Tributaries

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2012-2013 Staff

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Our Mission

Ridicule is the tribute paid to the genius by the mediocrities.
--Oscar Wilde

Tributaries is a student-produced literary and arts journal published at Indiana University East that seeks to publish invigorating and multifaceted fiction, nonfiction, poetry, essays, and art. Our modus operandi is to do two things: Showcase the talents of writers and artists whose work feeds into a universal body of creative genius while also paying tribute to the greats who have inspired us. We accept submissions on a rolling basis and publish on an annual schedule. Each edition is edited during the fall and winter months, which culminates with an awards ceremony and release party in the spring. Awards are given to the best pieces submitted in all categories. *Tributaries* is edited by undergraduate students at Indiana University East.

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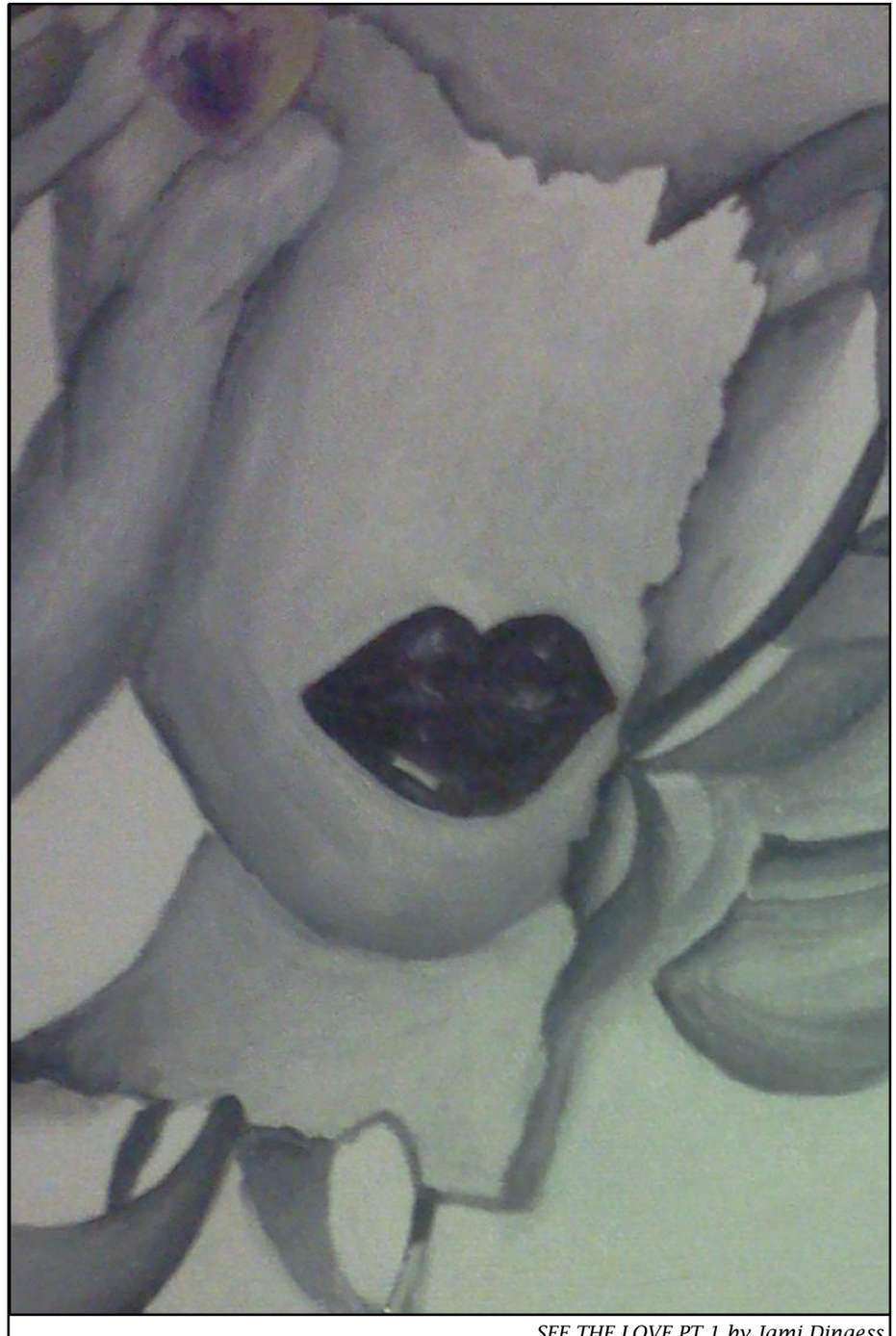

SEE THE LOVE PT.1 by Jami Dingess

Fiction

“The Right Hand Pocket”

by Ryland McIntyre

“Hi Linda.” Michael said, stepping in from the brisk, cold sun. His ears red and hands in his pockets, he had just rung the door bell.

“Oh, hello, Michael,” She said earnestly. “How are you?”

“I’m okay—I’m good.” They looked at each other for a moment, Michael a bit unsure of himself. He glanced into the house and back at Linda.

“How are you?”

“Oh, I’m fine. I’m fine. The usual.”

