The Quiet Divide
It is an absolute pleasure to present these pieces to you. These stories, essays, poems, and works of art ask us to stop what we’re doing and consider the question, “What does it take to feel whole?” They encourage us to look for the fissures in our world that make it complicated, beautiful, and recognizable. Each piece highlights the contrasts and complications that we encounter each day—the moments that split and divide us—no matter how subtle the cracks and faults seem to be. These quiet, unspoken rifts demonstrate how our own characters, desires, and senses of place can become fractured and broken; how we become challenged to piece our lives back together at a moment’s notice.

In this journal, we welcome you into intimate scenes that communicate separation. You are invited to see how a father’s character can be split into something new when visiting “The Land;” how who we are and who we want to be are not always the same, as in the poem “Being Good;” and how sometimes we feel our worlds overlap, the rift disappearing, as in the surreal story, “Sing About Me.” This journal shares the quiet divisions the artists of Elon University have created, and forces us to consider how we all might be a little divided, a little fractured.

It was an absolute honor to work on this issue with the Colonnades family. I owe an enormous thanks to the editors; I could not have asked for a more wonderful and talented group of people who share an amazing passion for the arts. I owe thanks to all of the readers who volunteered to come to meetings and sift through dozens of submissions; without their help, this issue would not exist.

I’d like to thank Drew Perry and Tita Ramirez for leading us through this crazy process while raising a beautiful family. Finally, thank you for picking up this journal and taking the time to read. Thank you, thank you.
This work from Elon was some of the best college work I have ever judged. I was impressed with the quality—both in terms of the writing styles, which varied, and the content, which was layered with meaning. What is being taught at Elon is the kind of deep reading that can result in writing of this caliber. I applaud the professors as well as these young writers.

“I Would Think It Was a Dream” has a distinct velocity, and is a convincing experience of a young boy who does not understand what is happening in his troubled family, nor can he explain his father’s strange behavior—though he tries hard to piece together the details. The result is a mosaic of innocence formed through the extreme weather of blizzards and hurricanes, and an unforgettable boy who wishes for a life more predictable than the one he has been dealt. The poignancy of this story lies in its being centered in the boy’s point of view, which offers heartbreaking clarity to the reader.

“Almost There” uses language that is spellbinding and pulls the reader forward. The poet includes both place and people, but at a certain point in the poem he moves into that still moment of longing that lives inside every heart—with “the world / moving on without him,” while he stands “hiding his hands in his pockets, fishing / for that warmth too big to fit any jacket.” The poet drops us down for a brief time into what it is to be human, and at the end offers the image of a split horizon that reflects that longing.

“From a Tightrope” creates a provocative focus on how the circus world awakens, in both children and adults, a sense of risk and freedom, before the inevitability of seeing it close down. The author develops, with intelligence, the movement back and forth between the world of reality and the world of imagination, revealing that deep longing that can be answered for only a brief time.

Elizabeth Cox is the author of four novels and a forthcoming collection of poems, as well as several essays and short stories. She has won numerous awards, including the Lillian Smith Award and The Robert Penn Warren Prize for fiction, and is a member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers. Cox has been published in The Southern Review, The Atlantic Monthly, Ms. Magazine, and The Oxford American. She has taught creative writing at Duke University, The University of Michigan, Tufts University, The Bennington Low Residency Program, and MIT. She currently teaches at Wofford College in South Carolina.
Just the other day, I was in a room with a handful of young, aspiring artists. I handed each artist a small blank white index card and asked them to write a response to the question, “What are you fighting for?” They looked at me, puzzled—some grinned awkwardly, while others silently repeated the question to themselves, as if (hopefully) they had misunderstood it. After a few minutes, each artist had written a response. There was a bit of tension in the room. “What are you fighting for?” was in the air.

Next, I asked them to respond to a second question. This time, they were to write on the other side of the card. I asked, “What do you value most?” Silence followed. Then they wrote. Then they handed the white cards forward. There were no names on these cards. Just words. The fronts and backs of the cards were indistinguishable from each other. Not knowing which response was for which question, I began reading them aloud. We heard statements such as “beauty,” “freedom,” “my family and friends,” “my ability to think,” “creating my own life,” and “my dog.”

It became clear very quickly to all of us that the things we valued most were indistinguishable from the things we were fighting for. So: why art? Why and how can art be a tactical tool to fight for and protect the things we value? And who or what are we fighting against? Like most artistic situations, our questioning only created more questions. Thank goodness! If we had found an answer that day, we would have needed to find something else to do.

In the course of judging the student work for Colonnades, I found a wonderful range of different things these artists value. For example, my top selection is a performance-based photo series by Allison Hren titled “Will Work for Acknowledgement.” This piece, comprised of a woman standing squarely in the middle of the street (physically obstructing movement) and holding a series of signs with verbiage such as, “Invisible, please help,” and, “I have not heard my name in a year,” is wonderfully confrontational. Hren’s public actions imagine a new economy based on self-worth and personal interaction, rather than a monetary one. These photos boldly implicate us, the viewers, as participants in our current system of economics, and challenge us to rethink our role within it.

Through painting, drawing, sculpture, and photography, some artists value the act of seeing—taking the time to slow down and just look at the beauty in the way things are. My second-place choice is an oil painting by Kaitlin Stober entitled “Doughnuts.” This painting shows us that doughnuts are just as beautiful as anything else might be, and pointing to these often-overlooked things and giving them value is an action that can remind us all to appreciate the beauty in the everyday, in the mundane.

Other artists experiment freely with material in playful and imaginative ways. Perhaps these artists most value their freedom: to play, think, and dream. This impulse can be seen in my third choice, a manipulated photograph titled “Leave,” by Sarah Wasko. This photograph exploits the camera’s inability to accurately capture a light that is moving too quickly. A record of light traces wrap and encircle a young girl in what appears to be her bedroom. I find the combination of how this photograph was made, the resulting image, and the openness of possible meaning to be compelling. In this case, it would limit the power of the work if I were to tell you what I think.

It was my pleasure to serve as the judge for this issue of Colonnades. I found all of the works submitted to be genuine actions that reflected the things each artist values—and all of them are worth fighting for.

Lee Walton is an Experientialist. His work takes many forms—from drawing, game/system based structures, video and web-based performances to orchestrated situations, walking, and golfing. He has shown work in many national and international museum-funded projects and exhibitions, public commissions, and private collections. Walton holds an MFA in Art from the California College of the Arts. His drawings are represented by Kraushaar Gallery in New York. Walton is currently an Assistant Professor of Art at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His work and musings can be viewed at: www.leewalton.com.
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It’s easier to define “place” when you’re talking drunk to a cute local girl on the beach, the weather having turned cool enough for sweatshirts, the sand retaining some of its heat into the evening, than when teaching a non-native how to shuck a fresh oyster. Your hands shake from the chill of the water and you stumble over words when you explain the difference between True mollusks and Pearl, the former bivalve best for eating raw with a twist of lemon and a dash of pepper; the latter sometimes opening to house a small sun in the brackish water.
Being Good

Caroline Klidonas

In the morning—
    “You're good at me.”
Hours before, when the sky supported
    a hung and heavy moon,
    the clock and its colon a blinking beacon,
    she lay awake, her torso a cup
    stacked inside his—things that hurt
    are always the loudest.

The afternoon before that,
    a shopping cart of tumbling
    Campbell's soup cans
    dictates her Friday.
    Her boss let her off early.
This is what she has.
This is what she is,
    a woman who doesn't care
    to cook. And he, the man
    who's still there in the morning,
    does not find it sad, or even charming,

which is why he called in the first place.
He doesn't need a beautiful woman, a successful—
    or even a broken—one.
He just needs a reason to shave,
    someone else's spit in the sink, a different
    (and growing more familiar) pattern
    of lip-prints on the rims of wine glasses to thumb clean.

He doesn't know how to help her sleep at night.

She doesn't know what she needs—or deserves—

other than a Cream of Celery for Wednesday
    and two or three Mushrooms of the same species
    for the weekend. But she wants to sleep, wants
    to need the math of him, circumference of nipple and thigh,
    and maybe that's the point.
Elephants always bow before they make their exits. I learned this on my seventh birthday, sitting on cold metallic bleachers that rattled when the surrounding crowd grew wild. I remember watching them; their massive bodies washed fluorescent in the spotlight and curved trunks arched high into the canvas-covered sky.

Maybe it was the mysterious nature of that first circus my parents ever brought me to, wrapped up in a scarf and curious fascination, that made me fall in love with the entire act. The winter of 1999 was unusually cold for North Carolina. I remember the circus unfolding itself after the audience walked away and taillights disappeared in dimming blinks. My family and I watched the dismantling from the dirt parking lot nearby. Workers with dusty jeans and tired faces were cracking jokes, faces pointed upward and laughing as they dragged bleachers into the gaping trailers of trucks. The cold was making their breaths heavier, exhaling translucent clouds. A metallic skeleton of stakes was holding up the bright tents, and groups of men tugged them from the soil before stretched canvases over thirty feet tall collapsed to the earth in billowing ripples. I had never seen anything so magnificent completely deconstructed before.

My father made us stay in that lot for a while, allowing the traffic to clear and the scenery to dissolve. My mother and younger sister sat in the car blasting heat while my father and I stood outside. I was leaning against the passenger door, watching clowns peel off painted masks and lions fall asleep in cages, when he sighed the way he usually did before beginning the lectures my seven-year-old self never desired to hear.

“It’s odd to think of history. Did you know that the Romans came up with the idea of a circus hundreds of years ago? They were originally extravagant dedications to Helios, the sun god. Imagine that.”

I never quite knew what to say to my father’s random outbursts of the kinds of facts that seemed to belong on game shows. I thought of the ancient circus companies creating something spectacular enough to entertain the sun, a show with enough grandeur to celebrate a giant glowing orb in the sky.

I found it strange standing in that parking lot, watching a circus disappear that never intended to applaud the sun. By then, darkness had veiled most
everything, almost blending with the pale silver of the moon. Circus members continued to pack their acts away. Suitcases filled with sequins, heavy trunks of costumes, cases of face paint, light bulbs, cords and china plates were strewn across the ground in random assortments. It was like the shows had morphed into their own worlds over time, dropped the obligation of praising anything, and instead turned hazy with dreams and rejections of reality. I thought of worlds contained in tents that could just be deflated and packed away, taken to other cities and rooted temporarily into the ground. I was young with a restless imagination and stubborn desire to live in dreams. Standing in thirty-degree weather next to an idling car, I was taken over by an obsession with the immeasurable and fleeting worlds of circuses.

Looking back, all I can do is think of absurdity and the way it ignites in a spotlight.

A few years later I found myself at a circus once again, a drum roll muffling surrounding sound before trapeze swingers stepped onto the rungs of ladders. One of them was younger than the rest, pale skin glowing and covered in a dress made of feathers. I watched all six of them climb, eyes unblinking and locked onto platforms thirty feet in the air. Black nets stretched out in webs beneath them, rippling and waiting to entangle them if the laws of gravity ever won. Fluorescent lights overhead dimmed seconds before the performers stood on the platform’s edge and jumped, poised and confident, into the pale gleam of the spotlight. There is something about acrobatics and the way performers glide so effortlessly from swing to swing, outstretched hands and open palms raised upward, waiting to catch hold of something.

It was a series of suspended dances, and the feathered girl was swimming through air, through nothing. I watched her release a swaying bar, flip as a shimmering blur and reach for the next. Her fingers slipped, grip loosening on the slippery metal. I wondered if she would catch herself, lift herself back to the safety of the solid swings. My stomach dropped, and something in her face fell. The placement of each foot, the steady pressing onto ground, the shifting of weight. It is something fragile, delicate like a thin sheet of glass.

The performer stood on the platform in a long pause with her eyes closed. I imagined her, a falling Icarus tumbling into a netted sea, trailed by a blinding spotlight. Silence. A held breath echoed through the audience, and released when another performer grabbed her hand and hoisted her back up. Watching the performers conquer that bit of tented sky, I thought of how the laws of physics were no longer relevant in this world. I felt like I was enclosed in an entirely different world from my own, one that exists in a tent that can be built up as easily as it is torn down. I realized I was in this separate universe made of imagination and intricate performances.

I had never felt so envious, watching trapeze swingers adamantly prove that they ceased to be possessions of nature. They never held on to the swings for too long, and it seemed that to let go was to be free.

After the act, a rush of relief and dazzling light layered the inside of the tent. Groups of performers orbited throughout the circus ring, entering and exiting in a flourish of sound. Lions sat on stools repeating their forceful roars, flanked by proud tamers with bright vests and skeptical laughter. The creatures looked bored but mysterious, heavy eyes blinking in the glare of fluorescence. The tamers’ movements were slow, calculated and careful. Any slip or mistake could have been fatal, and that small possibility made the crowd silent while studying the scene in front of them.

Clowns raced by on miniature unicycles, bright red and wobbling under weight. Their faces were coated in paint and it was hard not to think about who they really were and what they looked like. I tried to imagine having a career as a clown, dressing up in something comical everyday to mask my identity, trying desperately to make people laugh and forget anything more complicated.

Musicians appeared with dancing dogs in leotards, followed by men juggling silverware. It was the idea behind it all that captivated me—the notion that the ridiculous will never have limits, for it is one of the most infinite things in the world.

