

LIFE IS EXPENSIVE; CREATIVITY IS FREE

VOLUME 6 - SPRING 2012

“LIFE IS EXPENSIVE; CREATIVITY IS FREE”

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Volume 6 – Spring 2012

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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.

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

For the Spring 2012 issue of The Catalyst, we asked members of the La Crosse community to send us examples of how creative you they can be in these tough financial times. We were delightfully surprised at the amazing submissions we received. We would like to thank everyone who has shown us support this semester. If your submission did not make it into this semester's issue, we highly encourage you to submit next semester. Again, thank you for your support of this amazing project.

~ The Editors

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Paint Me Embrace

Mia Stickelmaier

Have you ever had one of those realizations
That when it hits you
So deep in your gut,
You know
You will forever remember that moment,
The time and the place,

I had one of these moments
This past the summer,
In our crooked house
You hugged me again,
And I was still surprised
By how perfectly I fit in your embrace,
This is when I realized we could measure our suffering
By how many hugs we had shared recently,
And I couldn't shake that concept from my head,
When the only currency for a hug is a tear,
And although a hug may be the best remedy,
It's a sad place getting there,

Why does it always take the rough hands of tragedy and pain
To wake me,
And make me realize how beautiful the day is,
And how lucky I am
Just to be here,
When it's just so easy to stay asleep
Trying to forget this world of hate,

So I've made a decision,
When I'm awake
I will be awake and alive,
No longer always just staring into the sky
Always looking out of windows,
Always trying to get a glimpse of this big picture we live in,
Instead I must recognize the
Modern day Picassos and Kalhos
Of my own very life,
Because we paint this moving picture everyday,

We make this life what it is,

So even if no one's told you this before,
I'm here to remind you
You've got a pencil behind your ear,
A paintbrush sticking out your back pocket,
Crayons in your shoe,
A can of spray paint in your purse
Or book-bag,
Or backpack,
Or some non-gender conforming strappy side bag,
Or wherever you want,
Have you noticed
You've got a permanent marker at your fingertips,
Just waiting for you to finish that masterpiece
You were born to create,
So you could finally sign your name,

Because look around this life is our canvas,
Yeah, spills are bound to happen
And sure, not everyone
Has the same color palette in mind,
But don't you think a mosaic would really brighten up our sky?

It's the Simple Things That Makes Life Beautiful
Christina Brugger



Wounded Soul

Diane Isham (Featherwoman)

Fate has cast a mighty blow
for the wounded
the discarded
the one-winged

Having to contemplate
life alone
fending for self
in a hostile environment

With obstacles to overcome
while struggling to survive
amongst the brutal forces
of not just nature
but that of society
that of fellow flock
turned foe

Save for a few friendlies
wanting to rescue
the unfortunate cast off
to ease its suffering
to stop the cruelties

encountered and endured
by the wounded soul

Untitled
Michael Knapik



A Poem

David Stilin

Do not say:
Go and walk into the surf and fetch me a bird for a pet
Or
Bring me a star, my lamp has burnt out
For this I cannot do.
Yet, if when sitting in a kitchen, silent, I can say:
The weather is cold, it will rain for a few days.
And maybe the stars and birds can mingle,
But can they say:
Your soup is delicious

And I Lived to See Another Day

Matthew Otto

There is a light above my desk,
Showcase my sorrows and my shame.
Pins assail my legs and feet,
I am not new to this. Thunder
Rolls within my ears—the skies are clear and blue.

Bottles pop left and right, their contents
Fill my veins. The agony has come and gone,
Misery makes its home.
What gods have cursed me?
I am not a man.

Spiders scratch upon the wall,
And blues collide with reds;
I am denied my begging slumber,
Did I forget my Ambien?
I take another.

Shameful, spiteful, evil beasts
Dance across my head.
Failure, Ugly, Needy, Stupid
Roaring in my soul.
Shut up, shut up, I take no more!
These voices never go,
And so I take another.

Oh no, oh no, what have I done?!
Bottles pop left and right, their contents
Hit the floor. My heart is on the megaphone,
I hear sirens on the way.
Bitter charcoal, you fill my mouth with shame.

Heroics

Matthew Bauman

Beyond our hero lays a molten past – his
days, events demanding repentance –
to release these times would be to unleash the lie,
and bode gravely for our deliverance.

On the headland I saw him, cocked knee
weight launched – forward onto squelched mud,
looking out into His city, breathing in all the
“rights and wrongs,” cradles, roses, graves
and candles – and he saw a thousand hearts of men.

Those fates he devised, those open eyes
which stare up through the dirt, those closed
eyes which softly nest in the moon-tinted faces of those
Unafraid.

To have that power, to be the Decider,
I do not desire, rather I would turn the knife on
myself,
and let it play out.

Untitled
Eric Skadson



Centipede War

Kevin Franshaw

It was while playing with her dollhouse that Sally first encountered a centipede. It poked its head and twelve of its legs out from the opening of the pink plastic basement. At first sight she took it for a stray clump of dust and hair. Reluctantly, she reached out to remove it from the stairs – when it moved.

Shrieking in terror she scrambled away from her dolls and the unknown creature. She shared the bedroom with her little brother, Toby, and in a moment of panic, she took his little league bat from the closet and smashed the dollhouse to pieces.

It was nearly three months earlier, the day after her ninth birthday, that her father had left their aging white farmhouse outside of Colombia, South Carolina, and had been shipped to Iraq. Sally recalled the day very clearly. He was a big man, with big shoulders, and a big smile that he reserved just for her. She wore her favorite jeans, worn out as they were, and a brand new camouflage hoodie, which her father had given her for her birthday. He said it went nicely with her dirty-blond curls and made her big green eyes stand out like oases in a desert. Her father's compliment made her laugh and cry.