Michael nodded.

“Here, come on in,” she said, stepping back with the door in her hand, subtly bowing her head. She spoke sweetly and softly, “Sarah told me you’d be coming. I didn’t realize it would be so soon.”

Michael followed her through the dining room and into the kitchen. He tried not to look at the pictures on the wall. He’d seen them dozens of times, wanted to ignore them—at once curiosity now replaced with a feeling of emptiness.

“Yeah, I hope I’m not intruding on anything—”

Linda cut him off. “Oh, no, don’t be silly. Of course not.”

“I just need to grab a few things. I left them here before the trip,” Michael said as he walked in the kitchen. Sarah’s father, Kurt, was sitting at the table doing a crossword puzzle. His glasses hung low on his head as usual.

“Hey, Mike,” he said.

“Hi, Kurt.”

“Didn’t think I’d see you.”

“Yeah, I know. I, you know—been busy.”

“Yep. As usual.” Kurt responded in monotone.

“Yeah—”

“Such is life,” He added, before looking out the window and back at his puzzle.

“Feel free to poke around, I don’t really know what’s lying around where.”

“I can’t say I’m really sure, either,” Linda added, again speaking softly and kindly.

“Oh, it’s okay,” Michael responded quickly. “I think I just left a few things in the closet, I’ll be right back,” his voice trailing off as he hurried out of the kitchen and up the stairs, breathing a sigh of relief as he turned the corner of the second step.

A manic feeling of anxiety quickly took its place as he continued, heightening with each step upwards. At the top of the stairs, he flushed the look off his face, dismissing any apprehension about what was now too late to be undone. He walked across the carpet, everything white and clean, sparsely decorated, and stepped into the spare bedroom. He glanced at the bed, pausing briefly, removing himself from the moment.

Again, shaking his head, he continued. He turned away, reaching for the gold knob of the closet door before pulling it open. It was filled with belongings—coats, shoes, sweaters, boxes—almost none of it his. He sifted through the racks until he found what he was looking for. A dark, nylon sheath. He unzipped it for a moment, making sure its contents were still there. Made of fine wool, he ran his hands across the fabric of a suit jacket and pants, enjoying the texture of one of the few decent garments he owned.

***

Michael walked out from the curtain, barefoot, slightly unnerved by the public space. Sarah's eyes gushed.

"Oh my god. It looks so good on you." Michael felt the front of the suit just above the pockets with both hands, then looked back at her, charmingly coy.

"You look so sexy," she whispered. "You have to get this suit. Turn around, let me see." Michael submitted, doing a quick twirl before walking up to her.

"I do really like it," He said.

"It looks so good, baby."

"I shouldn't get it, though."

"No…" She said, showing playful disappointment. "It looks so good on you! We should buy it."

"It's too much, we shouldn't spend money on this right now."

"No, it's fine. I want to buy it for you. I'm making money, it's fine."

"I know, I just—"

"Really, it's fine. My mom always says you can't shop for things, you just have to buy the things that come to you. This suit fits you perfectly! You have to—"

"—I know. I know. It's just, really, I know we have the money. But it's your money. It's not mine."

"Baby, please. Really, it's fine. This suit looks so good on you. It's rare you find something like this. And it's not that bad."

He looked over at her for a moment, before scanning the store.

"You'll be making money soon enough, it's fine."

Michael sighed reluctantly.

"It does look really good on me."

They were still in the kitchen when Michael walked back downstairs. Linda seemed to be shuffling through the cabinet while Kurt sat at the kitchen table, still pensively hovering above his crossword puzzle. Linda turned from the cabinet.

***

"Did you find everything?"

"Yeah, I'm all set. This is…this is all I needed." Kurt looked up for a moment, not saying anything.

"Ok. Well, is there anything else you need? Could I make you a cup of tea?"

"Oh, no thanks. I, uh, I really should get going." Kurt looked up again. "I have a bunch of other errands I gotta run."

"Oh, Ok. Well, I'll walk you out."

Michael and Linda walked towards the opening to the dining room. Kurt looked up again, this time waiting for Michael. He stopped at the table, sure what to say.

"Kurt, thanks so much…for everything." Kurt stood up, and stuck out his hand.

"Michael, it's been great having you around," he said, stone faced but seemingly sincere. They shook hands, looking each other in the eye for as long was it was comfortable.

"I'll tell Sarah you were here."

Kurt sat back down while Michael and Linda walked for the door to say their goodbyes.

"I'm sorry it didn't work out," she said, piercing the left side of her lips as she spoke.

"It's ok." He paused. "Really. It's been great."

"Well…" She replied. Michael went in for a hug, not knowing what else to do.

"I'm not sure when I'll see you…But I wish you the best of luck."

"Thank you, Linda. I really appreciate it."

Michael zipped up his coat. He opened his arms where he was holding the suit, nervously pretending to check if something was dragging on the ground.

"Well. I'm sure I'll see you again sometime," he said, not really sure if this was true.

"Oh, sure." She said, also not really knowing. And they looked at each other for a brief moment before Michael shrugged his shoulders and turned towards the door. Putting his free hand in his pocket and clenching his shoulders to brace for the cold, he stepped through the front door, suit in hand, and walked slowly towards his car.