The tightrope was the final act. Maybe it was the suspense radiating through the atmosphere that made silence pour over everyone. Or maybe it was the magnificence behind the ability to walk across a wavering rope three stories high, surrounded by only air.

The performer stood on the platform in a long pause with her eyes closed and breathing calculated; she was holding out every movement in her lungs, chest never rising or falling a second too late. There is an art in looking for balance. The placement of each foot, the steady pressing onto ground, the shifting of weight. It is something fragile, delicate like a thin sheet of glass.

She spread her arms out like wings and took the first step off the edge; feet bound and pointed outward, trust placed in one stretched and single rope. She kept walking with patient and measured steps across it, so seemingly thin from below that it looked like she was strolling on nothing but a brightly lit
Concentrating, focused, she was unconcerned with the world below her. And maybe I thought of freedom that way, or perhaps something crazy along the lines of dancing on elephants in bowties and gliding from trapeze swings.

The show ended as it always did, and the audience stood up applauding, laughing, demanding more of the outrageous. More of the unbelievable. The tent hollowed out slowly once the stage went blank. The circus world is always temporary, always eventually deserted, and at the end, we all left unprepared for the reality lurking beyond circus grounds.

The heaviness of the real world is something anyone would try to stray from. Sometimes life is monotonous. Sometimes it’s all too predictable and quiet, so I find myself drawn to these worlds of contained bizarreness where performers embrace what is dangerous. How easy is it for them to fling themselves through the air above hundreds of people, or to stand on their tiptoes atop galloping horses? It is all just a peculiar vacation, a healthy escape and a shocking return. Maybe it’s a good thing that these worlds are short-lived. Sometimes there is a numbness to staying in one place.

I became infatuated with circuses because they seemed so distant from the real world. In my eyes, they were extravagant distortions and experiments with the ever-expansive imagination. As years passed and circuses came and went with their bizarre productions and lessons on gravity, I realized that maybe the point was never to run from reality but to create something incredible out of it, like a separate world captured in a tent.

In a recurring dream, I’m the one standing on a tightrope. The space around me is washed in shadow, and I’m on the edge of a platform barely wide enough to stay grounded on. I’m stuck there for a while, trying to find a proper balance. Finally, I plant a quivering foot on a rope expanding and fading into the distance. As far as I’m concerned, there is no end to it. But pretty soon I’m walking across the tallest heights I’ve ever seen, towering above the Greatest Show on Earth. Maybe the secret is in the art of acrobatics—to feel weightless, to discover something to hold on to and trust entirely, to find that fragile equilibrium and start walking.
I Thank the Roots

Gabe Noble

It’s because we are joking, smoking, and away from our odd family that we notice the long stretch of cotton fields in full bloom.

My brother and I laugh because you never see this. Yes, it is Virginia, but you tend to get lost.

We take sail in our minds and cross what we believe is the Atlantic. I remember a summer reading of a story of Solomon told by Morrison. He went back and forth through Newport News, searching through the underdeveloped, poor houses of the migrated—now free—men, thirsty for pride and work. He searches for the gold of his roots and finds bones left in a heavy brown bag.

Here we are thirty miles from Newport News. Our eyes gaze upon the immense ground of white, bright puffs hanging and waving as if saying, “Welcome back.”

There’re so many of them, roots buried deep in soil. I wonder how many songs were sung and how many babies were born and taken away here.

Now, a silence in the warm car as we gaze out and make sense of stories we only read about in history books. We listen for our own stories.

The tall barns stand strong and their wood has turned worn and darker than the black backs that bled out into the ground below.
At a panel I attended on homelessness last year, one woman said she almost forgot she was a person. She said she could barely remember her name. The idea of invisibility in homelessness is just starting to be explored in recent years by photographers, reporters and the like. While living conditions and illness are clearly major factors regarding homelessness, I believe that the invisibility is the most damaging. People know they are human through interactions with other humans. If people continuously walk by without acknowledging you, you may simply forget you exist. Pedestrians safely distancing themselves from the homeless shows society’s inclination to ignore things that aren’t beautiful and perfect.

Homelessness hits too close to home and people don’t want to believe they could be on the streets one day. Dehumanizing the lowest on the social ladder takes away the personal attack and guilt. The main subject of my photo series is to try to bring these issues to the forefront. Brown cardboard signs seem to immediately turn an engaged passerby’s blinders on, but signs that shock them, I thought, might have a different outcome. Realizing there is a problem is the first step to creating a society that embraces both the good and the bad, and attempts to find solutions.

The signs read (l to r): “HELP! hungry for human contact!”, “remembering i exist > $$$,” “will work for acknowledgement,” ”i haven’t heard my name in a YEAR,” “invisible, please help.”
I Would Think It
Was a Dream

David Banks

This piece has been omitted from digital release at request of the author.
You can find this piece in the print version of this issue.
Like Meteors, We Might Burn

Brianna Duff

“—listen: there’s a hell of a good universe next door; let’s go” — e.e. cummings

The sun is rope, I think, or twine, and you unravel it at night. You flick your wrist and we are both undone, the sun and I made new,

or maybe just made dark. You’re rough, the way your burning grip can pull like gravity in moments when I am unbound. And yet:

if you

suggest the night, then I am there. Suggest our bareness and my skin on fire—I’ll yield like stars yield in their dying state. And I am yours

in sheets or in the universe next door, the singular point of you. And if you aren’t a god but only just a man, let me

forget that you might lie, your tongue as silver as the galaxy. Let’s touch enough so I can just be born again through you.

There’s a hell of a something good to come: be silent and let’s go.
These three portraits depict me, but in very different ways. The most literal representation is seen in “Joy and Shadows.” This work plays with the idea that a person can feel opposing emotions at the same time. While I was making this work, I was in a psychology class learning about Freud’s notion of the unconscious, and how discrepancies in it can cause anxiety that we may suffer from without even realizing these discrepancies exist. It is such a hard concept to grasp intellectually, yet it is something that is a daily occurrence. Our emotions run so much deeper than just surface level. Sometimes we are even affected by emotions coming from joys or pains that are so deep in our consciousness, we can’t even explain what is causing them.

“Morning Rays” and “At Day’s End” were both inspired by the idea of peaceful moments when time seems to stand still. “Morning Rays” portrays those days when the sun gently wakes you up, and for a few minutes, nothing else exists in the world. You are in between sleep and wakefulness and nothing has come to trouble you yet. I love those mornings when the first thing I see is light shining on my skin. It’s a warming and peaceful moment that reveals the natural beauty of creation. “At Day’s End” is exploring the idea of decompressing at the end of the day—the moment when you finally feel satisfied with the day’s work and you’re allowed to stop doing homework and stop worrying. This portrait has some extremely exaggerated features, because as I go through the day, I become more insecure about how I look, how much work I’ve gotten done, or how my friendships are doing. As the day goes on, I blow more and more things out of proportion. I think too much. At the end of the day, I’m forced to give up these silly notions and just trust that everything is going to be okay. I remind myself that I don’t need to put my hope in things such as these. The last thing I do at the end of a day is wash my face, not only for cleanliness, but also because I’m washing away the stress and insecurities of the day. “At Day’s End” is this moment of being filled with peace from coming to terms with the happenings of the day.
He lived in northern Phoenix seven years before new cities started sprouting from the desert. After his wife died and half a house was packed in boxes, twenty trees behind the garden bloomed with fruit. He found it odd to see such fragile life exist in Arizona, the sun scorching, descending in sweeps of heat. But every day he walked among the yawning rows of trees and whistled, stood on the roots and reached to break the stems of ripened tangerines. Their flesh was full and sweet—at times a breeze would travel through the open leaves and spread a citrus fragrance past the streets. Before long, the local children found it: a new Eden, the richest fruits ever hidden, perfumed and quiet. They would climb until they heard the man approaching. Stuffing fruit in jackets, they ran, laughing with their secret.
It’s Nice to Know You’re Somewhere

Molly O’Brien

I was thinking about you a lot today. Sometimes I like to imagine what you’re doing at any given moment—you might be buying milk or rock climbing or just getting out of the shower and wiping the steam off of the mirror with the palm of your hand. I make lists of the places where you might be, like Denver or Tallahassee or Baltimore. I wonder how far away you are from me and then try to figure out the midpoint, where we might intersect.

I imagine, sometimes, how you will introduce yourself to me whenever we happen to end up in the same place. I’ll notice your green sweatshirt or the fact that you sometimes carry around beat-up paperbacks. I will decide to say hello and you will say something witty and I’ll say something offputting or nothing at all and you will not care too much. I hope you’ll ask me out for coffee. You will probably order green tea and this will be the moment when I decide I don’t like you. But then, of course, you will change my mind without even realizing it because you’ll start talking about things like the road trip you took to Phoenix last March and how your favorite food is beef stroganoff. I hope you pay me a compliment, but not something predictable. Maybe you will tell me you like all the freckles on my cheek, which of course will make me fall in love with you, just a little. I bet you’ll have some odd habit like twirling your hair or picking at your fingernails while you listen to me talk and I won’t be able to figure out why I find it sort of attractive.

You will learn that I don’t particularly like first dates, so maybe you will invite me over to watch football with your friends. If the Giants are playing, I’ll swear too much and your friends will probably tell you later that I’m weird. I would like to think that you’ll defend me, even though they are your friends and I’m just some girl who liked your green sweatshirt.

At some point I suppose we will have to go out to dinner. I will try my hardest to be graceful and I will fail miserably. My hands shake, especially when I’m nervous, but it will be another few months before I tell you that this is just a side effect of the anti-anxiety medicine I take to make myself kind of normal. When the waitress asks if it’s one check or two, I will try not to blush when you casually say, “One.” I might tell some awful stories about people you have to know in order to find them funny. I think you might laugh anyway and I won’t feel so uncomfortable.

I guess it’s only fair to tell you that no matter what movies we watch, I’ll know useless trivia about them and I will insist on telling you as soon as it occurs to me. Did you know that the guy who plays the mayor in Jaws also played Death in the second ever episode of The Twilight Zone in 1959? He starred opposite Ed Wynn who played Uncle Albert in Mary Poppins. Did you know that Stephen King was furious when Stanley Kubrick chose Jack Nicholson to play Jack Torrance in The Shining? He originally wanted Jon Voight for the role because he didn’t think the audience would see it coming when he went crazy. You will tell me your favorite actor is Paul Newman and you will laugh when I tell you that mine is Sylvester Stallone because he makes me think of my dad. Maybe you will like me for all these things. Maybe you like me for—not in spite of—my frizzy hair, the fact that I sometimes have too many glasses of wine, or that I get migraines and make you turn off all the lights and let me sleep for hours at time. You won’t care that I’m a virgin.

A few weeks will turn into a few months and you will meet my parents and my brother. My mother will probably love you right away. My dad definitely won’t, but he’ll come around eventually. I will tell you that I don’t believe in saying “I love you” until at least six months into the relationship because I’ve never had a relationship last that long. When you finally say it six months after we meet, I’ll get weird and distant and try to pick fights over nothing. What makes you different is that you are the first one to care enough to tell me to cut the crap. I will finally admit that I love you, too.

We won’t live together, but on Saturdays we will drink lots of coffee and tea and watch stupid movies. I’ll fall asleep while you read me the newspaper. I imagine what your house will smell like, maybe something close to pine needles and laundry detergent, and I’ll think about how I’ve never been in a boy’s apartment that actually smelled nice. I hope you have a dog—something bearlike—maybe a St. Bernard with a funny name like Pablo or Grover.

Maybe this is when I will start to tell you the important, funny, awful things, like how I think every guy I have dated broke up with me because I’m still a virgin. I can’t say the word “continental” and I knit scarves when I’m sad. I love reading about serial killers and kidnappers and I’ve watched three documentaries
on Jean-Benet Ramsey because she was my age. I say I like to eat organic food like quinoa but not as much as I like to eat Tostitos and salsa.

I will tell you how much I wish you had been there to hold my hand when I was fifteen and my doctor told me I have Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome and might have problems conceiving, and I cried for a week. Maybe I wish you weren’t there, because I wouldn’t stop eating whole packages of Oreos and I gained fifteen pounds. I’ll probably be embarrassed to tell you that I want to adopt two kids no matter what. I really want to adopt a baby from Afghanistan because I once had to watch a movie about women in Kabul and there was a stillborn baby that the doctor threw on a metal tray once he got it out. I had to go to the bathroom and throw up because the little thing looked cold; I just wished the nurse had wrapped her up in a blanket. I’ll cry when I tell you this, and then I’ll laugh at myself for crying.

Of course I will want to know the weird things about you too. Maybe you will tell me that your favorite song when you were little was “Bennie and the Jets” and I’ll tell you that my favorite movie was Yellow Submarine. Maybe you were on the stage crew in high school and the first girl you ever loved was named Sarah; she played the flute and broke your heart.

I’ll tell you that I’ve never really been in love, which is a lie because I fall in love with everyone all the time.

I know we will fight. Maybe not a lot, but it will happen. We both have bad tempers and so when you do things like refuse to put plates in the dishwasher or fall asleep with the TV on, I’ll make an acidic comment and you’ll yell in response. I’ll bring up things that don’t even matter and say you’re such a bastard and you will leave before you say something you regret. When you slam the door, the windows will rattle. I’ll call my best friend and say, “It’s really over this time. He’s such an asshole.” But the next day you’ll show up at my door, bearing books instead of flowers and we’ll both apologize for being so stupid. We’ll say we’ll never fight like that again, which isn’t true.