"Carrying out my duty as a man is the most important thing I can do right now," he told her. "I need to keep my home and my children safe, like my father and brother did for me. Now you hold down the fort okay, sweetie? And look out for your little brother when your mom's not around."

Sally had only seen her father cry twice before that day. The first time was when she and Toby put on a bologna sandwich puppet show that made him laugh so hard he cried. The second time was at Uncle John's funeral. Uncle John had died last August in the line of duty in Iraq. Sally's family had moved from Tempe, Arizona to Colombia a few weeks after the funeral when her father had signed up for military training at Fort Jackson. He moved the whole family to stay close to them as long as possible.

He declined the on-post housing in search of something more spacious. When they toured the farmhouse it was beautiful. It had two stories and was probably larger than was needed for just the two kids. It had a large wrap-around porch and about an acre of yard space in the front and back.

"This place was built by the old Palmer family," said the quick-talking realtor, "big-time tobacco family, back at the turn of the 20th century.

"Course it's been extensively remodeled," he added with a friendly Southern smile. "You folks sure showed up at the perfect time, we just brought the price way down, you know. Place has been sitting unoccupied for a couple years now— great place, just hard times in this market, of course." The man's smile sagged for a moment then popped back up with a chuckle.

Her mother cried for three straight days after Sally's father left, and lost her job in a couple weeks time. She missed her husband terribly and had taken to excessive online shopping to combat her sorrow. After being caught one too many times at work, she shopped extra hard from home to forget that her husband was away and that she was unemployed.

Her mother would lock herself in her bedroom for days. At first Sally would go to her mom for help with homework, or with making diner, or to talk about how dad was going to come home safe. Gradually, the noise from the bedroom television grew louder and louder; usually the news, ghost hunting shows, or the soaps. Sally began to find her mother's door locked. When she knocked no one would answer. She told herself her mother was sleeping.

Sally noticed the house beginning to deteriorate from neglect. The floors boards began to creak and groan like an old man denying the need for a wheel chair. The paint began to chip away, and if the windows were not left open, the whole place would begin to smell like rotting spinach. All hundred or so years of the house's existence seemed to catch up with it all at once, as if the realtor had painted a gilding coat of white over the decay and called it good as new.

The kids at school said because it was springtime, centipedes would begin to show up all over.

“They’re worst in the summer though,” said Arnold Miller.
“My mom says they love the humidity,” said Megan Chase,
“And the dampness of bathrooms and basements.”
“One bit my sister in her sleep,” claimed Stacey Jackson.
“That ain’t true,” said Megan
“Uh huh,” said Stacy, “right on her ear lobe.”
“I hear they eat the glue that holds walls together,” said Arnold.
“And hair and toenail clippings” said Megan.
“And roley-polley bugs and spiders!” said Stacey.
“Yeah right,” said Megan.

Sally’s mother was disinterested in her daughter’s centipede encounter. She spent most of her days shopping from the bedroom, where centipedes rarely ventured. She was in favor of ignoring unpleasant matters, such as the debt she was accumulating that could rival the cost of their house. She ordered Sally a new dollhouse and said to be more careful with it.

A week after the new dollhouse showed up, Sally still hadn’t removed it from its box. By this time, she had seen three more centipedes in the house, and her kid brother, Toby, had reported two. Each sighting was relatively similar; the insect was spotted, a nearby blunt object was thrown at it, and when the attack inevitably missed, the creature would scurry away and vanish impossibly into the woodwork.

Sally and Toby slept with the light on.

She looked after her six-year-old brother. She made them both lunch most days before school when there was no sign of their mother. She helped him with homework and picking out clothes. They still didn’t know too many kids at school so each day they’d walk back from the bus stop together and plop down in front of the living room television. They watched military-based action movies, and now that their mother was rarely around to stop them, they played violent war video games, especially Call of Duty and F.E.A.R.

One morning, Sally woke and looked across the room to see Toby sitting awake in his bed. He looked awful. His eyes were dry and the lids drooped down onto his cheeks. He told her he had seen a centipede dart beneath his bed just after she fell asleep, but he didn’t

want to wake her. On this morning, Sally made a decision. She was tired of living in fear, being a constant victim. Her fear of the centipedes grew to hatred. She made it her mission to rid the house of centipedes, to squish as many of the creeps as she could, and to free her and Toby from the haunting uncertainties of sharing their space with such nauseating residents.

She found two old fly swatters in a drawer, which she customized by drawing a large target on one, and the word “DIE” on the other in thick permanent marker. She had Toby rip pages out of her schoolbooks and crumple them up. He tossed them at her and she smashed them with her swatters for target practice, sometimes two at once.

When she wasn’t practicing, she was on the hunt. She crawled around on her belly looking under everything in the house for enemies in hiding. She left bits of hair and clipped toenails in a dish as traps. Once she stood like a statue in the bathroom for an hour and a half waiting for an opponent to present itself. However, she had not yet dared enter the basement. She’d never been down there, and there was something ominous and terrifying about the thought of it. Even before the threat of centipedes, she and Toby had started referring to it as the Land of Monsters. Only when they were first moving in had she seen her father bring boxes and other larger items down those creaking steps.

One afternoon, after a few weeks of hunting, with only two and a half centipedes slain (one crawled into a vent after having its back end crushed off by the “DIE” fly swatter), the enemy took things to the next level. While scanning beneath the stove, Sally heard her brother let out a terrible scream. She rushed to the living room to find him standing on the coffee table with tears on his face.