"Book 'Em"
by Krisann Johnson

Lieutenant Todd Askins didn't look up from his computer.

"Name."

"Edward Brower."

"Address."

"539 M Street."

"Occupation?" There was a slight pause.

"I'm in auto sales. Is this really necessary? I mean, I didn't do anything bad, did I? I didn't hurt anyone."

"Marital status."

Edward sighed. "Divorced. She left me for a…a…teacher."

"How nice. Phone number."

"Not just any teacher, but our son's science teacher. What's he got that I ain't got?"

"Good English. Phone number."

"My cell is the only one—"

"Number."

"555-372-1933."

"You get one phone call. You may call a lawyer if you wish or someone to pay for bail. You get fifteen minutes starting now."

"But I didn't do anything!"

"You robbed from Nate's Tire Store."

"I wasn't stealing! I was just going to hide some of his funds as a practical joke!"

"Joke's on you, Mr. Brower. You have thirteen minutes."

Edward puffed. "This just ain't fair!"

"Life hardly is."

"Who am I gonna call, huh? Me and the missus don't speak, Junior is only sixteen, and I got no lawyer."

Todd gave him a glance. "Do you have any living relatives?"

Edward sighed. "I suppose I can call my brother, Bill. He's a stock broker, though."

"Make it quick. You only have ten minutes."

"Listen, can't you start over? It might take awhile, long distance."

Todd sighed. "Nine minutes, thirty seconds."

"A hard ball, eh? You're gonna play that way?" He started dialing. "No sympathy for the blue collar."

"Nine minutes."

"It's ringing, it's ringing! I don't need a countdown!"

Todd kept typing, filling out his report and ignoring Edward's pointless phone call.

"Nude"
by Brittany Hudson

Last Tuesday, just after my evening shower, I became invisible. I turned off the water, picked up a towel, and secured myself tightly in its warm embrace. I stood in front of the white, pedestal sink and looked into the large mirror covered in a thin layer of moisture.

Suddenly, an urge washed over me to create. The steamy haze covering the mirror became my blank slate and I, the artist. I held up my right index finger, which had found a new purpose as a stylus, and pressed it against the mirror. Soon, an oval appeared where I thought my face should be, and then came two large round eyes that resembled my own, then a small hump for a nose. Lastly, I drew a pair of full lips that I had always wished to have.

I stood back to examine my masterpiece. The portrait of myself gazed back at me with sadness. Steam rapidly turned into droplets where my finger had made contact with the glass. My image soon faded. Several paths of water raced down the length of the mirror and collected into a pool along the sink. I took a washcloth and began clearing the rest of mirror of the foggy haze. With each stroke of the washcloth, I expected to see my reflection appear in the mirror…but it didn't. There was no oval face. No big round eyes. No small hump of a nose, and no set of full lips that I had imagined. There was nothing. I was invisible.

Terror swept over me as I stood in front of the mirror in shock. The mirror only revealed the closed door behind me with my bath robe hanging from a hook. Frantically, I tried to find myself. I whipped around and grabbed a small compact that was lying on a nearby shelf. I peered into the small mirror, but it revealed nothing more than the bathroom wallpaper; a mass of purple blossoms.

I collapsed to the floor, breathing heavy; my world spinning off its axis. I tore my eyes away from the compact mirror and examined my body. If I couldn't be seen in the mirror…was I really even here? Was I dead?

Looking down I saw that I was still wearing a towel, my limbs were all intact and I was still breathing. My heart beat quickly. I was still alive. The fact that I was invisible, bewildered me.

I left the bathroom, and ran down the long hall of my apartment towards the bedroom. Inside was a floor length mirror behind the closet door. I wondered if I was losing my mind and decided the only way to check was to attempt to find my reflection.

To my surprise, the floor length mirror revealed nothing more than an unorganized chest of drawers behind me, an unmade bed and an open window that let in the warm summer breeze. Any indicator of emotion or expression was gone. I accepted the fact, that for now, I was invisible and the terror I felt melted away. Instead, I decided to seize this moment of transparency and lucidness not to do evil or even good for that matter…but for my own selfish reasons.

I left my apartment that night with intentions to see Logan.

***

Logan and I had met six weeks ago. There was something elusive about him. He left me in the shadows. He only revealed so much of himself to me, and I craved more. He wasn't aware that my feelings for him had grown deeper but tonight he would.

Logan's apartment was several blocks away and I thought the best way to get there was by taking a bus and then walking the rest of the way. Being that I was now invisible, driving would attract entirely too much attention.

The hallway, outside of my sixth story apartment, was quiet and empty. Still wrapped tightly in my bath towel, I made my way for the elevator that I took nearly every day. I pushed the button that would take me down to the lobby. A few moments passed as I stood waiting. Then, the doors opened and a couple that I recognized from an apartment a few doors down from mine, waited inside for the next occupant to enter. But there was no one waiting and confusion made the young woman's face twist into a question mark expression. The man was puzzled too.

"Well that's strange…there's no one out there." remarked the woman.