I’m not quite sure how you will ask me the most important question—the marriage question. I don’t want anything showy because I know I will cry or say no just as a reflex. You will have already asked my family for permission even though it seems a little archaic. They will all cry because that is what we do. We are a family of criers. This is probably when you will discover that I am more religious than you originally realized; I swear a lot, but don’t let that fool you. I’ll realize I’m not embarrassed to tell you any of this and that will be a new experience for me.

I don’t really care what you do for a living. Maybe you’ll be a teacher or an artist or a cop or maybe you’ll work in an office somewhere and that will be just fine with me. I don’t think we’ll be rich and I don’t think I really want to be. I do want to travel though, to places like Colorado and Italy and Japan and New York—places I’ve never been. I want to see things with you and I want you to be the only one I can talk to about them. I want you to be the only one who understands things.

I like to think about you thinking about me. I wonder if I’ll be the way you imagine. I don’t think I’m ready to meet you yet, and I’m not in any hurry, but maybe it’s a kind of security. It’s nice to know you’re somewhere, and I’ll be able to find you eventually.
Sycamore Anthracnose

Jacqueline Alnes

Spring
We bought this house when we were young and warm, just like your hand that stroked the hair back from my eyes, gently. We used to sit on the front porch so we could stare together at the sycamore in our front yard, a tree that stands disfigured now by some disease that feasts on bark and leaves and twigs. Come, sit with me and we can grow brand new again instead of slowly losing pieces of ourselves like leaves that fall from that tree, swallowed by the unforgiving dirt.

Summer
When light outside glows soft like fireflies I stare at brown leaves falling and wait for you. Across the low white fence you never fixed that weeps out paint in sticky heat, the man next door sets out a bowl of water for his dog, who lies in green grass and never has to beg for just one touch like I do. When your truck pulls up the drive so late, again, I’m curled up on the couch, inside the house where we were tender once. I want easy conversation or the warmth we used to have.

Fall
I’mm talking to the man who lives next door again. That tree is nearly dead, he says. I blush because I like the way his voice sounds: tattered, plain and not like yours. I try to look away from where his hands meet flesh as he hangs his dead deer up with rope because there’s evidence of working, growing, and maybe even love within the rough patches of his palms, the places that I think about sometimes when you come home and brush my shoulder as if I am some sort of afterthought. When the shortened days sink into the nights, we cling together, hollow now.

Winter
The snow is small and noiseless like our bed, a solitary place where we can hear the tree creak as it falls. You lie so far away, though I could touch your skin, your body I remember but no longer know.
Featured Artist:  

Trevor L. Fox

The symbols in “Keys” range from windmills, flowers, and hands, to waterfalls and mountain ranges. All of these images represent exploration of the outside world. The message this picture is sending is open to many interpretations. To me, it shows that exploration of the outside world is the key to understanding life and its many questions.

I take a lot of the inspiration for my art from nature. Walking around campus every day gives me an opportunity to look at the way trees are shaped, shadows fall, and many other aspects in the real world that I attempt to recreate in my abstract art. The picture as a whole is a representation of a ram skull, a symbol of death, while inside I made images of life, trees, and other symbols of the living. The text in the image shows positive words relating to life and growth. The image as a whole shows how closely the two concepts of life and death are related.
Life of a Woman on a Plane

Robert Dean

sonder n. - “The realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own...”

– Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows

She came from worlds bustling with color,
dusty feet and despair;
from wet green valleys with blood-red soil,
from white beaches and dirty beaches,
vast deserts and snowy heights.

The fabric of her life was dyed with ochre and indigo
by an old lady on the side of the road.
It has been soaked in monsoon rain,
stained with fish sauce and smells of smoke.

It is wrapped around her like a shawl,
those close, grainy moments of intimate memory
stitched into a backdrop of adventure-film scenery
spanning continents and cultures,
climates that left her bleached with sun, or pale and bundled.

She holds her worlds within the languages she knows,
her private records of life filed in French, Portuguese and Arabic,
strung together with airplane seat cloth—
illegible to most.

Many of them will echo with the whine of mosquitoes,
barking dogs and welded gates scraping on concrete;
French will be thick and strongly scented
with the smell of dried dates and salted air.

Her husband can be found further down,
next to the sound of trains and cicadas
under colloquial English.
Tonight, Charlotte sits up in bed when I tell her not to get romantic. She's featureless against the rush of headlights slicing through the window shades, but I know she has those dark circles under her eyes—I know she's not smiling. We've been together for eight months, and by now, I understand she doesn't want to introduce me to her twelve-year-old son; I understand there's nothing I can say to change her mind.

“You wouldn't have a good time,” she says again. “You don't like kids.” She lays a palm across my chest, and I can make out the delicate bones of her hand, the ones that look like they belong to a cardinal or jay.

“But maybe I do.” I take a deep breath and watch her hand rise with my chest. “Maybe it’s just been a while since I’ve tried,” I tell her, stressing maybe the way I practiced while waiting for the train at Lechmere.

Charlotte swings her legs over the bed, stands up, and starts dressing in the dark. “Well,” she begins, “what if he doesn’t like you?” She pulls her jeans over her slim hips and crosses back to find her shirt. “What then?”

I stay quiet and watch her get dressed, imagining her moving in reverse. I picture her standing in her own bedroom, a place I've never been but like to pretend I have. I imagine Polaroids slid in the mirror frame, images of her son, her parents, her late husband. I can picture his old mandolin standing in the corner—that hollow body she says she strums every now and then. I imagine his old suits still hanging in the closet next to the blouses that still get worn. I imagine the X-rays rolled up in a cardboard tube, the ones she told me once she still can’t get rid of.

Charlotte buttons her shirt and throws a jacket around her shoulders, says she’s waiting for the right time to bring me home—says she knows we have chemistry, but it’s about timing. She sits on the edge of the bed and runs her palm along the stubble on my cheek, and I think about how sometimes, late at night, she says she likes how I have dimples on only one cheek, how she likes that I smell like mulch and dried sweat after work.

I think about how some nights, I press her harder than I should. How sometimes, I’ll say I’m ready to take a leap of faith, meet her son, see what kind of screwed up, makeshift family we can sort ourselves into. I’ll say I love her, and I don’t believe she loves me back, and maybe it’s time for her to move on with her life, leave me behind. When I do, she always gets upset and leaves as quickly as she can. Those nights, I watch from my bedroom as she walks alone to the train station: shoes clicking, breath fogging the space in front of her, shadow falling behind her like a wake on still water.

But tonight, she stands up and just says, “Soon.”

I nod my head. “Soon.”
Shut Tight

Elsa Marie Keefe | Digital Photograph
The Land

Jacqueline Alnes

1.

The land is an hour away from where we live. When we go there, my mom stays home. She claims she has to take care of the dogs. Sometimes, I ask her to come with us because I want her to see who my dad becomes when he paces fields he has plowed himself. Sometimes I don’t bother, because I like that the land only knows the three of us.

My dad always drives. I usually read while my brother and dad talk about things that I pretend not to understand: batting averages, the pH of soil, the lyrics of old rock songs. On the way, we pass constellations of small towns. Some of them are trailer parks without names. But others, like the fairgrounds that get flooded every year, the Taney County Jail, and the Bradleyville town sign boasting about a high school basketball team from the 1960’s, are places with names that we know. When we pass, we talk about what it would be like to practice basketball after school and coon hunt at night. Sometimes my dad tells us that he used to spend summers in a place like that, at his grandparents’ farm. When he speaks, I close my book and listen.

There is a faded, slanting white church close to the land. It’s called the Church For Jesus. We stopped there one time and peered through thick glass. There were rotting pews, broken glass on the ground, and an altar where Erik said he’d like to get married. When my family talks about the future with Erik, we talk about the Church For Jesus. It’s our way of asking him if he is going to become a smoke jumper without a wife like he often says he will. We imagine what he will be like when he is grown. Each year, it becomes easier: his voice is as low as my dad’s, he begins to drink black coffee, and he is old enough to drive a fire truck.

When we pass the Church For Jesus, we know we are close to the big field, the tufts of alfalfa whispering to each other and breaking apart in the wind. We know we are close to the land.

2.

The land is spread like the hem of a cotton dress. We pull up to the red gate, one that sits like a closed smile against the stubble of hayfield behind it. Erik always opens the gate, his scuffed boots greeting the very dust that has worn them raw.

When we get out of the car, Erik and I become the type of people that we want to be: people who run fingertips along prairie pollen, climb tender birches and ride them slowly to the ground, and catch crawfish in the creek with our bare hands. My dad spends his time in practical ways: he tills the fields, combs the ground for traces of deer, drags dead trees off the paths. Sometimes, he stops to watch us.

This place is some kind of sacred. A field about a mile long marks the entrance. Alfalfa and elephant grass bow when the trees breathe. Underneath, armadillos and foxes burrow, leaving deep wounds in the earth. A creek sits between the field and the hill. Box turtles drink from it before wandering under the shade of blackberry bushes, pregnant and leaning in the summer heat. Up the hill, my dad has plowed fields and planted sorghum, oats, and soybeans. There are three big fields of crops, bordered by remnants of a low stone wall that someone built long ago. We envision them luging stones under the same heat that stifles us now.

At the top of the hill, there is a cedar-paneled wood cabin that we built with our neighbors two summers ago. We squinted and argued under the sun, positioning the concrete blocks until they formed a square we could trust. On that foundation, we lined planks of wood shoulder to shoulder until our small cabin stood. A set of antlers hang over the door. A black potbelly stove paints the air hazy. Three sets of bunk beds make up the ribs of the house; they are narrow, hard, stacked against the
walls. The small clearing for the cabin marks the land like a scar, reminding the earth of us even after we leave for home.

3.

I should tell you that our home doesn't exist right now; the land and cabin are all we have left. Last February, a tornado destroyed our house. None of us were home. Erik and I were especially far away, in Montana and North Carolina where we each attend college. My parents moved into a rental house next to the skeleton of our house. My mom worked each day to sort through the rubble. My dad helped her most of the time, except for the weekend trips he made by himself to the land. On his drives back to our ruined home, he would call me sometimes to tell me that the land wasn't the same without Erik and me there with him.

I should tell you how we got the land. My dad drove around this part of Missouri for weeks, looking. He drove through the Ozark Mountains that are merely gasps in the landscape, past rivers where copperheads lie like subtle currents, past garlands of small towns and trailer parks that lace themselves into the forest. He drove until he found the plot that he wanted. From the sky, our land would be one gauzy, yellow-green patch. The plots around us belong to farmers who stitch the fields together with fences. The cattle roam the green grass, the sheep wander the yellow. Houses are sparse. In front of them, cars stretch out in sunlight.

I should tell you that we know one of the houses out here. When my dad decided to buy the land, it was partially because of Lee, the farmer we share dry dirt with when it blows from our fields to his. Lee is tall and weathered. His clothes are stained and the color has been drawn from them by heat and time. His wife bakes peach cobbler sometimes. His son, Donald, lives up the hill. Donald has heart problems, so he helps Lee instead of trying to make it on his own.

I should tell you that my dad speaks a different language when he's out here. He carries a black notebook with softened edges. He keeps notes about sorghum and soil. He talks with authority about things I didn't realize he knew; red foxes, mottled trees, the ten inches of rain debt. When he talks to Lee, the two of them talk for hours about the sheep, the fence that's down on the west side of Lee's land, how soon they should harvest hay from the big field. My dad is a different man when he's out here. He speaks a language he understands, one of patience and conviction. Men out here mean what they say.

During the summer, I worry about Erik a lot. Each morning when I drive down the road that we live on, there are new patches of trees blackened by fire.

I should tell you that my dad talks to Lee each time we visit. Lee sits on his porch and the three of us stand in the grass below him. We know from the ragged, slow way that Lee speaks that the hay is much heavier than he lets on, that the sheep aren't selling for as much as they used to. Some years, Lee is too busy to settle and talk. This summer though, the summer of the drought, Lee's hands are swollen with age. We listen to him speak for hours, the words coating our brows like dust.

4.

Erik and I decide to come home to Missouri the summer after the tornado. It is the summer of the drought, fierce and dry. The earth swallows the lake. I spend most of my time at the rental house with my mom. We start to pick the pieces of our new house: the wood floor, the cabinets, the banisters. My dad works a job in Oklahoma. Erik fights fire. We have little time to visit the land.

Erik's days string together into a rosary; he leaves and returns from fighting fires in a series of smooth, unending beads, each one a familiar prayer we breathe for him to come home safe. He does. He is a firefighter on the local volunteer department. He is nineteen.

When he is gone at fires, I get nervous. I take the dogs outside more than I need to. I flip through the local newspaper without reading articles. When he comes home each time, he peels off his damp uniform and leaves it on the front porch to dry. While he showers, I make him eggs and bacon. It's all that I can do.

During the summer, I worry about Erik a lot. Each morning when I drive down the road that we live on, there are new patches of trees blackened by fire. When I see the damage from the fires, I'm thankful each time that Erik wasn't in Missouri when the tornado hit. Members of the fire department came to our house the morning after. My mom said that they spent hours picking up glass and parts of walls and some of my belongings off the hillside. My mom said that mostly, the firefighters were silent, save for the moments when they looked in disbelief at the flesh of our home on the ground, at the shattered rafters, at my weary parents who moved slowly through the rubble. The firefighters said they'd never seen anything that broken before.