“It attacked me!” he told her. “I was playing Lego’s and it came out of nowhere and it was on my hand and it was gunna crawl up my arm to my throat but I shook it and shook it and it flung off over there and escaped under the basement door and I’m sorry I didn’t kill it like you’d want but I panicked and I’m sorry and—”

“Shhhh shh shh, it’s alright Toby,” she said, helping him off the table and giving him her target fly swatter. “You take this and you

stay right here. Big sister's gunna get that creepy little bugger, don't you worry."

Sally went out to the garage to prepare for the offensive strike. She strapped on her trusty yellow Wellington rain boots, slid on her mother's retired gardening gloves, tied a camo bandana over her braided hair, threw on a yellow raincoat, and for good measure wiped a greasy cloth under each eye, forming two thick black streaks.

She decided to visit her mother before the journey, hoping for some support. She bounded up the stairs and raised her fist to knock, but stopped. She could hear the news loudly listing off the daily death toll for both sides of the war in Iraq. Between the newscaster's lines, she could also make out the sound of her mother weeping profoundly. Sally knew it was very unlikely that one of the names listed was her father's, but the thought alone was shattering. After a minute, Sally thrashed her head back and forth, dispelling her tears. She took in a deep breath and turned back to her mission.

As she passed Toby in the living room she noticed he had switched to the oversized Lego bricks, and his construction efforts were focused on a Lego wall, several feet high. She paused before the basement door and exchanged a solemn nod with her brother. She turned the handle, yanked the door open, and descended into the Land of Monsters.

She crept down the decaying wood stairs with her "DIE" fly swatter raised. Toby appeared at the top of the stairs as she went, craning his neck into the doorframe as to expose as little of himself as possible to the world below. The stairs creaked and sagged as though they might give way if she weren't careful where she stepped. With each step the temperature seemed to drop, but the dampness only increased. The light switch at the bottom of the stairs did nothing, but by the dim light from the doorway that pushed into the musky darkness she could see bits and pieces of the neglected basement. The walls were made of uneven stone that had been haphazardly covered in places by crusty, flower-printed sheets. The foundation had partially crumbled in places, leaving small piles of stones on the floor.

From the last stair Sally could make out an assortment of old objects. In the back of the room there were several stacks of sagging, unlabeled cardboard boxes from the move, some sawhorses and tools, a water heater, a furnace, and a dark spot that may have been a very small entryway to another room. On the wall to her left there was an ancient looking washing machine with a dryer to match. They looked moldy and discolored and the cement floor beneath them appeared to be damp from leakage.

On the wall to her right, a few yards from the bottom of the stairs, she saw a relatively new looking glass case that came a few inches out from a smoother part of the stonewall. It was maybe six feet from top to bottom, but appeared larger in the low-ceilinged room. Due to her angle from the stairs and the fact that the display light, which arched from the top of the case, was off, she could not make out its contents. On the side of the case closest to her she noticed a switch. It appeared to be her only remaining option for lighting. She strapped her yellow Wellingtons tight as she could, squeezed her swatter in her gardening gloves and stepped off the stairs.

She could hear water dripping somewhere, and tried to stop imagining the sound of tiny legs. For a moment she stood before the glass and in the reflection could almost make out her silhouette against the faint glow of the washing machine and wall behind her. She raised her hand to the switch and flicked it upwards.

The light brilliantly illuminated the case amidst the shadowy room. Through the glass before her stood a full-body United States military uniform, complete with a handgun, a grenade, and a whole belt of other gadgets. It shone bright light an angel amidst the dark cellar. A small copper plaque next to the torso explained that the suit had belonged to uncle John and was given to her family in honor of his service. She had seen the suit displayed at the funeral, but was unaware they had received it or that her father had hid it away. In the right sleeve of the coat looked to be a tear from battle. She took a step to the right to get a better angle, and at that moment noticed something behind her on the wall.

She turned to find an immense centipede, at least seven or eight inches long, clinging high to the wall above the decrepit washing machine. For a second she froze at the sight of its thick body and

sprawling legs. Her adrenaline pumped through her clammy skin, heating it to a state of action. She knew it was too high for her to reach with her fly swatter and did not want to lose her only weapon by throwing it.

Without taking her eye off the creature, she scooped a handful of fallen stones off the grimy ground, placed her feet, and hurled one towards her enemy. The stone clunked a few inches from the beast causing it to dash across the uneven wall, its hundred legs clicking against the rock. She then spotted its destination; a crack that ran from floor to ceiling and in its middle was an opening roughly the length and thickness of her arm. Determined to slay the monster before it vanished into uncertainty, she cast another stone towards the fleeing beast. But the leviathan was swift and it slithered into the wall, with the stone following closely behind.

The stone made contact inside the wall, but the sound wasn't the clunk she'd expected. It sounded like it had plopped into a basket of rotting fruit. For a second, there was nothing. Then the wall grumbled like an empty stomach followed by a high-pitched screech like a thousand angry rodents. Then it came. A waterfall-like rush of a million pin-needle legs scurrying out of the hole in every direction. In an instant, there were hundreds of them. They covered the cracked wall and spread across the floor, and the ceiling above her head. They were making their way over the soggy boxes to where she stood frozen. She almost ran. But she hated everything about the bastards and was not about to give over her house and family to them.

In an instant of rage, screaming, she threw her DIE swatter at the squirming wall and used the remaining rocks in her gloved hand to smash the glass case of Uncle John's uniform. She grabbed the grenade from the belt. Her Wellies sloshed through the carpet of bugs as she dashed from the source of her nightmares; crawling with centipedes, she made for the blackening stairs.

She stopped half way up the stairs, removed the grenade's pin like in Call of Duty, and cast it into the shrieking swarm of insects. She bolted the rest of the way up the stairs, grabbed Toby, and made for the door. They were on the front porch when the blast went off. The house shook and toppled them down the porch steps. Sally helped her brother up and began stripping off her centipede-ridden clothes as they ran out into the yard. A large cracking sound turned

them around. Sally stood nearly naked next to her brother at the edge of their yard, staring at the smoking house. It swayed, sagged, and with a profound groan, collapsed upon itself.