"Probably just a glitch with the elevator again." said the man.

I entered the elevator right before the doors closed. Watching the couple closely, it was then that I realized the young woman was tipsy. Her face flushed from a few drinks. I stood near the woman. Her breath hinted that she'd been drinking something mixed with vodka or tequila. Soon, the entire elevator filled with heat. The couple grew closer as I stood in the back corner now...watching and taking full advantage of my new
ability.

"I want you right now." said the man as he grasped the woman firmly by the hips and kissed her.

"You're not going to do this again…I won't let you," whispered the woman in a teasing manner.

"What? Take full advantage of my gorgeous girlfriend in this elevator?"

The woman giggled, attempted to resist the man's advances, but gave way to his kisses.

A deadly cocktail of emotions filled me as I stared at the couple. I wasn't a voyeur or a creep. I didn't get off from watching other people engage intimately, unaware of my presence. However, desire consumed me, along with jealously, and an unsettling feeling. An urge to escape the confines of the elevator and the flirty couple swept over me. The man had stopped the elevator at the third floor so they could continue what he had started. I didn't want to watch the finish, so I punched the down arrow.

3… 2…1, the numbers lit up and signaled a ding, with each passing floor. In the heat of the moment, the couple was never fazed by the sudden change of activity. Finally, the stop for the ground floor approached and I hurried off into the brightly lit lobby, leaving the couple behind in the lust filled elevator and continuing my journey to see Logan.

***

I live at Holly Oaks Apartment Complex, a six story residential building that previously had been a hotel, built in 1924. The building was remodeled in 2002, to serve its new purpose as an apartment complex that would attract young professionals. This part of the city was growing rapidly. New restaurants, boutiques, and dance clubs were opening monthly along with the addition of larger shopping outlets, hotels and apartments. Single men and women were everywhere, waiting to be paired up. Logan and I actually met each other at Stella's, a bookstore and coffee shop where I was currently a barista.

Serendipity. It was by chance that Logan came into the shop a few weeks ago. It had been a dreary Saturday afternoon. Grey clouds not only nested above the city but they perched quite comfortably above my head. I was in a horrible mood. I was late waking up, late getting to work and the espresso machine had been on the fritz all afternoon. Then, Logan walked inside and my frustration melted away. He had been jogging around the neighborhood and stopped inside for an espresso.

"I'm sorry, but the machine is broken…it probably won't be fixed until Tuesday." I said.

Logan smiled and replied, "It's not a big deal. I'll just take something else. What do you suggest?"

Logan was so warm and friendly. When I told him I wasn't a big coffee drinker, he laughed and said, "Wow, a barista that doesn't drink coffee. I'm perplexed."

Logan stuck around a little longer; taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi and enjoyed a scone and coffee until my shift was over. That evening, we were together. Learning more about each other and taking in the sights. Every night that week, we were together. We went out to dinner, out to the movies, and watched the stars at the park; a typical romance. Then it happened, everything between us slowed down. Whatever we had… came to a screeching halt and the grey clouds returned.

***

Mr. Mueller was an older man with a short stature, and a head full of dark brown hair that wasn't his own. I decided it'd be fun to mess with him a little bit. So, I stepped in front of him, undid the towel I had been wearing and exposed my naked breasts. I bounced around, did a cartwheel and even yelled:

"Hey! Look at these! Can't you see me? Can't you hear me?" But, Mr. Mueller couldn't see me or hear me. I was invisible and silent.

I wondered if he could feel me. So I stepped directly behind him, flicked his ear and snatched his toupee right off his head, exposing his round, shiny dome.

"What the hell! Who's there!" yelled Mr. Mueller, his eyes screaming in terror. He stood up, almost falling to the ground and looked to his left, then his right, and then his left again. I stood back and watched him and I felt terrible. I thought I had almost frightened the man to death. Somehow, he couldn't see the toupee that I held in my grasp. I realized that once I held onto something, it too became invisible. So when he wasn't watching, I laid the toupee on the front desk for him to find, wrapped myself tightly in the towel, and literally disappeared into the night.

***

The warm breeze caressed my skin. I was happy to feel. I wasn't sure if being invisible was a relief or a curse yet. I walked towards the bus station, and decided for now, it was relief to be invisible. When you can't be seen, you can't be judged. You're free to walk about the world, being free to observe others, pass judgments, and not be reprimanded.

I'm running now because I can see the bus up ahead and people are piling inside. The stop is about a block away and I'm weaving in between people on the sidewalk. I'm gliding past everyone and I'm sure that if I was a visible I'd still be a blur. Without warning, my bath towel comes undone. Why did I wear a bath towel? Why didn't I wear a robe? No time to worry about that now because the towel is gone. It's a fluffy, purple heap on the sidewalk. People will notice and wonder why it's there. Could they imagine a naked, invisible woman left it behind?

Now that I'm completely nude, I decide to skip the bus. I'm reluctant to take public transportation when I'm fully clothed because of the close encounters with strangers and not to mention germs. There's no way I'm sitting my bare ass on a bus seat.