Sometimes, when I hear things like this, I wonder how long my brother will be able to stand underneath the weight of it all. He has seen bones sticking out, exposed, people screaming that they don't want to live anymore, and the limp bodies of children that I only read about in the newspaper. The fires, too, are beasts of their own. He tries to explain to me the ways that the fire crews have to open certain
doors and windows to prevent deadly drafts, how they spray down specific parts of the house first in order to contain the flames. I only understand that the flames are hungry, that he sprays them with water until they believe they are full.

All summer, my brother mows lawns for fire departments across the county and fights fires as they come. Whenever my mom hears about fires from my brother, or sees tornado survivors on the news, she breathes deeply. She tells us that the first moment is the worst; when you see something you love that you can’t repair.

6.

The dinner in the skillet gets cold. Sausage, corn, potatoes, and onions; Erik’s favorite, but he isn’t home. Dusk settles and my mom calls his phone again. He doesn’t answer. We move from the kitchen to the couch and talk about nothing, really. Both of us stare at the dark, dry horizon as if it is a palm we can read.

My dad is in Oklahoma this week, stuck staring at the railroad cars that churn past his office. He is three hours from us. He is four hours from the land. He tells us he hasn’t heard from Erik when we call to ask.

We take the dogs for a walk. We listen for sirens. When we get home, Erik calls. Something doesn’t sound right. My mom talks to him on the phone, walks in circles by the couch and scratches her head the way she does when she gets nervous. She hangs up and sits down.

“It’s a big fire,” she says. She scratches her head again and calls my dad. She paces in the bedroom so I turn on the local news. The newscasters are talking about the fire. I try to make sense of what they say: over 1,000 acres of land burning; farmers evacuating their homes; Bradleyville is the closest town to the fires; crews are gathering from across the state.

My mom comes back into the room and sits down. She hasn’t cried since the tornado hit, but she cries now, leaning into the couch as if it will somehow keep her stable. She tells me that my dad has been quieter than usual since the tornado. She’s worried about him. She’s worried that this fire will be too much.

Finally, I understand. The fire is close to our land. Erik is driving out there now. My mom and I stare at the television. I think about my dad alone in Oklahoma, watching the Weather Channel because it will make him feel useful, calling Lee on the phone to gauge how close the fire is. I’m sure that Lee will talk to my dad in the language they always use; words spent on what the sky looks like, the speed of the flames, the chance that the land will burn.

Erik calls again and my mom and I both cry when we hear his voice. “Guys, we’re gearing up right now. I’m at the Church For Jesus,” he says. “I’ve gotta get my gear on so we can get to the fire, but I’m at the Church For Jesus. I don’t believe it.”
7.

Erik comes home from the fire before dawn. He wakes us up to tell us that the land didn’t burn. He says he’s exhausted, so we don’t press him for details. He sleeps for a long time. My mom and I fill the morning silence with the drone of the news. Reporters reflect on the fire in a way that only strangers can. They talk about acres burned, the number of crews called to the scene, the monetary damage. Experts warn against using tools, lawnmowers, and smoking cigarettes, making it obvious that they’ve never spent a day out on the farms.

They talk about how tricky the fires are in Missouri this summer. Usually the fires are low creatures, slinking along the ground. This summer, they crown the trees, flinging sparks from the tender top limbs. The reporters tell stories as if they are delivering a diagnosis. I want to hear about the fire the way Lee speaks about things: letting words slip softly and occasionally, letting the full weight of them settle on our shoulders before he continues speaking.

When Lee speaks, he only looks at my dad. My brother and I always stand there, but he doesn’t acknowledge us. Something about Lee—the permanent soil stains on his knees, his hands when they reach to brush the line of sweat and dirt from his forehead—make it so I don’t mind that he ignores me. It’s as if I haven’t completed the rites of passage required to call the land my own. I’ve never skinned a buck or heaved an injured bull out of the creek with a chain and tractor. I haven’t seen. Prettier than Christmas, I think, the way that the woods were lit up against the black of night. The whole forest was glowing. When we drove away, we saw this burnt field—completely black and just burnt to the ground. And there were these cattle, these black cattle, just wandering around that dead field in the dark.”

My mom and I fill the morning silence with the drone of the news. Reporters reflect on the fire in a way that only strangers can.

My dad mentions the sheep and the massive collection of tractor parts on the side of the road. When he attends and the massive collection of tractor parts on the side of the road. When he sees us, he comes out on his porch and sits down.

8.

When Erik wakes up, he makes a pot of coffee. My mom and I linger around him like snow clouds, heavy and nervous. We try not to overwhelm him, but we want to know what it was like to fight a fire that big. He drinks his coffee black with one ice cube in it, the way he always does. His voice is rough from smoke when he speaks.

“We got the call last night for the fire, so Chief said we should go. Chief took the engine and I drove the truck. We drove a different way than we usually do to get to the land, so I had no idea where we were going at first. About thirty miles away, we started seeing smoke on the horizon. We drove a while and then turned down Martin Road and I realized we were heading straight toward the land. I just kept saying in my head we’re by the land and I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t believe it when we parked the trucks in front of the Church For Jesus. That’s when I called you guys,” he says. He takes a sip of his coffee. “They gave us a sandwich each and then we geared up. They put me on burnout crew so we walked up and down highway UU with drip torches to set the woods on fire. We made a firewall and tried to keep flames from hopping the road. There were a few farmers out there. They weren’t listening to anybody, they were just out there on their tractors. I kept looking for Lee because I figured he’d be out there.”

“How was it out there?” I ask.

“Actually, I was tearing up,” he says. “Not because I was actually crying, but the smoke was the worst I’ve ever seen. I tied a handkerchief around my face but my eyes wouldn’t stop. Sometimes we’d take turns lying on the side of the road and sleeping for a little while, but there wasn’t much time to rest. We stayed out there until they told us they didn’t need us anymore. The fire was still going when I left, but there were fresh crews coming in,” he says. He turns his head to look out the window. “You know, it was actually one of the most beautiful things that I’ve ever seen. Prettier than Christmas, I think, the way that the woods were lit up against the black of night. The whole forest was glowing. When we drove away, we saw this burnt field—completely black and just burnt to the ground. And there were these cattle, these black cattle, just wandering around that dead field in the dark.”

9.

A few weeks pass and we decide to spend a day at the land. We want to see the scars that the fire left around it. We want to hold dirt in our hands. We leave mom at home with the dogs. As we drive there, we stare at the corpses of trees, begging the sky for rain. Our land is cracked and dry, but breathing. Only the very fringes were damaged.

When we pass through the gate and cross the creek, we spot a sheep in our woods. We know she belongs to Lee, so Erik gets out of the car to catch her. He scoops her up and carries her to the fence we share with Lee, setting her gently into the pasture. The whole land smells faintly of smoke.

We decide to visit Lee and let him know about the sheep. We drive the long way to his house, around the entire border of our land and his, past the small church he attends and the massive collection of tractor parts on the side of the road. When he sees us, he comes out on his porch and sits down.

My dad and Lee begin speaking in the tedious way that they always do; their conversations are built on hard work and truth. My dad mentions the sheep and there is no indication of thanks from Lee. I’m reminded that this is a land of natural
give-and-take. Life and death are not concepts to be ruminated on; they are realities. There is only work to be done, not favors.

“You know, Erik was out on the fire here last week,” my dad says.

“Oh,” Lee says. I want to hear what he has to say about the fire, but I know it will be a while. I stare at a kitten curled up under the porch. She stretches out and walks toward me. “I was too,” he says, and smiles. “You know how it started, don’t you?” he asks. The kitten rubs up against my leg so I pick her up. It feels wrong. She feels like the fish I catch in the creek, as if somehow her body doesn’t belong with mine. “The man’s neighbors made him use the brush hog. They told him his lawn was too high and they made him cut it. Stone hit metal and sparked the whole thing.”

My dad nods. “Came awful close to my land and yours. We were ready to plow a stretch across the hayfield and burn a bunch of it. We were gonna make a border that the fire couldn’t cross. We would’ve made sure the fire didn’t cross the creek, didn’t touch your cabin or my house.”

“That would’ve been smart, Lee,” my dad says. They settle into talking about other things; my dad asks Lee to find someone to lime the soil, they talk about Donald’s heart for a little while, and they talk about the neighbors who have set up some sort of hunting tent with a heater and a television. They talk while Erik and I stand in the heat of the sun, soaking in the language we understand, but not one we speak ourselves. I let the kitten onto the ground and Lee glances at me, with eyes that hold pieces of the yellow fields in them. I realize I’ve never really looked at his eyes before. He looks back at my dad, who says that we better head out to work on projects before dark.

We drive back to our land and my dad ambles off into the woods by himself. He has forged trails that run like veins into the heart of brush. He keeps track of deer out there with cameras that he positions carefully on trees. Usually, while my dad tallies the number of deer he sees in his notebook, my brother and I head to the creek. Our swimming has become almost a ritual. Sometimes we fish in the creek, weaving lines like spider webs into the clear water, holding bass up by their lips. We let them kiss the sky and then release them.

But today, my brother and I don’t get to swim as long as we’d like. Before we can head to the creek, my dad asks us to check the soil while he walks to his cameras. Erik and I squat in the dusty fields where my dad is trying to grow his crops. We lift the grey, crumbling fragments in our hands and then let them float away in the wind. My brother has taken a class about soil so he classifies it: granular horizon, silty clay loam. I pick up handfuls and let it fall, watching how it swirls from me like ashes.
LaGuardia Terminal C
Carolyn Kolezar

There are birds stuck in the rafters
Of the airport. They're singing
About flying away.
Jasai and his stressed-out mother had just sat down to bless the food when
the gang around the corner huddled together to say a final prayer.
“Lord, bless this food and let it nourish our bodies. Let this water run
through us and cleanse our lives.”
Jasai eyed the sliced ham and fried okra his mother cooked with such
delicacy as she always did. Her hand flung up and she gave a snap faster than he
could blink. He closed his eyes again, mouth watering.
“We live in your name. Amen.”
Jasai, with his smiling face and loosening braids, reached for his silverware
and placed a napkin on his lap.
“Boy, if you try to pick at your food while I’m blessing it again I’m going
to take you outside in front of all your little friends and tear that butt up,”
Jasai’s mother said.
“I didn’t try—”
“Don’t talk back,” she said, not letting him say any kind of nonsense. “Eat
that ham. You’re only seven and you think you can do what you want. Not here
and not today, boy.”
“Sorry, Momma.”
His mother exhaled deeply. “No, baby,” she said, staring into his eyes. “It’s
just—” She shook her head. “I can’t find a job anywhere in this city.”
Jasai didn’t understand. He just picked at his okra and smiled. “I ain’t never
going to get a job.”
Every mother knows to not take these young words seriously. “Oh, so
what you going to do?” she asked, as if asking, “When is the sky going to
change colors?”
“I’m going to go to the jungle and play with the big ol’ animals running
around,” Jasai said. “My teacher showed us pictures of it today and I started
making lion sounds.” He slid his chair back and planted his bare feet on the
floor. What he did next shook his mother in the best way.
“What? You a lion now?”
Jasai got on all fours and scampered underneath the table against his
mother’s legs. “Arrrrggghhh.” Jasai roared.
His mother laughed and looked thankful to be home, even if home was in
a run-down neighborhood with gangs hanging on street corners. “Arrrrggghhh.”
His mother laughed until she couldn’t take any more forkfuls of her mashed
potatoes.
She sat with the side of her face rested in her palm, taking in the imagination of
her one and only child, who she thought would never stop crying when he came out
of her. It took a whole two days for him to stop his bawling, and from then on she
knew that it was dangerous to make him feel pain and let out all of that emotion.
These thoughts subsided while watching her energetic son crawl and roar
through his jungle, fighting off the other lions and preying into the night. She
laughed as he took a small, gentle bite into her shiny brown leg. Jasai scampered
away and pulled down the rag hanging from the sink, shook it wildly as if waving a
branch to let all of the leaves and sticks fall to the ground. His mother
laughed and laughed and forgot about the dinner she had worried over, forgot
about the day she spent feeling trapped. She was finally content with the way
things were: she and Jasai, stuck in a world of beasts and dedication.

“Arrrrggghhh.”
Her son’s roar couldn’t stop or out-roar the blasts that suddenly rang
outside their door, from the street and into their walls like splinters. In a
moment that didn’t require reflection or ask for any, Jasai’s mother’s eyes
widened and looked toward her son in terror. Jasai now lay flat on his stomach
away from the scary objects that whizzed through the air, and asked his mother
with his eyes, What’s happening? She replied with a scream without any sound, a
scream made entirely with her body; she jerked and convulsed with every bullet
that entered her, and her eyes clenched shut. Jasai covered his eyes with his
hands and didn’t dare peek through until the loud hissing and thundering pops
settled in the air and fell to the cracks in the floor. He stared at the ground first
and focused on the small curves of blood approaching his side of the table.
It looked like the lava he saw in class, moving slowly, with little life in it. He followed the trail and saw his mother lying in a position that didn't look too uncomfortable. She seemed to be looking past him, but Jasai didn't notice her eyes, only the big stain of red that soaked her shirt, save for the white sleeves. They looked like wings.