“Ma,” said Toby in a half whisper.

Sally’s face quivered and hardened.

“It’s alright, little brother,” she said, taking his hand, “I’ll take care of you when Mom’s not around.”

Courage
Teri Talpe



I Am Not a Very Good Poet

David Briggs

I am not a very good poet
I don't always compare things to other things
I don't frequently use the same letters to start words
I don't make social commentaries hidden behind layers of subtext

I never want to write a sonnet
I don't like iambic pentameter
I don't use words like e'er or o'er
I don't write iconic one-liners about the end of the world

I am not good enough to be romantic
I don't understand the mechanics of modernism
I don't ever want to be considered post-modern
I don't have the skills to break out of any categories

I will never be T. S. Eliot
I don't write like Edgar Allan Poe
I don't have the soul of Langston Hughes
I don't sound nearly as natural as Billy Collins

I write poems about writing poems
I don't write about the ills of society
I don't describe boundless unrequited love
I don't know a darn thing about the motives of the gods of the Greek
pantheon

But honestly?
As long as one person in the world
Reads my poems
And thinks that they're all right

And as long as my poems
Inspire at least one person
To write their own poems
And to enjoy writing and reading poetry

Then I think I did my job

And maybe,
Just maybe

I am not that bad of a poet.

If I Could Write a Jazz Etude

David Briggs

If I could write a jazz etude
And play it Kind of Blue,
I'd spend A Night in Tunisia
With Plenty of Money and You.

Van Morrison would sing a song
As we would go Moon Dance,
And Django would play Nuages
When we arrive in France

We'd spend our April in Paris,
We'd Stomp at the Savoy,
We'd walk like Basie – Straight Ahead
In Autumn Leaves of joy.

We'd see the American Patrol
When we finally come home.
You'd show your Bossa Nova Soul,
But In a Mellow Tone

You're the Girl from Ipanema,
My Funny Valentine.
I'm a Boogie Bugle Boy
who wants you to be mine.

I'd say that I am In the Mood
to Sing, Sing, Sing some more,
but I can't write a jazz etude.
You've heard it all before.

The Beach
Alison Ross

The sand is wet now that the beach finally has water, or perhaps
because our imaginations have grown.
Come get me, love. I've been standing in the sun for too long
and my skin is burning off of my skeleton.
My wiring is frayed as my mind strays backwards
only honouring the things that make me cry
and tell my mind it's not yet 1995.
When the rain freezes my cells and saws
the remainder off my bones only then
can I see into the future
and laugh as I see werewolf tears transform
back into smiles as the sun rises.
I'll only be thought of once a month
in the middle of the night
when the moon illuminates the sea that carries my ashes.

Untitled
Michael Knapik



Fade

Tyler Keyes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1xla2yjRDA>

Song available for free download at

<http://www.djbooth.net/index/mixtapes/entry/mi-tcs/>.

I'm Tryin'

Derek Olson

<http://soundcloud.com/derek-olson/im-tryin> [Link is down]

The Temple of Body

Caleb Roberts

This wasn't supposed to even happen.
I shouldn't be punished for this.
I mean its all your fault; you're the problem here.
I had everything planned out until you came along.

If I could take everything back I would,
But everything is lost in the battle of pain and pleasure.
I mean I had places I wanted to go, things I wanted to do,
But all I see in the future is the growing pain of you.

But now I must protect my own well being,
And what better place to finish it in than this temple we are in.
So I draw the end of my metal tip blade,
And I will correct all the mistakes that I have made.

The sirens, how they scream racing towards the temple.
Illuminating flashes of red and blue lighten up the sky.
The slow rumblings of people begin to gather,
And the body still lies at the door for everyone to see.

The yellow tape surrounds the enchanted façade of the temple,
Its doors open exposing its sacred interior.
People used to bow to its glory and all the men respected it,
Now the darkness of the day outweighs its glimmer.

And then there is her how, quiet she has become.
From inside the temple I can see her staring into my eyes searching
for comfort.

She weeps and weeps, cursing me because I told her it would be
okay.

"My body," she says, "I have disgraced my body my temple."

And with a vengeful gasp, she screams,
"My seed, my seed!" as she stares at the body.
But I have sent it to its death in its disenchanted tomb,
As the corner comes in and marks a chalk outline of her womb.

Elegant Simplicity
Kacey Harasimowicz



Springs Tidings Faire

Lauren Ihrke

Audrey stepped out of her latest failed interview with a feigned look of content. She didn't want them to know just how much they'd ruined her day. Sure, she could find another job, her face said to them. It was easy. She didn't need them at all. As soon as she was through the doors, however, everything changed. Her shoulders slumped, and instead of a well controlled, contented visage, her face dropped and a hand lifted to rub at her eyes.

She felt like it had been ages since she'd gotten a decent night's sleep. She wasn't sure what to do about that though. It was the stress of it all that kept her mind from rest every night, and until some job or another came her way, she knew that she wouldn't get anymore sleep than she currently was. For now, she had to pull herself back together; even if she didn't have a new job to hold her afloat in the weeks to come, she still had a full schedule to her day. Society accused her of laziness — that's why she had no job, it said. If she was just a harder worker, everything would fall into place. Well, Audrey wasn't sure how much harder she could work at everything before she started losing limbs, or at least wits.