So I walk, and I walk and I jog a little then I walk some more past dark storefronts, empty restaurants and couples walking arm in arm until I've finally reached Logan's apartment building.

***

Logan's apartment building is a little smaller than mine. It's only three floors tall and is located in a more family oriented neighborhood just a little ways east of where I live. He said he liked the quiet. It's a more intimate setting here. Some of Logan's neighbors are retired or just wed and starting a small family.

Logan works as a software engineer and he's currently project manager for a computer game that is set to release in October. He also writes freelance for a popular tech magazine. The temperature is dropping slightly, cool summer air sets in and I'm cold. For a brief moment I mourn the loss of my towel and revert to trying to cover whatever I can with my hands. I look up and see that lights are on in Logan's apartment. I have to get inside but the entrance doors are always locked. You either have to have a key code or be buzzed inside.

"Come on snicker…come on baby. Mommy knows you have to make a poopsie woopsie..." says Mrs. Ada Pearl, an older woman that lives on the second floor. She's just exited the building with her fawn colored, Pomeranian. I saw Mrs. Ada Pearl once before and she seemed to be a nice person. Logan had told me that she was rumored to be rich. She was widowed, and her husband Wilson supposedly left her with money he had earned from lucrative, property investments. The pair had been married for forty-two years and had no children except Snicker, and he would get the majority of it when she died.

I watch as Mrs. Pearl tries to lead Snicker to a grassy area in the front lawn to do his business. She has a plastic bag ready to collect the mess but Snicker is distracted. He's yipping loudly; his tail is wagging ferociously and he's fighting to break loose

and make his way over to…me.

I don't know, maybe he can actually see me or smell me? I wonder if the invisibility is wearing off.

"Snicker! What's gotten into you?" says Mrs. Pearl. They are coming towards me now. Snicker is growing even more excited, so I lean in close to him and pet him lightly on the head; bad idea. The playful Pomeranian is resting his paws against my knees and licking my hand.

Mrs. Pearl's mouth opens a bit and she stares in my direction with piercing grey eyes. For a moment I think she sees me.

"Wilson…? Is that you? Have you come to take me to the upper room?" whispers Mrs. Pearl. She thinks I'm her dead husband and the reaper.

Just when I think I'm never going to get inside to see Logan, a man is waiting outside the apartment entrance, to be buzzed inside. I bolt for the door and escape inside, leaving Mrs. Pearl alone with Snicker.

"Wilson? Wilson?" she says.

***

I sucked in a deep breath; reality was beginning to sink in. I made my way to the stairs, which would lead me to the third floor. What was I doing? I stood still at the top of the second first landing, wondering why I was here; contemplating turning around and going home. Here I am; invisible, silent, nude except for a pair of flip flops, clearly insane.

The door to apartment 3B, Logan's apartment, is grey, steel, and slightly open as if he's expecting someone.

"Jamie…Jamie…?" says a soft voice. I peer through the opening between the steel door and the jamb but I can't see anything. The apartment is shadowy. I try to push the door open and step inside but I can't move forward. I'm running with all my force but I'm still standing motionless.

All of a sudden, the door slams shut and I'm shoved backwards. The building crumbles around me and I'm falling, tumbling, and sinking into a black abyss.

"Jamie, wake up babe."Somehow, I had fallen back to earth, back to reality. I was awake; eyes wide open, looking at Logan.

"You look confused…"

"I am…very confused. I had a bizarre dream."

"Well we have a date tonight, remember silly? Its Tuesday…you took a shower like twenty minutes ago, and I thought you were getting dressed but I came in your bedroom and found you asleep, still in your bathrobe and flip flops," explained Logan with a smile. He was fighting back laughter.

"Come on…get dressed…we're too late to make the movie…but you can tell me all about that dream at dinner."

"The Enemy Within"
by Lynn Loring

As I hesitantly entered the funeral parlor, the ambiguous odor of the usual fare of flowers threatened to stifle what breath I had left. My breathing already shallow and labored was only second to the torturous thumping of my heart. Without embarrassment the battle lines were drawn as was customary when the Reed and Lentz family were forced together.

Mr. Higgins, as his profession bids him to do, politely greeted me with his head slightly bowed and his eyes refusing to meet mine. As if I was participating in a race, I hurried to the seat next to Selma, the expected matriarch successor of Henry, my uncle. Straining my peripheral ability I stole a look at the Lentz family. As my eyes rested on the widow, Catherine, a flashback filled my mind from 20 years ago. Instead of a funeral, it was a wedding. This is where the battle began.

The hoarse voice of the preacher jolted my mind back to the present. I noticed all heads turn at attention towards him. Preacher John looked down at the podium before beginning. But reluctantly, he began his words of contrived familiarity. Absent, among the gathered, were the tears running down cheeks that you might expect; being replaced by deep scowl lines.

On one side, the imagined enemy wore costly fine watches, necklaces and rings that boldly reflected the wealth and status of its wearers. On my side the ornaments worn were tarnished, dully reflecting our poverty. Both families wore their garb with chins up and shoulders back. Both sides competed with each other as to who gave the most attention to the spoken sermon.

