everywhere you look there is a story to be written.

DANIELLE NOLDEN is studying Art Education at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse, while she continues to grow as an educator as well as an artist.

Although her primary focuses are ceramics, painting, and drawing, she does not allow herself to become boxed in and so she is continuing to learn new artistic methods. As she is honing in her skills and developing a strong portfolio of work, the ideas for creating art are more abundant than ever, challenging Danielle to more accomplishments ahead.

DYLAN BLOCH is a junior majoring in Finance from Lomira, WI. Photography and videography are a growing interest of his and will likely remain a hobby for the rest of his life.

EMILY PLACHETKA

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