Letting out a gruff sigh, Audrey turned her attention to preparing her mind to continue on, as if this slight to her character hadn't happened at all. Pulling her hair into a bunch at the back of her head, she pulled a hair tie free of its hiding spot behind a bangle bracelet and wrapped it around the mess of styling gel and carefully placed bobby pins. All of it was a wasted effort now, she realized. Those people inside the store hadn't cared at all that she had spent an hour and a half fretting over her own looks, trying to make herself good enough for them. She didn't even like using products in her hair; she hated the way it felt, she hated how greasy it made her hair, and she hated the way it made her hair look like a plastic mold on top of her head. Businesses liked it though, and so she had done it. Now, it was all for naught.

If she continued to think about that though, Audrey would never bring herself down enough to get through the rest of the day. Her jaw was

already sore and tense. She could almost feel the headache that would follow from the tense muscles, and then the insomnia stemming from the headache and aching jaw. Pushing it from mind though, she did her best to force the muscles to relax. Digging into the pathetically small pockets attached to her dress pants, she pulled out two things: The first, and most important, of the objects was a piece of chewing gum — Audrey's crutch. Ever since she was a child, she had chewed gum habitually. Her parents disliked it, calling it an annoying, juvenile addiction, and her friends took teasing jibes at it, but in a time of mental crisis, it rarely failed to calm her mind. The second object was a single key. Usually she would have a set of keys attached to several dollar-store key chain oddities. Because of the dress pants' pockets though, she had decided to take the key to her car off of the set and just leave the rest in her car until after her interview. Of course, now she didn't care what the interviewer thought of her habits, and she wished she had her silly little toys to cheer her up.

Crossing the parking lot in strides extended for speed, Audrey located her car and quickly dropped into the driver's seat. Her head came down next, resting against the steering wheel with eyes closed. She breathed deeply, pulling air in through her nose and letting it out slowly through pursed lips. In her chest, she could feel her heart beating against her chest. This was the signal that her temporary shock had worn off and the panic was setting in again. She didn't know how she was going to live if she couldn't find a job. Her bank account was down to only three digits and it wouldn't be long before it dropped down to two. If something didn't change soon, Audrey wasn't sure how she was even going to feed herself, let alone pay rent and continue with school. Everything just seemed to be working against her.

A light buzzing pulled Audrey's attention away from her struggling pulse. Turning her head without lifting it from the steering wheel, she let her eyes focus on her phone. It was sitting in the cup holder in the center column, and currently, the screen was lit, showing her that she had just received a text message from her mother. She didn't move to pick it up though. She already knew what the message would say, and

she just wasn't ready to answer it yet. "Good luck!" it would say, in her mother's hopeful way. And that would be followed by, "Let me know how it goes," and a heart made from the number three and an angle bracket. There would be no sign of uncertainty in her mother's tone. The other woman did her best to deny the reality of the job pool, believing naively that her daughter would find a job at every corner. And Audrey didn't blame her; she tried to do the same, and just wasn't as successful with it. While her mother was able to keep the facade up, at least for her daughter's sake, Audrey couldn't help the night terrors and paranoid thoughts that told her she was never going to be able to find a job. She imagined herself with no money, living back in her parents' house like she was in high school again. She couldn't do that, not after being majorly independent for over two years.

Still, she couldn't just ignore the text; her mother would have a fit if she didn't hear how the interview went. She figured she might as well just get it over with now, instead of trying to put it off and only prolonging the process. Letting out a slow breath Audrey reached a hand toward her phone. She would have to tell her parents eventually, so there was really no use in avoiding it. It wasn't as if it were new anyway; she had made this call to them dozens of times in the past. As she dialed her mother's number, Audrey's hands shook uncontrollably. Her nerves really were much worse than they'd ever been before. She was running out of time, and she knew it. She had to figure something out.

The phone rang three times in Audrey's ear, and each time she found herself praying that her mother wouldn't answer. She did though of course, with as much excitement as if this were the chance of a lifetime — Audrey realized it probably was to her mother. "Hello, honey," her mother answered, with no hint of confusion in her voice as to the reason for the call. "How did it go?" Though they'd been through this so many times before, her mother still sounded like she was sure it must be good news.

Audrey didn't answer at first; she couldn't. Her throat had closed up, and her eyes were stinging with the need to flood. Swallowing hard,

she tried to force words from her throat, but all she succeeded in doing was letting out a sharp mewing sound.

It was all that was needed though; Audrey would swear she could feel her mother's face falling. "Oh," the older woman murmured, all hints of hope dropping away from her voice. "Well what happened? I'm sure the next one will go better."

Audrey tried to pull a breath deep into her lungs, but it was shaking as her diaphragm spasmed. "I wasn't good enough." The words rushed from her mouth without any control, giving away the inner turmoil that was at the helm of her mind. "They didn't want a student with a busy schedule." She was whining out the words, unable to control the hopelessness she felt.

"Oh, honey," her mother let out sounding like her daughter's distress was physically hurting her. "It'll go better next time. You just wait and see." Her mother's confidence could not be shaken. "I can't believe they wouldn't want a college student. It's a college town; how else are they going to get workers?"

"They already have as many students working for them as they can afford." Audrey dropped her head into her free hand, feeling more and more hopeless the farther she thought back through the short conversation she had had with the interviewer. "They weren't going to hire another student."

"Well, why did they even bring you in then? It was on your application. Do they even bother reading them?" Her mother's voice was clipped and angry; this wasn't the first time Audrey had an interview with this problem. In fact, it had been happening quite frequently. Every interview she got only lasted a few minutes, because there was always some problem that should have been seen on her application before she ever came in.

After a moment, her mother took a deep breath and told her again that it would be better next time. Audrey was truly feeling as though everything was falling apart — including her mind. "I don't know if I can do this again," she let out, feeling hot tears break free of her eye

lashes. “All of the stress.” She didn’t continue her explanation unable to describe just how exactly it felt. All of the reserve that she had built up for herself to get through the day was gone now, and she didn’t have the strength to continue.