After preacher John's sermon had finished, something akin to lake drying up from the scorching heat, the barren souls sat motionless, waiting for the enemy's next move. Catherine stiffly rose and turned, signaling her clan to follow. As the Lentz family walked by they used their eyes as weapons to pierce their target's souls, hoping to annihilate the hatred they can not hide from.

"Vance Grafton"
by Heather Barnes

"A letter came for you, sir."

Vance Grafton looked up from his paper work at his valet, Graves.

"Who is it from, Graves, did they say?"

"No sir, but the messenger boy said he was to tell you it was urgent, sir."

"Ok, thank you Graves. I'll attend to it right away then." Vance said as he took the small letter from the older man's hand.

"Very good sir, would there be anything else, sir?" the servant asked.

"No, that's all I need Graves. Thank you." Vance said as he took his paper knife and slit open the envelope. Graves left Vance's apartment office then, closing the door behind him. Vance's brow furrowed as he read the urgent message.

Vance, I am in desperate need of your assistance. Have been accused of murder this morning, and know of no one else to turn to but you. Am hoping you will come to the jail immediately and help an old chum.

Roland

Vance was shocked. This was ridiculous. What had Roland gotten into? Vance did not take long to consider this, however, and quickly stood from his desk. As he walked swiftly out of his office into the hall of his apartment he called for Graves. That man came quickly from the other end of the apartment where he had been performing his duties.

"Yes Mr. Grafton?" Graves said as he entered Vance's bedroom where Vance was changing from his brown suit to a black suit more suitable for the evening.

"I have to go to the jail right away. Will you have the car brought around please Graves?" Vance said as he calmly but hurriedly tied his tie.

"Yes sir, right away!" Graves said as he hurried from the room.

This was not an unusual occurrence for the two men. Vance, as a well known lawyer in New York, was often being summoned to work on a case. This was the first time it was a close friend though. Roland and Vance had gone to Oxford together and become great friends. Roland had come to New York about a year ago and had been living there at the New Yorker ever since. Vance wasn't sure why Roland had left his home in England to come to New York, but he had been very busy over the past year with his practice and had not questioned his friend.
A few minutes later Vance walked to the foyer of his apartment, Graves was there to meet him with hat and coat.

"It's gotten rather cold out there sir. I do believe winter is upon us. I got your heavier coat out." He said as he helped Vance slip the black coat on.

"Thank you, Graves, I don't know when I'll be back so don't worry about dinner for me, I'll get something out. You can take the night off if you like; this could take a while." He said smiling at the man.

"Thank you, sir, I hope everything works out alright." The servant said as he opened the door for Vance and handed him his briefcase.

***

The Lincoln Willoughby Limousine pulled up to the jail a few minutes later. Vance picked up the mouth piece and spoke to his chauffer Adams, "You can take the rest of the night off Adams. I'm not sure how long I'll be here and there no sense in you sitting out here waiting for me. I'll just take a cab."

"Alright then, sir," came the response over the speaker.
Vance stepped out of the car and was glad Graves had thought to give him his heavy coat, winter was indeed here. The round street light with "Police Station" printed on it was on; it was getting colder and darker out. Vance stepped into the station and the policeman at the counter looked up.

"Well, if it isn't Vance Grafton. You're getting to be a fixture around here. If you keep this up we'll have to make you a bed in one of the cells!" the big man said with a smile.

"I'll just take my meals here instead, Clancy, if your wife does the cooking. I'm sure whatever you'd stir up would put us all in the hospital." Vance retorted with a grin.

"Who is it to be this time then, Vance?" said the Irish policeman, looking over his reading glasses at Vance.

"I'm here to see Roland Fairfax, Clancy. He was booked for murder this morning. Can you tell me anything about it?" Vance said taking his hat off and leaning against the counter.

"Oh, that one's for the rope for sure! They found him this morning standing over the body with a knife in his hand. He has some cock and bull story about being knocked out and waking up with the dead man next to him, and him with not a scratch on him! You're wasting your time on this one, Vance, you may as well go back home." The policeman said with a shake of his head.

"Well this happens to be a friend of mine so I'm going to see what I can do. I doubt he did it, despite the obvious." Vance said as he peeled off his coat.

"You always say that their innocent Grafton! That's nothing new! This one's definitely high fallootin' though! English accent and dressed to the nines, you'd think he was the king of England the way he talked when they picked him up!" Vance just smiled.

"Well, they always are innocent when it's all over aren't they Clancy. I haven't lost a case yet." Vance said as he headed for the door to the cells.

"I don't take cases if the people are guilty; that's a waste of my time."

Vance smiled at the older man and waited as Clancy opened the door leading to the cells.

"Well, we'll see this time Vance. You can't be right all the time!" Clancy said, laughing as Vance walked toward the policeman that would lead him to Roland.

"Take Mr. Grafton down to see the guy we picked up for murder this morning Barton." Clancy called to the other policeman.

Vance walked behind the policeman noting the a few drunks along the way sleeping it off. When they came to the right cell and the policeman unlocked the door.

"Here you go Mr. Grafton, just holler when you're ready to come out again."

The young policeman said as he opened the door.