Across from Jasai was a cheap television, a nice white therapist who wore black-rimmed glasses, and a floor littered with toys. The therapist tried to show Jasai every single toy to see how each one made him respond. Anything could’ve been a breakthrough for her, something to write in her yellow notepad.

“What do you think when you see this guy?” she said, holding up a teddy bear to his face.

No response.

“Okay,” she said. Setting down the bear, she picked up a soft frog. “Do you like this one?”

Jasai just stared blankly out the window next to the television. The sun was bright and the houses outside were hard to see. He didn’t speak and the therapist was looking more confused. She sat cross-legged and was really nice to him. She reminded Jasai of his teacher, and he liked her. Still, he said nothing and the therapist persisted: a baby doll, a shark, a kitten, a dinosaur. Jasai couldn’t get himself to feel anything for these toys and the therapist breathed a deep sigh.

However, Jasai’s eyes locked on a giraffe laying behind the therapist’s foot, and after seeing this, the therapist grabbed it and placed it inches away from him. Jasai felt the therapist’s eyes scanning him and became nervous. Whatever anticipation he sensed only became bigger since he began staring at the toy giraffe, trying to figure something out. It was one of those cheap animal toys that can stand up straight but can only stay in that one position, so it was pretty useless to most kids. The little boy brought his numb face forward and it was as if he was studying a math problem. The therapist smiled as Jasai reached forward and grabbed the toy giraffe.

The giraffe rolled in Jasai’s palm. Jasai brought it close to his eyes and rested it in his palm once more. Jasai studied it, or maybe he was playing out a story in his head with this giraffe, since he couldn’t find the energy to actually play with it. Nonetheless, after he placed it standing up on the floor in front of him, much to the dismay of the pretty therapist, he knocked it back over with his hand. He watched it fall over onto the floor, stiff as dry clay, and went back to staring into the space in front of him. The therapist sighed and got up.

Jasai heard her say “Okay,” and that they would “try again in a couple of minutes” after she talked to somebody else. He heard “sweetie” and it did nothing for him. To him, nothing was sweet and in a couple of minutes it would all be the same. So he didn’t respond. She left the room and he was alone, how he thought he wanted to be. He sat for a minute and then another minute. He looked out the window and saw his mother walking with him down the sidewalk, asking him about what he learned in school that day and telling him what she had in store for supper that night. They disappeared and the only thing he saw now were the streets of the neighborhood. It was a bit nicer than his own. He thought about how it could have been to live there instead of his
He thought about never going back, how he was sure he would be killed if he walked into his house. He closed his eyes, hoping to just fall asleep, maybe wake up somewhere else.

_CLICK click._

Something hit the window, not very hard, but loud enough to make Jasai jump and take a deep breath. He felt his heart hammer against his chest and tried to calm down. He thought the shooters were coming back for him.

_CLICK click._

This time he caught a quick glimpse of a furry object swinging in front of the window to the top corner and out of sight. He couldn’t figure out what it was, but it had a big shadow that covered the grass near the sidewalk. Finally, Jasai got to his feet and walked over to the window to see exactly what it was. When he reached the window, he had to look up towards the sun in order to see the massive animal standing outside. Jasai’s mouth dropped open as he gazed upon the skinny legs leading down to solid hoofs, the dark brown island pattern that covered its whole body, and the big slabs of muscle that lifted a peaceful face into the branches of a tall tree. It was a giraffe, but this time Jasai knew it wasn’t one he could place in his palms and knock lazily onto the ground. He had to go outside and see it.

He ran outside of the room and saw adults lingering around the office. They popped in and out of rooms and Jasai hid behind a table that sat next to a wall. If they saw him, they would grab his hand like his mother and walk him back to those stupid toys, ask him more questions that confused him. Jasai scrambled across the floor. He was quick, and if anybody in the room saw him pass by, they would only see a blur. His breath picked up. He slipped out unnoticed.

The giraffe was on the opposite side of the building, so Jasai cautiously walked around the first corner and tiptoed toward the giant creature while it continued to feast on leaves. Jasai figured, judging how peaceful the animal looked, that it could never be violent. He stood for about a minute and finally decided to walk up to him, right next to his tail, and try to poke its backside to get its attention. If he simply yelled at the giraffe, it might spook him. So he took small steps, staring up at the head of the giraffe, who was still eating.

Jasai poked the giraffe. It swung its neck around to see what touched it and caught sight of a small, brown creature near the base of its legs, which were now kicking up dirt. Jasai hid behind the corner of the building. The giraffe stared at the half-hidden face of Jasai, who stared back in amazement. The giraffe appeared to be something he didn’t have to run from, so he came out from the corner of the building. About five feet away from the hooves of the giraffe, they both stared at each other, confused.

“Why are you out here, giraffe?” asked Jasai.
There was no answer, but Jasai persisted.
“Did you come from a zoo or something?”

The giraffe tilted its head as if trying to comprehend the noises coming through the dark lips.

“You so big,” Jasai said with astonishment. “Can I pet you?”

The giraffe only blinked. Jasai reached his hand out, kept it wide open, and waited with patience. He focused on the giraffe. When the giraffe bent down, Jasai didn’t get nervous. He just let the creature’s nose rub against his wild braids. It sniffed Jasai, taking him in. Jasai finally felt some joy run through him. He smiled.

“Are you the giraffe I picked up?” Jasai asked. “I’m sorry that I dropped you.”

“It didn’t hurt.” The giraffe spoke with a voice that lacked emotion.
Jasai gasped. “You can talk too?”

“Of course I can talk,” the giraffe answered.

“But I thought only people can talk.”
When the two running creatures reached a brightly-lit baseball field, Jasai decided that he had had enough. He panted and screamed. He didn’t want to run anymore because his legs hurt, his chest hurt. He cried and pounded his small hands into the dirt below him. He screamed some more.

“I don’t want to run anymore,” he shouted. “My legs hurt.”

The giraffe insisted, “We’re almost there, Jasai. Don’t stop now. It’s only a little further and you’ll be free. I promise.”

“I can’t,” Jasai cried. “I’m so tired. Please don’t make me.”

When the giraffe bent down, Jasai didn’t get nervous. He just let the creature’s nose rub against his wild braids.

The giraffe reached down and tried to lift the child up with his nose. Jasai had no desire to gather the strength to get up, so he dropped to the ground. He stared into the sky above, and the sunset created a smear of a dim reddish color. Jasai didn’t know what was next, but wasn’t frightened, only tired and sad. He wanted to go on and keep running from the gang, but was far too weak.

“I just want my momma,” he shouted. His face became a mess of spit and tears. “I want to eat dinner with my mom.” Angry, he dug up dirt, slinging the pieces back at the world. The giraffe saw that it was a lost cause and bent his skinny legs to sit down beside Jasai. The spotted coat of the animal reflected an orange light from the sky, and his ear twitched at the sound of the gang running from a nearby alley with their guns drawn. They looked like wild boars.

The bulging eyes of the giraffe looked straight out at the buildings and rows of houses. He breathed slowly and was once again peaceful, like he was when he ate the leaves.

“When the giraffe began to eat leaves again, Jasai still wanted answers. “Why are you here?” he asked.

“I have to take you away from all of this,” the giraffe said.

“Are you taking me home? I don’t want to go back,” Jasai said, shaking his head.

“No,” the giraffe said. “It’s a place you need to be. I think you’ll be happier there. So tie your shoes.”

“I don’t even know where I want to be,” Jasai said. The giraffe was confusing him. Everything was confusing him.

The giraffe finally looked at him in a way that a father does when teaching his son how to throw a punch to defend himself.

“In order to survive out here in these streets, you have to come with me, Jasai.”

It was then that Jasai started to believe in the giraffe, trust him. He felt safe. He wasn’t quite as alone anymore.

“Are we going to be friends?” Jasai asked.

The giraffe’s head jolted back, surprised, and then in worry when he saw a face covered in a black bandana across the street from him and Jasai. The two contrasting animals, a lost boy and a mysterious giraffe, stood frozen and watched the gang member stop at the end of the street, surrounded by rows of buildings and apartments. The gang member dropped his head to his chest. His tank stuck to sweaty skin. The young man brought his head up and down as if nodding to a beat through headphones. Jasai’s heart began to thud in his chest. It hadn’t beaten this fast since the night his mother was murdered.

The young man in the black bandana raised his arm and pointed his trembling fingers toward Jasai’s neighborhood. He was trying to gesture towards something, something only the giraffe could interpret.

“Jasai, are you coming or not?” the giraffe asked. “Those bad guys are coming for you. When they find you—we should run to the place you need to be.”

Jasai breathed quickly and looked down the road where the young man was pointing and felt afraid, abandoned. He didn’t know what else they could do, so he agreed to run with the giraffe, away from the oncoming danger. They ran fast, the boy trying to keep up with the long legs of the giraffe, through streets, past convenience stores and families on stoops.

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looked up at the giraffe and admired the creature; he wished he was him. Jasai wanted those long legs that could gallop across the land, craved that long, muscular neck that made him the tallest animal in the jungle, the most beautiful creature that Jasai had ever seen. He looked back at the dangerous men. They were just feet away. The boy got down on all fours and began to roar like the powerful lion he once was underneath the dinner table.

*Arrrrrrggghhh.*

The ground shook when the giraffe brought his neck around in a strong swing. He slammed his neck into each gunman and shattered their guns and their bones, one by one losing breath and power. The giraffe relentlessly pummeled his neck into the men, despite the burning bullets. He sent them flying. Jasai continued to roar and felt no pain.

*Arrrrrrggghhh.* Louder and louder he roared. The battle echoed through the streets, went through windows, and disappeared into the past.

The gang was scattered and motionless. There was a stillness after all the bodies dropped to the ground. It was so quiet that Jasai heard the drops of blood smack the dirt. The giraffe was quivering. Streaks of red covered his coat. The lovely animal was splattered with gunshot wounds and struggled to stay standing. Jasai felt a desire to lie down and fall asleep, to curl up next to the giraffe so he could comfort him, keep him safe from all the grief that follows death.

Jasai was just a small boy, but he was as strong as the king of the jungle and no longer felt he needed to worry. He felt the gaze of the giraffe and walked up to him. The giraffe shook, but managed to keep his magnificent stature while quietly dipping his head down toward Jasai’s outstretched hand. The giraffe sniffed and rubbed his snout against the brown skin. Jasai knew how goodbyes began, and he felt a part of himself leaving when the giraffe turned to face the darkness clouding over the far houses.

“You’re fine now, Jasai,” the giraffe said, and walked away, limping in solitude, away from the boy and his passing world of pain. The boy looked on at the giraffe silhouetted against the red sky beyond the baseball park and surrounding neighborhood that was suddenly filled with the sound of kids playing. The kids came from every corner and were all smiling as they lived out their fantasy worlds. They danced and ran after each other. Jasai hadn’t felt the passion to play or roll in the grass in so long, that when the kids walked up to him, it was like being baptized.

Some of the kids had the same red stains on their white shirts and others wore their damage in their eyes. He accepted these things. It didn’t scare him because he finally knew where it came from and how it got there. The kids took his hands and they ran in a big circle, chanting and singing louder than any of the gunshots in their lives.

In the distance, the young man who shot Jasai’s mother shuffled in the direction of the kids. The young man’s whole body was modulating and his limbs were waving like a flag being blown in the wind. He was grooving, in a voodoo trance with a face that screamed out through its cracked skin and painful expression. He grooved like this for the rest of his life.

*Human Nature*

Brittany Graham | Print Paste and Digital Transfer on Muslin
Almost There

Rob Shapiro

This piece has been omitted from digital release at request of the author.
You can find this piece in the print version of this issue.
Young Death, Old Life
Noelle Casimo | Woodcut Print on Rice Paper
Midwest Fishing Report

Chris Sonzogni

We pop open the steel hatch and climb through, down to the bulkhead that straddles the Chicago River, swinging our feet over to perch on the ledge.

Here, we are like Redbills: closer to the sewer drains and the honest gut-work of the city. I crack a Coke bottle open with my fist and load one of Sam’s stolen fishing lines with a crankbait. The wind fingers our hats and plays with my line. We will never be more aware of falling.

The reel spins. Above, we hear the nervous chitter of mothers walking their children, and yellow taxi rumble to match. The line drags and I imagine vibrations undulating through the bulkhead into my fingers like electric pulses. A tug and a quick release before the line is still again.

There are businessmen riding bicycles, briefcases thrown over their backs, on the rusting bridge across from us.

Sam is talking about Paolo, one of the Canadians, who found the hatch first, but I’m concerned only about the way my bait drags across the bottom of the River and the way the cement work behind my back imprints a braille history of this day, of Chicago, into the tenderness of my palm.
In The Stars
Carolyn Koleszar | 35mm Film Photograph
If the crazy homeless man who sometimes recites Bible verses outside the Times Square Toys R Us is right, this is the last New Year's Eve I will ever see.

Outside, maybe a street or two away, someone is launching fireworks. I can hear the sound like distant gunfire as I sit in Nanny's living room with my mother. It's a nice enough room with a large TV and a box of chocolates permanently situated on the coffee table. An arrangement of Christmas cards and family photographs throughout the space gives it a warm, homey feel. But after having been cooped up in this room all week, I'm starting to feel like I'm being kept in a pleasantly disguised prison.