The next few moments went by like a blur in Audrey’s mind. She forgot about the phone grasped tightly in one hand as she began breathing heavily again, her eyes flooding over with salty water while she desperately tried to control her own emotions. Then, suddenly, she was aware of another sound in the cabin of her car. It was the ringtone of her phone going off again, but she knew that she hadn’t hung up on her mother.

Turning her gaze in wonder, Audrey looked at the phone, trying to decipher the jumble of blurry numbers in front of eyes. It wasn’t one that she knew, even if she would’ve been able to read it clearly. There was one thing that she could make out, though, and that was that the area code was precisely correct for the area in which she had been applying.

Feeling her heart pick up again, Audrey quickly answered the call, forgetting all about her mother on the other line, desperately trying to figure out what was going on. “Hello?” Audrey breathed, sounding as if she had just finished a sprint. She wiped at her eyes, as if the person on the other line could tell that she had been crying.

“Hello. Is this Audrey?” The voice coming through the speaker seemed awkward, as if they weren’t used to making calls like this, or they just didn’t think themselves very good at it.

“Yes, this is,” Audrey said, feeling her nerve leave her quickly. If this was another person calling her in for an interview, she really didn’t want to take it, though she knew she must. She felt as though she were constantly setting herself up for disappointment; like she was some sort of masochist.

“Hi, Audrey.” The voice of the person on the line perked up considerably at the thought of having the correct person on the line; Audrey couldn’t help but wonder if they had called in the wrong

person, the way her interviews always seemed to turn out. “This is Pete from the flower shop here in town. We interviewed you last week for a position this summer?”

All Audrey could do was make a slight sound of agreeance. She was afraid if she did too much, she would screw it all up, and they would change their mind about having called. She had thought she had completely failed the interview with the flower shop; she had been nervous because she really wanted to work there, and by the end of the interview, the interviewer seemed really uninterested in taking her on as a worker.

“Well, Audrey, I’m sorry it’s taken us so long to get back to you, and I’m really sorry for such short notice, but we were just wondering if you could possibly come in today sometime? I totally understand if it can’t work for you, but —”

“Yes.” The word was out of Audrey’s voice with determination she didn’t know she possessed. If they had asked her if she could get a tattoo of their logo on her forehead, she would’ve said yes; she was desperate to get a job, and to even have a call back from a business she would be happy working for had her hopes soaring again. “I can come right now; I’ve just gotten done with my only appointment for the day.”

“Really?” Pete, one of the managers if she remembered correctly, sounded amazed. “I mean, that’s great! It’s just that we really need to get a new worker trained in. We thought we had more time to take it at a regular pace, but we lost someone today, and we’re a bit swamped. It’s the busy season, you know.”

“That’s fine. I can head over right now.”

“Oh, thank you, so much!” Pete sounded ecstatic. “I know you were looking for the summer, but is there anyway you could get trained in and start immediately? I understand if you can’t. You’ll get the job either way.”

A sharp breath caught in her throat, and Audrey felt herself thinking of a way that this could possibly be a joke — cruel as it would be. She

was convinced that it had to be some sort of deluded dream. Maybe she had passed out from the stress? Maybe she really was just dreaming, as she lay in her car, unconscious. Even that seemed more plausible to her than this.

“Audrey?” Pete asked after a moment. He sounded even more nervous than at the beginning of the conversation. She realized that he must not have been joking when he said they were desperate for help. This man, one of the managers, was so desperate for a new worker, that he was sounding just as nervous as Audrey did at the beginning of every interview she did.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, that would be great — just great. I’m on my way.” She knew that her words betrayed her, but she didn’t care anymore. She wanted this job, and her mind was reeling at what was happening. She could barely comprehend anything at the moment, and she was filled with absolute amazement that things might be turning around for her finally.

“Great! Thank you so much. I’ll see you soon!”

Pete and Audrey quickly exchanged goodbyes, and hung up. The phone dropped from Audrey’s hand, the call with her mother completely forgotten, as she put a hand over her mouth, taking gasping breaths. She was bouncing in her seat with excitement as she stared at the steering wheel in front of her. That wasn’t what she was seeing though. What she saw was a solution to her current dilemmas. She saw herself able to keep buying groceries and paying her rent. She saw herself able to keep everything afloat without having to do something desperate like dropping out and moving home. It was a miracle, just when things had looked most bleak.

Audrey was stunned with excitement and disbelief that was only broken when her mother’s ringtone sounded through the car, reminding her that not only had she hung up on her mother, but she had done so without any sort of explanation. It had been at least five minutes since she had very unexpectedly hung up on her mother, and at the time, she had been in the midst of a breakdown.

Letting out a squeak of panic, Audrey leaned forward to retrieve her phone from the floor, quickly picking it up and answering. She couldn't wait to tell her mother what had just happened. For once, she didn't have bad news to correspond. She didn't have to let her mother down the way she had been for so long, and she realized that that was the best feeling in the world right now.

A Thinking Man
Dang Ton



Remembering Honeyed Brass in Rosy Hues: Vintage 1952

Avery Stenso Velo

Age has started to creep in through my memories. Antiquing them into dropping colors and blurring details. Yet this inevitable fiend has weaknesses. I've found reminiscence in the aromas caught by the breeze outside my resting window. From the sweet honey of coffee to the clout of dog shit. These remembrances come upon me like a switched channel in a short vibrant scene that always bring a wounded expression or a leery obscene smile. Either one really, but music is something powerful. Music lays the movie of my soul to pave the ground I once walked on. A magic that dictates every curving shadow of perfection and captures every freckled flaw. It stirs some unspeakable movement within that has no equal or superior. To resist it is to deny the heaven in life. There's this one song, this rosy cheeked melody lapping at my brain so I begin to remember and once more live again in the ghost of my refrain.