Roland jumped up from the cot in the cell.

"Vance I'm so glad you're here, I was beginning to worry you hadn't been home to get the note." Roland said as he came toward Vance. His face was white and he looked desperate and afraid. And rightly so, thought Vance, this was a fine mess Roland had gotten into. This was not like his friend at all, Roland was usually all business and proper at all times, being from old English Aristocracy.

"I came as soon as I got your note Roland. Here, sit down and tell me what happened. Start from the beginning. Does this have anything to do with you moving here?" Vance said as the he and Roland sat on the cot. He heard the clang of the key as the policeman locked the door and his footsteps as he walked back to the entrance of the cells. Vance got a small notebook out of his briefcase and a pen, he wanted to write down facts that he felt would be most important.

"Yes, this all comes down to the reason I came here a year ago." said Roland as he ran his hand through his hair in nervous agitation.

"You see, my mother died suddenly two years ago while I was in the orient on business. I hurried home to find that everyone said she had, had a terrible accident, apparently taking an accidental overdose of sleeping powders, the night of a party at the estate. But that doesn't make any sense Vance!"

Roland looked up at Vance with question and conviction in his eyes. He frowned.

"My mother would never take sleeping powders. In fact she didn't like taking medicines of any kind. They had found her on her bedroom floor with nothing to show that there had been any trouble or a struggle. My Father was away at the time and was told that my Mother had not been herself. I'm afraid my Father thinks she may have committed suicide. But, that's not possible either. My Mother was just not that type of woman. She'd rather fight it out; if something was bothering her, than do away with herself. My sister was there and she said that Mother had been acting odd and told my sister Rosalind she wanted her to go on vacation somewhere for a while. Rosalind thought it odd that our mother would suddenly want her to go away when there was no reason for her to go so quickly on a trip. She's been worried about Mother and had written me but I never got any letters from her. I didn't know anything about it until I got the telegram that Mother was dead. I asked questions about the weekend that she died. Apparently, there were quite a few people there for the party."

"All the guests had a good time and Mother had been in good spirits. The party that last night had gone well. No one was very helpful, except that my mother's personal maid. She said that when the night ended my mother was very quiet and seemed upset. I went around asking the guests questions about that weekend and that night but most of them knew no more than anyone else I had talked to. I did finally talk to Colonel Blackmore and he had noticed my Mother talking with a Miss Milford and Mr. White, two guests from America. He said their conversation seemed very intense but that's all he remembered. So I came here to find them and talk to them about a year ago. I discovered Miss Milford had drowned a month after I got here. Apparently, she was on a ship to the Argentine and fell overboard. I have been waiting for Mr. White to return from business travels. His servants were very vague and said they were not sure how I could reach him. So I have been waiting for him to return and he did last Tuesday. I was able to get an appointment to meet him at his apartment last night. However, when I got there the door was open. None of his servants were there and the lights were all out. I went in calling his name as noticed a light on down the hall. When I followed it, I found it was coming from his library. I walked in and all I remember is someone grabbing me and a sweet smell. The next thing I knew, I woke up this morning next to a dead man. I had a terrible headache and was still foggy from whatever my assailant had used to knock me out. I didn't even realize I was holding the knife until the police came busting through the door and grabbed me. This is a dashed awful mess Vance and I am no closer to finding out what happened to my Mother than I was before. I need your help, Vance. I don't know how to get myself out of this."

Roland looked again at Vance. He had been looking at the floor remembering everything as he told Vance the story.

"Do you think you can do anything for me, Vance? I know your reputation, and besides that, you've always been a good friend." Roland looked at Vance, pleading with hope on his face.

"I will see what I can do Roland. It sounds like I may need to start in England. These deaths are too convenient and timely not to be connected. I think you must be close, but I need to see where your Mother died and ask some questions. We'll go up before the judge tomorrow and plead not guilty. I'll set out for England directly after. It's going to be alright Roland; we'll figure this out." Vance said as he stood and put his hand on his friends shoulder.

I'll be back here at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning and we'll go to court. I'm going to go home now and get my case together for the hearing.

Roland's face showed his relief. He smiled, a weary smile, for the first time since Vance had arrived. "Thank you Vance, I don't know what I would do without your help." He stood and Vance collected his coat, hat and briefcase.

"I'll see you in the morning Roland. Try to get some sleep. You'll be no good to me unless your mind is clear." Vance smiled reassuringly and called for the policeman.

***

The next morning, Vance and Roland sat at the table in the court room waiting for the judge to appear. Vance had been up most the night working on details and mulling over the facts that Roland had given him. He had no doubt his friend was being set up and had gotten very close to finding out something vital. He knew, of course, that he would have to find the cold hard facts to prove this to the judicial system and save his friend's life. He would need to find the murderer, he thought as the judge entered the room. "All rise!" the bailiff called out.

***

They were going to trial. Vance had expected this and was ready to get started on the case immediately. Vance looked out the car window at the cold rain pouring down outside. He hoped this would not cause any delay to his plane taking off. He had instructed Graves to get him a ticket for the next plane out and knew by the time he got back to his apartment, at the Century Apartments, Graves would have Vance's suitcase packed and ready.