I see the digital clock above the television change to 10 p.m. and automatically cringe, because I know what's coming. Every hour on the hour, the oversized, gold-colored clock that hangs by the door will make a loud chiming noise for every hour that has passed. I clench my jaw tightly as the clock lets out ten impossible-to-ignore bongs. It seems to go on forever. I try to block it out and listen to the Bay News 9 reporter talking about what the ancient Mayans thought might occur in 2012.

I'm not sure why people give the Mayans any more authority about the apocalypse than anyone standing on street corners screaming Bible verses. Isn't it possible that they stopped composing their calendar because the task simply became monotonous after two thousand and twelve years' worth of entries?

Nanny says that she doesn't believe the apocalypse will take place next winter. She says that she believes in Jesus' word alone, not some ancient civilization of calendar makers. I have to admit it surprises me to hear her say that. Usually Nanny looks for any occasion she can come up with to worry. Shopping in malls, visiting the zoo and even using a microwave oven are all sources of anxiety for my grandmother. Of course, knowing she lost my grandfather, was diagnosed with cancer, and started going blind all in the course of six months, I can't say that I blame her. I imagine it would be pretty difficult to feel safe anywhere in a world that's turned out to be so different from the one you always knew.

As for me, I believe in the upcoming apocalypse only when it suits me. When I'm sitting in a church pew, listening to the priest read from the Book of Revelation in his thick Sri Lankan accent, I tell myself that I have nothing to worry about. It's nothing but a scare tactic. No fire and brimstone for me.

But when my roommate's obnoxious friend is lecturing me about how I could save one cow per year by becoming a vegetarian, I explain to her that it doesn't matter how many cows we save. They're all going to die along with us when the world ends.

And tonight when my mother tells me to stop sulking, that I can celebrate New Year's with my friends next year, I am quick to point out that there might not be a next year. She raises her eyebrows at me, and because I'm 20 and much too old to throw a tantrum, I laugh as if I'm kidding and not just trying to be difficult.

I'd be lying if I said that New Year's Eve has ever mattered much to me. Though I'm a native New Yorker, I've never gone anywhere near the city on December 31st. Some years I think I might go join the festivities, but I'm always dissuaded by the thought of having to wait outside in the cold for fifteen hours without any access to a bathroom.

"Do we really have to stay up 'til midnight?" Nanny asks.

"Yes," my mother says.

If Nanny had it her way, she'd spend most of her time asleep. Sometimes, when left to her own devices for a day, she will report to us that she waited until 9 p.m. to wake up, and then made breakfast and went back to sleep. It's a stark change of routine for a woman who used to wake up before sunrise and fill her days with household chores, visits to the neighbors, and romance novels. But it seems that chemotherapy is, in some ways, having the opposite effect.

I know that Nanny and my mom have discussed the possibility of putting an end to the chemo. But Nanny will never do it. She says she can't stand the thought of giving up this fight, of waiting with her hands folded in her lap for death to come and claim her. She has made the choice to be alive.

And my mom is going to hold her to that choice.

"You know," Nanny says in a tired voice, "I don't normally stay up until midnight on New Year's Eve. Papa and I used to go to bed around nine. We'd have a glass of wine and then we'd just go to bed."

"Well," my mother says, "That was then. This year you're going to stay awake."

I sigh to myself and recline back in my grandfather's chair. Even though Papa's been gone for three years now, this will always be his chair. It's the one blue piece of furniture amidst the pale peach colored sofa and chairs. I'm pretty sure it's the most comfortable spot in the house.
Nanny says she’s hungry, which my mom and I both know isn’t true. She hasn’t been hungry for months, which is why she’s lost so much weight since I last saw her. What she means is that she wants a pretzel. She has recently developed a moderate obsession with the jumbo pretzels they sell in the freezer section of the grocery store. She says she sometimes has trouble concentrating on anything because all she can think of is how badly she wants another pretzel.

“Do you want one, too?” Nanny asks me as she meanders towards the kitchen.

I really don’t. In truth, I’ve developed a bit of an aversion to jumbo pretzels after having eaten them every day at lunch for the entirety of seventh grade. But I tell Nanny I would love a pretzel, because on the occasions I’ve turned down her offer, she seemed so hurt. It was as if by rejecting her new favorite thing, I had rejected her as well. And I cannot reject Nanny. Not now; not at the end of her life, not when I still have fifteen years’ worth of rejections to make up for.

When I was five I told Nanny that I couldn’t understand why everyone always told her she looked young, when she had so many wrinkles. It was a stupid comment, not out of the ordinary for my obnoxious five-year-old self, but it was one that Nanny had a hard time forgiving. I knew that from that day forward I’d been transformed in her eyes. I was a rude and difficult child who had been given too much freedom to speak her mind. Because I knew that was how she saw me, I didn’t bother trying to be anything different. But that was before.

I follow her into the kitchen—a tiny, yet comfortable room decorated with pictures of Papa and a needlepoint next to the old-fashioned phone that reads God Bless Our Home. I prepare the pretzels, and though I know Nanny’s mostly blind, I swear her eyes light up when I pour on the salt.

“You know,” Nanny says as she takes a bite, “I used to watch my weight. But now the doctors just want me to put some weight back on.”

It’s sadly ironic to think about. Weight was always a concern to Nanny, but she could never maintain any of the diets she started. I can’t remember a conversation with her in the past that didn’t include her complaining about the extra pounds she put on. But since she was diagnosed with cancer, her body has been transformed. It’s so hard to adjust to my grandmother’s new body; I’ve been surprised practically every morning of this trip.

“You really do need to gain weight,” I say.

She laughs. “I used to worry so much about calories. But now that I’m dying, what does it matter?” She lets out a soft chuckle, but I don’t laugh at all. This might be the saddest thing I’ve ever heard. The thought of being so close to death that everything that’s mattered to you before doesn’t anymore—even something as silly as counting calories.

I’m startled when I hear a sound that’s either a machine gun being shot in the distance or a series of fireworks being launched.

For a second, I’m not sure why they’re celebrating. What’s so great about seeing another year go by? Sure, we can all make resolutions, but no one ever keeps them. At least I don’t. If I did, I’d be in much better shape and my room would be clean and I’d know how to play the guitar that’s been sitting in my room since I was 13. In the end though, it doesn’t seem like we ever know how to change ourselves. We just let the years go by, and light fireworks, and wait for time itself to change us. And looking at my grandmother, I’m not sure that I really like the way time goes about making changes.

Cuenca
Ellie Erickson | Acrylic and Oil on Canvas
Nanny says she wants to lie down now, so we move into her bedroom. Like all the rooms in the house, Nanny's bedroom is small yet comfortable, decorated with light colors, family photographs, and religious ornaments. And, like the rest of the rooms in the house, it really hasn't changed in my lifetime.

The only difference is that the photograph of Papa that used to be on Nanny's nightstand is gone. For a while after Papa's death, Nanny kept a large blown-up photograph of him right next to her bed. I'm not sure when exactly she took the picture down. But now a photograph of my cousin's new baby wearing a Santa hat is in its place.

"Is it midnight yet?" Nanny asks. She has already changed into her pajamas and is getting into bed.

"It's 10:30," my mother says.

"Oh," Nanny says.

This exchange begins to take place every fifteen minutes. Is it midnight yet? No. Oh.

On TV, Ryan Seacrest is questioning a group of people in their mid-30s about what their New Year's resolutions are. No one responds with anything particularly profound. They want to lose weight. They want to clean out their garages. They want to travel more. My guess is that they've been resolving to do the same thing for the last seven years.

Maybe, I think, this is why the Mayans stopped writing the calendar. Maybe they weren't trying to warn us, but to scare us into thinking our time was more limited than it actually was. Because when you've still got dozens of new years ahead of you, all you do is vow to lose five pounds and then throw the towel in a week later. Perhaps the ancient Mayans were really a crafty bunch that realized that only when we stop thinking that our time is infinite do we actually accomplish things. Maybe it's all a trick.

Or maybe they thought a giant flaming meteor would strike the earth in 2012. Who knows.

What I do know is that it hasn’t happened yet. As of 11:27 p.m., the world is still loud and brisk and animated. The potential of all we might become has not yet exploded in a burst of flames and ash. We’re still here, and as long as that’s true, we can’t afford to live as if we are already gone. I just need to make sure Nanny realizes this.

There is a bottle of champagne that sits neglected in the back corner of a cabinet in the kitchen. A neighbor gave it to Nanny a while back, but she says she has nothing to celebrate, so the bottle remains unopened. I leave Nanny and my mother in the bedroom, watching the musical performances on TV and talking about how music isn’t what it used to be, and I go to retrieve the champagne bottle.

I fill three small glasses half way to the top with clear, bubbly liquid, and carry them shakily into Nanny’s bedroom.

"What is that?" Nanny asks, squinting at the glasses as I set them down on her nightstand.

"Are we celebrating something?" she asks.

"Yes," I say, "We’re celebrating the fact that you’re staying awake tonight."

"Okay," Nanny says.

Earlier, when my mother told her that we’d be staying up, Nanny had sounded so defeated when she agreed, as if we were forcing her to leave behind her worldly
possessions and join a cult. But now, there’s a determination in her voice. She wants to stay awake tonight.

I press the “mute” button on the TV and turn on the stereo that Nanny rarely uses. As I knew it would be, the soundtrack to the 1980’s film *Somewhere in Time* is already in the CD tray. My uncle gave Nanny this soundtrack several years ago, and she loves to listen to the music and recap the plot to anyone who will listen.

Nanny sits up in bed, her eyes closed, smiling as the stirring violins give way to the piano’s sweet music-box melody. As the first track fades out, and the second one builds, Nanny begins to recount scenes from the movie. I listen dutifully as she describes a young writer who travels back in time and finds love with a beautiful actress.

It is nearing midnight when the story is complete, and Nanny is looking livelier than she has in a long time. With just minutes left before the year is over, Nanny, my mom and I are wide awake, filled with energy, and I know that we’ve made it. Outside, the fireworks and celebrations have stopped. Everyone’s gone inside to watch the pivotal moment where the New Year’s Eve ball drops and 2011 ends.

Nanny’s eyes are glued to the TV screen. She’s determined not to miss that last second when an entire year is both completed and lost in the same instant. But I keep glancing away from it to look at her, the woman that I hardly recognize anymore. She’s lost so much weight, and her hair has thinned substantially from the chemo, but she looks the happiest that I’ve seen her in a long time. She’s smiling and she’s making lively gestures when she speaks. But most importantly, she’s accomplished her goal. She’s awake.

After the ball has dropped and confetti has fallen over Times Square, my mother finally grants Nanny permission to go to sleep. But now, she doesn’t want to anymore. She says she feels wide awake. I go into the kitchen and fix three pretzels, and bring them back to Nanny’s room. ✟
“Can’t you stop driving so fast?” I asked. There was pressure in my chest. “David, slow down.” My breath hissed in and out in quick bursts. “David, please!” I gripped at the seat below me. I counted to ten. Then I did it again. We weren’t even at the party, and already I was feeling a little wild.

“We’re going to be late,” David answered instead of slowing down. He ran his free hand through his hair and didn’t glance over. He’d been talking about this party for months. It was to celebrate the release of a book he had collaborated on, an exposé of modern war veterans that featured his photography. It was his first major job since Iraq, and I knew it meant a lot to him. But I also knew what it meant when my breathing started like this. I couldn’t help myself.

“David,” I repeated. He pressed the gas pedal harder, just for a second, before finally braking a bit and slowing us down. I felt my chest loosen. My hands released the passenger seat, leaving lines of gray-white where the fabric bristles had flipped the opposite way.

I should have been angry with him for pushing me like that, but it was difficult, especially since he couldn’t hear the sound of the tires that had set me off. That nearly inaudible tear of rubber against concrete was a memory sound; it belonged solely to me. I knew this, so I didn’t try to make him understand what he couldn’t. Besides, there was the party for him to worry about.

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“You grabbed the casserole out of the oven, right?” David asked, eyes still on the road. I looked at him, hoping he might feel my stare on him, might hear the memory that I did.

I’d been walking with some of the guys from the troop when we’d seen the girl lying on the ground, dress up around her waist and the skin of her forearm and right leg jagged and flopped open against the dirt. The brown hue of her muscle had brightened against the blue flower someone had tucked in her hair, and would have seemed almost beautiful if not for the openness of her. I’d taken a picture, and the click of the flash had sounded like her skin being pulled open and ripped like paper. It wasn’t until Jory picked us up from airport the day we came back to the States that I realized I’d never heard the way tires sounded until right then. I’d never realized they sounded exactly like that girl, like the tear of skin from bone.

“Nell? You got the casserole right?” I wondered why he had to keep asking since I was holding it in my lap. “Yes.”

“And you turned the oven off?” “Yes, David.” I shifted in my seat, and the casserole pan slid a bit in my lap. I wondered what he’d say if the casserole dropped and the pan broke. He’d made it this afternoon even though he never used to cook. He’d spent fifteen minutes picking away rust-colored flakes so it would look nice. He’d also forgotten the tomatoes; he’d left them in the wrong grocery bag on the pantry floor, and I’d found them sitting there with the cereal boxes.