The success of a second date was just finishing and I had staked everything but this months rent on it. She was spring greenery with a body dressed in a blush of jealousy. An ambience procured by every other female we'd encountered tonight. Legs to the floor with eyes starring the nighted sky. Her hair was this questioning color of blonde so pale it collected shades of rose into it. The hair was obviously dyed but the effect was lovely enough. Although every time she opened her mouth my attention would crumble to the music playing. Her voice had the odd quality of a dead mouse. You couldn't hear it, but the awful ghost of a smell indicated it was there. Fortunately the music was loud, she was beautiful and the more I drank the better things got, especially my dancing. "Eddie your swinging those shy coattails around more than me," Rosey filled sweet words with her eery whine. "New suit love, still getting used to it."

Then there was me. A musician souled for music but built poorly in every other discipline. There wasn't a single sport I hadn't gotten injured in, baseball, football, tennis. In my school years I had almost drowned in the shallow end of a puddle. My body was stretched but lean and I had learned to throw the length of my shadow over any

other man's to gain a bluffed upper hand. Nobody had tested the physical merits of my courage. They simply accepted strong appearances for reality. For while I retained the figure of an athlete, my hands were made to create music and my feet to count out beats. This profession though had emptied my closet, filled the cupboards with dust and taught me how to read a menu from right to left. However, the clothes I had on tonight would certainly get me a rougher sort of attention.

I didn't have the money to beg a dry cleaners and the suit I'd worn on the first date was dirty. Mostly because of a clumsy waiter and the distraction of my companion's legs. We got free dinner and booze as compensation, but my only suit was ruined. The morning after that first date I found myself alone, extremely hungover, reeking of booze, slightly of pee, and comforted by a soggy card board box outside a library. Someone had stolen my shoes while I was sleeping. The bastards had even left a note, "It's not blood just red wine, let the bum sleep he'll wake up fine."

So after a first date that was hardly remembered I called for a second one, because I'm a masochistic bastard when it comes to beautiful women and she said, "How lovely, of course!" Maybe a few other words but the cussed up connection hounded them out. I was borrowing a white dinner tux and dress shoes from a respectable fellow in my brass section. A third chair, first rate guy whose suit shrank on my frame and borrowed me shoes that could only service a clown. Tucking in the embarrassingly long coat tails into the back of my pants and stuffing the ends of the shoes helped a bit, but I still resembled circus cabbage. It was a loan that came with an oath of no wrinkles, rips, or stains. So instead of the much cheaper, but very risky red wine I ordered champagne all night. "Champagne is for celebration. Are we celebrating something?" A second date, but I copped out and went poetic, "Well the sun went down, the moon didn't show up, but the stars are around and you've conquered my thoughts." What you could see of the sky anyway clouds had bullied it out in spots. Rosy just gurgled some wisps of a rotten flavor demanding we attend the floor.

We danced till I was certain my feet were bleeding. There was this squishy wet feeling down there. Fortunately though I was quite positive all the pain was being blocked by champagne bubbles. The arrival of the bill held numbers that just barely cut into our cab fare. Rosy and I would have to 'sight see' a couple blocks before we could afford a ride home, but the night was snug and liquidly warm. Sticking us into its darkly lit paint, making it easy to distinguish the yellowed cab pulling near us.

Some street lights and intersections later I had somehow lured her from the taxi into my apartment building with the promise of a view. My building was a rotted husk suited for struggling artists and musicians, but not their companions. I was hoping they would move that cat carcass from the lobby today, but I could still hear the rats picking at it. Luckily it was dark and we were drunk. "What's that smell?" Another painter had died the night before I guess. His name was Ferdinand. He was a prick and only the third person to die on that floor. My level held the record for most deaths so far, but eleventh floor was getting pretty close. Everybody in this building was ready to be another casualty for art. "That stink followed us from the taxi Rosey. You know cab drivers, they're filled with the bowels of this city." Since it was an old building the elevator was taped off and in the 'process of repairs' so we took the stairs.

At the landing of the first flight Rosy turned to me with this damselly wilt, "Won't you carry me?" This creature was hunting my patience to extinction. "I'll simply drop your body and watch the fall," I said. "How knightly of you," Rosy rolled her eyes and started marching up the steps with no assistance from myself. Although, she managed to brush her entire body against anything that happened to be descending the stairs.

The familiarity of certain stains mounting the rug helped guide me and Rosy through the the dirtily lit hall. While the noise coming from some tenants rooms certainly sounded like trouble, scaring a guy might put me more securely in Rosy's favor. Unfortunately or luckily there were no confrontations to be found when we met number 810. The digits of which were the victims of a serial bandit who worked

under mischief and the numbers now bore a significant likeness to, well- “What’s that?” Rosy pointed her damning finger at my door. “Oh that. Well I smashed a guy’s head into it. Mangled all the numbers up.” I dug the key in and had to shake the door to open it because the dimensions were off and the damn thing often stuck. “Whatever for?” Rosy started picking at it like there were chunks of skull or hair to be discovered there still. “Are you religious?” I questioned still jimmying with the door. “Not particularly,” She wide eyed. “It was a Land Shark.” I rammed my shoulder against the door practically breaking it open. “Ah...I thought you were going to say Jehovah’s witness!” I ushered her through the entrance, “Nope. Religion gave up on this place before it was even built.”

I had pinned stories of fly trap around the hanging bulbs to cheer the white hospital candor it used to have. I hate hospitals. There was gig I had once where I played music for all the terminal patients. Every day there’d be someone new to take the empty bed you saw last week was full. I stopped after I was assigned the children’s wing. But now the light was warm and you could still see perfectly clear. Everything was just dripped in a glass of amber grace. The perfect atmosphere for every move.

Drastically kicking off the clown shoes I proceeded to crack every toe into the carpet. None were bleeding. “So your a percussionist then?” “Nope I’m a brass man, always have been.” I tried cleaning up a bit, but I guess it wasn’t a successful effort. Rosy kept twirling around the room looking for a place to sit I think. Sheets of music were strayed around on tables like magazines or crawled the floor impersonating cockroaches. The bothersome beasts were probably crouching under them. A man who once lived in the basement used to sell the hugest one as pets. He could make five dollars a day selling the dead ones to the hot dog stand man. They were both men of cheats and thieves, just comforting the borders of survival like me though.

My trumpet was tucked above in the ceiling tiles because a lot of people here thought shiny things were fun to steal. I didn’t have a cup to my kitchen, so I quickly started rinsing out a glass jar of strawberried jam. Rosy distracted herself from the mess by sorting

through some of my sheet music. I shot a prayer hoping that the water I only dared to shower with wouldn't make her sick. Placing the jar on the table next to her. "Here you go miss. On the house, be careful though. It doesn't have a warning label but it probably should. You know," I mustered some hardened bravado but was utterly ignored for a slightly stained slice of paper. "How delightful! This one has my name in it. Oh won't you play it for me. Please?" "La Vie En Rose?" I questioned. "Please?" She was using this Bambi eyed trait that overcame all the awfulness of her voice. La Vie En Rose was a song made to express the purest form of affection. An adoration that usually wrapped itself around a ring. All I wanted was her wrapped around my bed. My vanity for performance couldn't refuse though, "Why not."

It must've been the morning side of midnight at least, but I knew the people in my building wouldn't mind much. They were either awake, working or doing something dastardly. The best acoustics were in the bathroom. It held tiled walls that could pitch back the melodies I played note for note. The room was also the largest in the whole flat. A phenomena that could fit a gurney and two EMS while the landlords (Mr. and Mrs. Piaf) waited outside with their Polaroid camera. The Piafs kept a wall of the dead in their office as well as the occasional toe tag. Both Ellin and Louis had always been very nice to me though, often excusing my late rent if I gave their son Tony piano lessons. I could never leave him alone though, because the child would stuff all the sheet music in his mouth, snapping at my fingers if I attempted to pick them out. You can't exactly beat up your landlord's kid even if he eats your sheet music. One time I discovered him on the floor desperately sawing through the piano bench, peeling off varnish with just his teeth. That poor bench. I think I saw someone salvaging it from a dumpster last week.

I lifted my grandmother's stool into the shower. It was something she had painted back in her old country. The only thing left of my inheritance. Quite skillfully I manipulated the shower handles to steady the sheet music, wedging it in with a sponge for more security. With my last gram of politeness I dropped a towel over the toilet seat. "Second row reserved for the Miss," I took her hand with a gentle

kiss. “If this is second, what’s front billing look like?” The alcohol was sobering off and she was ghosting into that irritating territory again, but only when she spoke. “Silence. It’s about to start.” And so she did, trying to look bored but the stillness of her posture was raptured to attention. So I poured her honeyed brass. Notes thick with the strike of wonder. Slurred together by a bounce, but still intoned with an individual soul. There’s this weak sway to the melody. It tilts you in this frail way. To the point of almost tipping over unless you find someone to hold you close and fast. Just like the lyrics promise.

The anthem was spirited from the sickness of that first crush and the divinity of a new world’s touch. How all the boredoms in the world had become new again because you were in it. The song was incredibly sappy, but it worked and I woke up in a duet with a pretty satisfied audience. Every moment that song plays I dance in those shoes again, to a shower concert, in a building casketed for artists. It always plays in rosy hues to honeyed brass.

Untitled
Amanda Gresl



Twelve O'Clock
Teri Talpe



Untitled

Joseph Van Oss



Untitled
Michael Knapik



Untitled
Eric Skadson



Nobodies Plant Seeds

Kevin Fanshaw

Four-year-old bare feet locked firmly to the
Soil, I look up. Peers speckle the backyard
Apple tree with its fruit, swaying in the summer
Breeze. I am the runt of the lot. I extend
My green arm toward the lowest place to hold,
Leaping, I try to join the others. I slip
And descend: eyes and the tree's course bark
Tear into my tender flesh.

I receive laughter like the thud of
The Earth on my back. I turn watery
Eyes to the mother of a friend and say
"Help me."
The responding voice booms like a gramophone
In my soul, "You cannot be in the tree
Unless you deserve to be."

I slipped swiftly down the line between
Yards and Neighbors; my face a red oak
In early November; Transformation blows
Blushed to exposed; I feel an early chill
Of three months deep winter.

First blizzard blows bundled children to their
Respective doorsteps. Solitude. Silence.
A bit-too-violent snowball fight. Blood in my teeth.
Frostbite. My skin toughens and grows thick
Against the ice.

In time
Sunlight peaks in with a smile;
Thick warm air smells like a symphony and
Beckons my insides to seep out through the
Cracks in my thawing hide; I stand
Champion to challenge: I grow up-

Wards. Friendships flower like fruit: I cling to them;
I stretch forever towards the blinding sun.

After twenty years of growth for the tree
And for me, I return to the backyard of my youth.
Toes woven into the Earth: my head slowly
Reclines as my eyes desperately scan
The forbidding trunk for the lowest place to hold.
It is lost amongst the clouds. My head bows
And turns away. My eyes open to find
Those of a small child: yearning,
Pining to be above
Where he is now.

I lead the boy to the base of the tree
And offer him a freshly fallen apple.
There we lay, contentedly, sprawling
In the shade of a towering Tree,
Pleased to know that we are
Nobody; planting the seeds
Of what's yet to be.