“It looks good,” I told him. He smiled a little. Maybe casseroles, like parties, were something to be proud of.

The front porch light of Jory’s house was on when we got there, though dusk was only just beginning to simmer at the base of the horizon. As we walked up the brick stairs, the leftovers of the photographer in me took over for a slight moment, and I wished I had my camera. It was a beautiful frame, if you could kneel down far enough to catch the very edge of it. I looked sideways at David to see if he thought the same. We always used to do that. When an image was there, as if made for people like us, we would smile at one another and make a camera-clicking motion with our fingers. I’d loved that.

But he didn’t look at me this time.

“Nell!” Jory opened the door and ushered us in. He gave me a hug and patted my back, holding me just long enough that I caught the smell of his cologne and the faintness of the sweet basil that was going to be in the dinner. “You look lovely,” he said. I blushed, and his hand lingered on my waist.

Jory, David and I had all been on the same assignment during our time in Iraq. During our first weeks back, David had spent weekends job-hunting and I had slept on the floor in the den, not wanting to go into the bedroom without him and hating the foreign feel of a mattress. I would often call Jory and ask him to keep me company. On one Saturday in particular, while David was in Raleigh for an interview, Jory and I drank margaritas on the floor and
 watched a scary movie that had come out in theaters while we’d been abroad. I’d asked him to stay over. It was before he’d met Lisa, and he’d only just kissed me and pushed my shirt up around the lines of my shoulders. We hadn’t done it again, but sometimes, like now, he would do something to remind me of how I had been the one to stop him, and not the other way around.

“Everyone’s here already,” Jory said as he pulled us after him. “Lisa’s just finishing up dinner, so if you guys could just…” He deftly maneuvered us into the dining room and sat us at our places, this time not letting his hand linger against my shirt. The other guests, taken in by his subtle cue, began to wander in, champagne flutes and greasy appetizer napkins in hand, to sit around us.

Somebody called David’s name, and he left my side to go mingle. I was left alone in the familiar room. We hadn’t been to any of Jory’s parties in months. At the last minute, we would make up something about why we couldn’t go. Usually I was sick. Another one of her episodes, David would say into the phone, and not the other way around.

His caring was what had gotten David involved with this book. Three months after we’d gotten back to the States, and shortly after the failed Raleigh interview, Jory had offered David a photography job. At the time, Jory was in the middle of working on a collection of stories about modern-day war veterans, and he needed someone to take photographs for him. Though Jory could have done just as well taking them himself, it had given David something to do and allowed him a job that was both familiar and close to home. Jory had offered me a job too, but I’d refused.

Everything had set me off then, and I was still sleeping in the old sleeping bag on the floor. We’d stayed up talking that night, David and I, both of us on our backs in the same tiny sleeping bag. He hated the bed too, and sometimes, if it was a bad night, he would just curl up on the hardwood and snore next to me. David had told me that I should work on the book alongside him. That maybe if I got back into it, I’d be fine. It’ll be just like when we were over there on assignment together.

Now, as I looked at David shaking hands with one of his colleagues I didn’t recognize, I could hear David in my mind. I could hear how wistful he was, both for me and for us; we were in the midst of a war ourselves. I could hear how much he hated me when I told him I couldn’t, that I couldn’t take pictures anymore, and how that was more foreign to him than the country that lingered in the tans on our skin. But even now, I shuddered at the thought of the camera and the job that Jory would have asked me to do.

David had tried to fix me after I refused the job. He’d told me I didn’t have to work for a while. He had a job now and we were fine. Told me he’d do the grocery shopping so I didn’t have to drive as much. But, no matter what he said, he didn’t understand the person that still panicked at the strangest, smallest reminder. It was just another day on the job to him, and though he sometimes didn’t look at the images in newspapers whose captions read Iraq in small print, he never really got why I couldn’t learn to forget. I think that was what had been pushing him away.

Now, a year and a half later, the book was finally done. Jory had decided everyone deserved to celebrate. He’d invited a few of his closest friends and colleagues. He’d invited me, too, the only one of the group who hadn’t held her Nikon in a little over a year. As I sat at the table, I wondered if any of them knew what tires sounded like against the road and if the veterans they wrote about knew sounds like this. Of course, they’d all been abroad at some point. It was why Jory had chosen them for this job. But I knew that no matter what they had seen, no matter what was eating them up inside, they had learned to hide it, the way David had with the bed he finally slept in again and with the new camera he’d gotten to replace his Iraq camera, even though the old one still worked perfectly well. The only difference between them and me was that I hadn’t quite learned to hide it yet.

I cast a quick look at David, who sat across from me. Jory was always good at planning the seating so that people were comfortable, but not so much that they didn’t talk with others around them. David’s hair was done a little nicer today, the way he used to do it before the war, and he’d dry-cleaned his shirt. The sticker from the dry cleaner was still on the underside of his collar, just peeking out, but I didn’t say anything. He was talking to a pretty woman in a blue dress who sat to his right. David traced a finger along the scalloped edge of the tablecloth when she laughed.

“Tell me, Nell,” said a voice from my right. A middle-aged woman who
had collaborated with Jory on various projects smiled at me. Karen, I thought, but I wasn’t sure. “You still glad to be back?”

“I am.”

“It’s been two years, right? I remember David telling me.”

“Yes. Just about.”

“You must be so relieved. I know I was when I got back from my first tour.”

“Extremely.” She blinked at me, wondering if I was being sarcastic. Had I said this same thing to her before? It sounded familiar.

“And is David excited about the book?” she continued.

“Haven’t you guys talked about it?”

She blushed. “Well, yes, but…” Her voice stumbled about for a minute, and I had the slight fantasy of slamming my palm onto the table and reprimanding her for not thinking that maybe I didn’t want to talk about the book or the way David always talked about it, though never to me. Or maybe of just slapping her. “I just thought I’d ask you, since, you know, you’re his wife,” she mumbled, eyes down.

I smiled a little forcedly, feeling bad for making her uncomfortable. “Yes, he’s excited,” I said. “I’m excited for him.” She just nodded.

Lisa interrupted to tell us that dinner was ready, and we were welcome to go in and serve ourselves. The woman (I was sure now that she was Karen) became suddenly interested in her husband sitting across from her, hurrying to stand up with him.

“Honey,” she said as they walked away together, “I thought I told you to wear the green tie. He complained back. She was probably glad he didn’t wear the green tie. It gave her something better to talk about.

I hadn’t realized Lisa was waiting for me until I turned to follow everyone into the kitchen. As long as she and Jory had been together, she’d always been pretty. Not quite as pretty as Jory, who was nearly feminine in his desirability, but as Lisa stood in the doorway, the maternal softness of her stance was pleasing and homey. I wished I could like her a little more; I’d never really been able to be friends with her.

“I’m glad you could come, Nell,” she said.

“Thank you.” I hoped she couldn’t see the insincerity of my gratefulness.

We walked into the kitchen together, and I lingered near the line of people waiting for food. Jory was serving, and he laughed every time the spoon dipped back into the dish. His hair was longer than I remembered. I liked how it looked on him; it made him look younger. He caught me watching him and smiled.

“Nell!” I loved how big my name sounded when Jory said it. “Can you grab me the salad Liam brought out of the fridge? It’s next to the iced tea on the bottom shelf.” I nodded and turned, my shoulder already close enough to brush against the cool silver of the refrigerator. The door had always been difficult to open, something I remembered from the times we used to come for drinks before we’d gone abroad; I had to tug on it a bit before it popped open.

The suction-cup sound squelched against my ears.

For a minute, I had the image again of the girl with the flower in her hair. That memory sound of the ripping of her skin echoed loudly in my ears. This time, it sounded just like the unsticking of doors pulling apart from what held them.

I swallowed. My hands shook a bit as I got the salad out of the fridge and took it over to where Jory was standing by the counter.

“Just put it right there, would you?” he asked. I set it down, right next to David’s casserole. There wasn’t much left of it. I leaned with my back against the counter, arms crossed.

“Looks good,” I said, nodding to the dish Jory was serving.

He looked at me over the steam of the pasta. “Thanks.” We both paused. “You really haven’t been shooting lately, have you?”

I shrugged. “Nope.”

“You were really good, Nell.”

I let my lips turn up, remembering when he told me the same thing on the floor in my living room. “Things happen.”

Jory nodded, and I wondered what he was thinking. His eyes met mine, and I felt a short tug at the pit of my stomach. For a minute, I tasted the faintness of margarita salt on my lips. But then I remembered David was there, and I practiced hiding the way everyone else had learned to do. I touched Jory’s arm and went back to the dining room, forgetting to grab any of the casserole on the counter.

People came back in the room in groups of twos or threes and sat down. Someone scraped his chair against the floor as he sat down next to me, and someone else giggled. I thought about David, strangely, even though he was
The first time we were shooting in action together on the assignment, I had been so overcome with adrenaline I was practically in hysterics. He had laughed at me for finding humor in what was so grossly not humorous. Later that night, as I felt the tug of his contour against mine, we remembered and laughed again. We felt bold.

Eventually, Jory came back in too. I watched him settle down in his seat. Jory's skin was starkly russet-colored. I liked that about him. I glanced at David and, seeing him already occupied, I leaned over Liam, a friend of Jory's who I'd met once or twice, my hair brushing against his plate.

“So are you happy with how the book turned out?” I asked Jory, because it was an easy thing to talk about. He glanced at David before nodding into his arugula.

“Absolutely. Everyone did fantastic work. Just fantastic,” Jory said. I kicked the sandal off one of my feet and imagined stretching my toes toward Jory’s shoes. “It’ll be worth seeing.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” I said. I smiled, and Jory raised an eyebrow.

Karen laughed next to me, and Liam shifted so that I had to sit back in my seat away from Jory. My shoeless foot accidentally knocked David's leg across the table from me.

“Careful, Nell.” David looked at me in annoyance. The woman in the blue dress looked like she was mid-sentence.

“You have a dry cleaner sticker on your shirt,” I told him. He stared at me as the woman turned and peeled it off. She patted the collar.

“There.”

“Thanks.” He smiled and looked through me.

When I was photographing, people looked through me a lot. They were uncomfortable, so they didn’t look at the little square of glass or at the photographer, but just behind them, as if they were less on display that way. It was like on school picture days, when kids would smile their biggest smile, but when the prints came back, they never quite looked like themselves. There was an emptiness to people who knew their picture was being taken. I’d always preferred candid’s. It’s what I’d told our wedding photographer to do. That way, the only thing you would see was the joy of a moment you weren’t expecting.

I’d only had a few people ever really look at me while I was shooting. During one of the air raids, a man, a startlingly tall man who had been carrying a young woman in his arms, had been coated in dust and running through and away from the gunfire. The dust fell against his unshaven skin. It settled on the
woman’s bare face. I had raised my camera to my eye and steadied the shot. He had turned, though, when he heard the first click, a click different in some ways from the click of a gun, quieter, less obviously condemning. I shot again the moment he began to register me. Then, he had taken a few steps closer, the dead girl still in his arms. I had almost backed up, but as there was nowhere to go, I just took another picture, my camera rattling away.

No pictures! He’d shouted at me in a steady voice that was not the kind of steady of a dead woman held close in your arms, but the kind of steady of someone furiously, unsettlingly distraught. Someone who wanted to be heard. He’d spoken English, but badly. No pictures. Please. He had pressed closer to me, the please spitting angrily from his tongue like fire. How can you? No pictures. He hadn’t wanted me there, but he had seen me. He had seen right into me.

“Nell?” Jory was giving me a strange look. I glanced down at my hands and saw the slight tremor in them.

“I’ll be right back,” I said. David looked over, listening carefully, as Lisa turned to me in surprise.

“Want me to go with you?” She made to take her napkin off her lap. I didn’t want her to follow me, so I shook my head and pushed away from the table. As the hardwood floor touched the bare toes on my right foot, I noticed that I still wasn’t wearing one of my sandals. I didn’t stop to put it on.

Steadily, I walked out to the hallway. They hadn’t closed the front door, so I had only to push open the screen door and I was outside. I breathed hard for a minute, calming myself.

“Nell?” Jory had followed me. I wanted to lean back into the sound of his voice.

“Hi.” Things were silent for a minute.

“You okay?”

I considered that and decided that I didn’t want to answer. “Remember that time with the margaritas?” I asked instead.
It wasn't what I was expecting. I turned away from him and felt myself sink into the ground. The grass was paper-thin against my bare legs, slick from having been watered earlier on an automatic sprinkler system. I ran my fingers across it.

“Can’t you just contain it?” he asked. “We’ve been back long enough.” I gripped the grass a little harder.

“Tell me, David,” I said. “How can you contain it?” The words tasted like metal as I said them. They stung a bit. We were good arguers, but we hadn’t really practiced in a while. “Advise me,” I taunted. He sighed behind me, like this was a chore. Like it should have been obvious. And maybe it was obvious to him. From the very beginning, he’d learned to hide the war that flickered through him in memories. He didn’t tell anyone about the sleeping bag. Or the new camera. I was the only one who ever had an issue keeping it down.

“Jesus, Nell,” he repeated. He couldn’t fix me. He’d tried. He could fix himself, buy things or change things to make everything better, but I was still the one thing in his life that refused to adjust. I was still stuck in the war he was trying so damn hard to forget. Why did it matter so much to me? Why was I the crazy wife who couldn’t seem to get over the war? I twisted my hands in my hair and squeezed.

“You just have to try, Nell,” he told me. “We didn’t even fight. You have to remember that.” I thought about the things that weighed me down, the things I saw over and over again. The woman in the dust. The blue flower and flaps of skin. How was David like this? What had he seen that he had never told me about, that he had buried and learned to ignore? I felt like sobbing. I wished that he had told me, and that he’d felt comfortable enough to talk about it with me.

“But we still saw everything, David. And they didn’t even want us there,” I said. I heard it again. No pictures. How can you? “He didn’t want his picture taken.” David shook his head hard. He clenched a fist and I wondered if he wanted to shake me instead, rattle me around into someone resembling the woman he had married from the candid pictures.

“Who didn’t, Nell?” he asked.

“That man, David. That man with the dead woman in his arms. He was grieving.” I was actually crying now. I realized I’d never told him about the man, just the woman in the dirt. “And I took a picture even though her skin…” I trailed off, feeling it as if it were my own flesh being separated in chunks. I ran my hand up my arm. Did David even remember that woman? I had told him her story in the tent. We’d sat together, talking, and I’d told him that it bothered me. He’d stroked my hair. But that had been so long ago.

“Nell, I know,” he said. “But you do it because it’s your job, and you learn to forget.” He sighed. “You just learn to fucking forget everything, okay?”

“I don’t want that,” I said. We both stayed still, balanced, waiting.

“No.” He studied me, and I stuck my shoulders back. “I need to be out here.”

“Why?”

“Because they think I’m crazy,” I said. They already know how to forget.

“You’re not crazy. You just care.” This was what he used to tell me. Somehow, it sounded different this time. His eyes were wandering, and I wondered if he even believed what he was saying. “But sometime, Nell, you’re just going to have to try to get over it. We all did.” He paused and looked over his shoulder to the house. I could see him thinking about the camera that was his entire life, the new one, not the old one on the closet floor, and about how he and I used to stand together in the middle of a shooting with cameras stuck to our eyes. I could see him wondering why that wasn’t what I cared about now, the us that had been there behind the shutter. “You just have to pretend it’s no big deal.”

“But it is a big deal.” I shook my head, so confused by him. “It’s a huge deal.”

“Nell, don’t.”

“It’s a fucking huge deal, David. Stop acting like you can just forget it.” I slammed my hands on the ground so that the dirt smacked into the creases of my palm. The ground felt like it was hitting back. I hit again and again, feeling the searing up and down of the motion as the dirt buried itself in me. I was crying now. I was shuddering, the way I had in the car with David, but it was
more violent. Nausea overwhelmed me in waves as I felt my nails break into my fists.

“Nell, stop!” I beat the rawness of my skin down, again and again and again. The sound of my yelling was in my ears. I could imagine the people in the house pressing against the window, watching. I could imagine the photograph this would make. The peach of the porch light would give us halos, make us look holy.

David reached for me and I beat against him too. I grabbed fistfuls of grass and tossed them at him, smeared it into his shirt and against the collar where the sticker had been. I lashed with my nails and thought about standing up and kicking him. I wanted to. God, I wanted to. I grabbed the buttons at his neck and pulled him to my face.

“I shouldn’t have done what I did, David!” I thrust punch after punch at the stripes on his shirt, pummeling myself into him. He was yelling back but I couldn’t hear him. Things in my own mind were too loud. There was a rhythm to my insanity. I would have beaten David to death, gladly, the heel of my hand repeatedly striking its mark, but he grabbed my wrists and wrenched me to the ground, rolling on top of me and holding me down with all of his weight. My arms were pressed into the grass, bent repulsively to the point of breaking.

“Nell!” He was in my face, shouting. “Nell, stop! It’s over.” He pressed into me a moment, the way he used to, and when he knew I wouldn’t hit him anymore, he got up.

I felt my back in the grass. The wetness soaked into my shirt.

“We shouldn’t have done it,” I said, my voice scratching against my throat. Because I shouldn’t have done it. And he shouldn’t have either. Even if he had learned to forget. Even if he had hidden it on old film in the back of a closet. He shouldn’t have done it. I saw myself in him, the stupid look on my face when that man held up his dead wife and told me, *no pictures.* It terrified me beyond anything that David reminded me of myself. I hated that when David looked at me, something lingered in him that was so me it was glaring and recognizable, the way the war had drawn me into the camera and away from the people on the other side. Maybe I had returned to the States and regressed into the memories. Maybe he hadn’t. Maybe it had been two years of trying to forget, but I hated him for actually forgetting.

He leaned down and tried to kiss calmness onto my forehead and then my lips. It used to work. But now, I wanted to vomit away the taste of him.

“Fuck you,” I said. I pushed him off of me. Even though he was stronger and could have held me down, he moved off of me. I stood, brushed off my
shorts, and went to go back inside. David waited until I was through the door before following me; I heard his footsteps, but I didn’t turn around.

Jory was waiting in the hallway. There was still conversation in the dining room, but it was more subdued. I tried not to imagine I could hear them saying my name.

“You okay?” Jory asked. His face was crumpled in serious concern. I wondered what he’d witnessed through the thin screen door. I hadn’t cried the night of the margaritas. Back then, I’d just let him hold me. But now, I felt strange and unconnected, and I didn’t want him near me.

“I’mfine.”He didn’t attempt to stop me, though his eyes were heavy. I kept walking until I found the bathroom. It was a big, two-sink, full-mirrored room, set up in a way that reminded me of the bathrooms in restaurants with the couches and flower pots on the counter tops. I stood there, my hair a tangled mess and my shirt dark with the wetness of the grass, and I rubbed my finger under my eye where the mascara had smudged. My foot was cold when I moved it to rub against the shoe I still had on. I thought vaguely about the sandal under the table and the pant leg of David’s khakis.

With a jolt, the door opened behind me; I turned to see the woman in the blue dress walk in. She stopped short when she saw me, and her face colored. Had she seen everything outside?

“Oh, sorry, I’ll—” She turned to leave, but I waved at her to stop.

“Don’tworry.You’refine.”

She smiled awkwardly. “I just wanted to fix up my makeup. It’s so hot in there with all those people.” She put her purse down and shuffled around inside until she found her lipstick. She leaned far over the sink and swept it on in a precise movement. The color was too dark for her, I thought, but she kept pressing it on, sinking it deeper into the small creases of her lips.

“It’saprettycolor,”I lied, watching her. She looked up at me in the mirror.

“Thanks.”She paused for a minute, sighed, and made eye contact through the glass. “Jory asked me to check on you.”

“He did?”

“Yeah, he’s worried. About what happened outside. Just to let you know.” She looked uncomfortable and I tried to see myself the way she had seen me, wrestled to the ground by David.

“We shouldn’t have done it,” I said, my voice scratching against my throat. Because I shouldn’t have done it. And he shouldn’t have either.

“Thank you,” I said. She added another coat. “It really is a pretty color.”

“You can borrow it if you want,” she said. I shook my head and she shrugged. “Okay, well, see you in a minute.” I watched her leave through the mirror.

I adjusted my blouse. It fluttered against the flatness of my belly, light as lace. As I watched in the mirror, I noticed a tear in the side from where David had wrestled me down. I let myself think, for the first time, that I hated him, if not for anything else, then for the shirt. Or maybe for not knowing about the margaritas. For not asking even though he’d had to replace the tequila when he’d gotten back. For being so damn good at forgetting.

I pulled at the tear, then yanked at it, so that it ripped all the way up in a jagged line. The rip exposed the thin lilac of the camisole underneath, and I pulled the ruined fabric off so that all I could see was the purple. It was a pretty color, and I wondered why I had covered it up before.

Tousling my hair a bit, I tossed the shirt in the trash and went back out to the dining room. Only Jory looked up when I walked in, and his eyebrows rose when he saw me. David wasn’t in the room. He was probably in the kitchen, hands on the counter, looking at his casserole dish and wondering when I had fallen apart for good and when he hadn’t.

Watching Jory, I had that same strange ache for a camera so that I might capture his expression as he looked at me. His eyebrows nearly touched his hairline. I laughed at him, and I didn’t hold back. Even though I was loud, I felt good. I felt big, the kind of big I was when Jory called my name across the kitchen and needed me for something. If anything, I wanted my camera so I wouldn’t forget that.

“You okay?” he mouthed. The corners of his eyes had scrunched slightly at the sound of me and at the sight of my tank top strap slipping off my shoulder.

I nodded. Fine. And I smiled. He returned the gesture, and the russet-brown of his skin nearly glowed in the light. I wanted him to kiss me, and I knew he would, this time, if I asked.

“I’m fine.” And when he laughed at the unruliness of me right then, I couldn’t help but laugh too. ✤
Sculptor's Hands
Lauren Sheridan | Ceramic with Acrylic Patina
Jacqueline Alnes is a senior majoring in Literature and Creative Writing. She’s moved eight times, visited 27 states, 22 countries and is still searching for adventure. She loves road trips, especially when she has plenty of popcorn to snack on. In her free time, she enjoys going for long runs in the farmlands and swooning over James Galvin’s poems and prose.

Elizabeth Amonette is a third-year Communications and Art major at Elon. When she’s not napping or watching an absurd amount of Netflix, she enjoys taking film photographs.

David Banks is a junior Creative Writing and Literature major from Fairfax, Virginia. He talks in his sleep, often about the practicality of scissors—or lack thereof.

Kelsey Camacho is probably going to live on the moon when she grows up.

Noelle Casimo is an artist who has seemed to have a natural talent for seeing something the way it is since she was very young. She has always been able to create realistic, lifelike pieces. She considers this a great blessing and is glad to be able to share it with others through her interpretation of life and death.

Robert Dean is a senior pursuing the International Studies major with a regional focus on Africa, and leads the Elon Model UN Society on campus. His writing is influenced by his experiences growing up overseas in an expatriate family and his passion for travel and discovery.

Brianna Duff is a sophomore Creative Writing and Physics double major. When asked, she will say that this is because the world is beautiful both ways she sees it. However, she would like to apologize to you for the lack of hover cars and time travel. She is working on this.

Ellie Erickson has one month of college bliss left until she moves to Chicago to pursue a career in social work. Ideally, she would love to use art therapy as a method of expression for disadvantaged populations.

Trevor L. Fox is an artist who attempts to recreate the unity of nature and express the ambiguity and beautiful connection between all living things and the environment. The inspiration for the lines and symbols found in his drawings are captured from the miraculous natural world around us.

Brittany Graham is a third year Art and Arts Administration major who is enthusiastic about painting, trying new things, and of course, the all-too-often Cookout shake.
Molly O’Brien is a senior Creative Writing and Anthropology major and sweater enthusiast. After graduation, she plans to move to England and marry into the royal family.

Kaitlyn Palumbo is a double major in Art and Psychology. She loves playing dress up.

Olivia Pohl is a dedicated Cinema student who has always had an affinity for studio art, specifically realism through painting. Recently she has branched out, prompted by the design classes she has taken at Elon, but even when she does more surreal pieces of art, she likes to base them in realism. At Elon she loves that she has the opportunity to maintain that aspect of her life and improve on it exponentially, even though it is not her major.

Rob Shapiro believes in the designated hitter.

Lauren Sheridan's real name is Smurf, and her guinea pig is named Doobie. She enjoys arts and crafts, cooking, and playing rugby.

Chris Sonzogni is from Emerald Isle, North Carolina.

Kaitlin Stober is a sophomore majoring in Sociology and Art with minors in Psychology and Women’s/Gender Studies. She is a SPARKS peer educator as well as a member of Elon's cross country and track and field team.

Gabriela Szewcow listened to 8tracks and ate Special K straight from the box the entire time she was designing this magazine.

Sarah Wasko is a sophomore Strategic Communications and Art double major from Marietta, Georgia. She is very passionate about photography as well as the environment and nutrition. She enjoys running, hiking, and watching a gratuitous number of documentaries on Netflix. She plans to study abroad in Copenhagen in the fall.
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<th>fiction contest 2012</th>
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| poetry contest 2012           | judged by A. Van Jordan   |
| first place                   | Rob Shapiro               |
| second place                  | Kelsey Camacho            |
| third place                   | Jacqueline Alnes          |

| nonfiction contest 2012       | judged by Ander Monson    |
| first place                   | Jillian Weiss             |
| second place                  | Cody Greene               |
| third place                   | Kelsey Camacho            |

submissions guidelines

Colonnades welcomes all submissions of fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, as well as visual and audio-visual art. Submissions must be free of grammatical and mechanical errors. Pieces are chosen for publication through a blind reading and ranking process by staff members, taking into account the space available in the magazine. Accepted submissions are automatically entered in the magazine contest.

All pieces should be submitted electronically: literary submissions to colonnades@elon.edu and art submissions to colonnades.art@gmail.com. In the subject of the email, include your last name and the title of the piece (ex. lastname_title). In the body of the email, include only your name, Datatel number, the title of your piece, and genre. Save your submission as the title of your piece and attach it to the email as a Word document (do not paste submissions into the body of the email). You may include multiple submissions in one email.

Each piece of artwork must be saved at 300 dpi resolution, in TIFF format.

The deadline for literary submissions is January 13, 2014, and the deadline for all art submissions is February 2, 2014.
special thanks

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- Our Readers