***

When Vance arrived at the London Airport, he quickly caught a train to take him to Sussex. The Fairfax country estate was there. The ride wasn't long and he soon was stepping off the train. As the porter was setting Vance's bags down a man in his mid-thirties in a chauffer's uniform approached him.

"I've been sent to take you to Fairfax Hall sir." The man said bowing slightly. Vance was surprised; he hadn't told anyone at Fairfax Hall he was coming. It had been such a fast trip he hadn't taken the time.

"Thank you." Vance replied after collecting his thoughts.

"Are these all your bags then sir?" asked the chauffer.

"Yes, that's all I have." The chauffer picked up Vance's valise and suitcase and led him to a limousine parked nearby. Vance decided that perhaps not asking to many questions would be the best course at first. Getting the first reactions of the people he met might tell him more than questioning could. The limousine drove up to the opulent estate. The drive circled around a large landscaped green with a fountain in the middle.

The home itself was very large. The stone house that was probably 300 years old but well preserved. The car stopped in front of the large stone steps leading up to the heavy wooden door. As the chauffer opened Vance's door, Rosalind Fairfax came out of the house.

"Oh Vance, I'm so glad you've come!" she said as she rushed down the steps and shook his hand. "I didn't know that anyone was expecting me Rosalind." Vance said, smiling at the tall slender woman.

"Oh, Roland sent a telegram telling me to expect you. I've been trying to get him to let me help with looking into Mother's death but he hasn't allowed me to do very much."

Her pretty blue eyes looked sad as she spoke of her Mother.

"Well, you can certainly help me now; I will need your viewpoint to help me learn the facts." Vance said reassuringly squeezing her arm, he smiled at her. The last time Vance had seen Rosalind Fairfax, had been 6 years ago at his and Roland's graduation from Oxford. She was quite grown up now her black hair coifed into the latest up do; she had become a willowy, beautiful woman of 24.

"Well, I will show you to your room." Rosalind said, taking Vance out of his musings. She led the way into the vast entryway of the house.

"Parks will take your bags up to your room."

***

Vance sat in his room that evening after everyone had gone to bed. He had his papers on the case in front of him on the desk in the bedroom. He was trying to remember every detail from the evening. He wrote down notes as he thought. He had met the household soon after arriving and then spent the evening with them. There was the matriarch of the family, the widowed Lady Fairfax. This was Roland's grandmother. She was a rather regal woman, polite but he felt she could become rather snobbish at times. Then, there was Roland's father Ernest Fairfax, the Earl of Stanton. Vance had met Roland's parents and sister previously and had always liked Roland's father. He reminded Vance of his own father; their only fault being that they sometimes got to preoccupied with business. Vance had then met the Earl of Stanton's brother Wilfred Fairfax, his wife Julia and there 25-year-old son Philip. Vance had liked Wilfred Fairfax right away. He was a rather laid back but sharp man that Vance had enjoyed talking to. Julia Fairfax was a rather nervous woman. She seemed to be easily exited and fidgeted with her hands quite a lot. Vance had remembered Roland saying he didn't care for his cousin Philip. After meeting him, Vance had to agree. Philip Fairfax seemed to be only concerned with Cricket, parties and himself. Perhaps the most delightful person Vance had met today was Lady Celia Wingate. She was a close friend of Rosalind's and a delightful woman. Celia Wingate was a petite woman of about 25, with shortly-bobbed curly red hair. She had dazzling green eyes and an infectious laugh. Most of all Vance had found her to be a smart, witty, well-traveled young woman that was a great conversationalist! Vance rarely met women that were not merely interested in society, fashion, money and marriage. Celia was a breath of fresh air.

Vance had not been able to learn much more than Roland had already told him. The one interesting item was that there had been a rash of robberies in the area. Vance wasn't sure if this could be linked to anything or not but he had learned that often crimes were connected. His next step, he decided, was to speak to Scotland Yard tomorrow and find out what they had to say about Marianne Fairfax's death, as well as, the robberies.

***

The next morning, Vance had concocted a plan while shaving that he hoped would help him learn if the family knew more than they were saying. He took Rosalind and Celia aside before leaving after breakfast.

"I was hoping you two could help me with a little experiment."

"We'd love to! We want to help in any way we can." said Celia excitedly.

"Good," Vance said smiling. "I am going to talk to Scotland Yard about their investigation into your Mother's death, Rosalind." He said turning to that woman.

"I am also going to ask them about the jewel robberies. I have a hunch there may be a connection but I'm not sure. Since your family was at many of the parties where jewelry was stolen, they may have thoughts on it."

Vance's fellow conspirators leaned forward intently listening.

"I am trying to find out if the family knows more than they're saying. Perhaps talking about me going to Scotland Yard about the jewel robberies will bring some surprising results. If you ladies could mention this during tea and see their reactions, that may get us further on our way to getting Roland released."

The two women were excited to help and agreed to let him know what came of the plan. Vance left the house with a smile on his face. The two women reminded him of little girls off to play a new game. He knew from past experience though that often when he got a hunch it should be followed up. It had many times helped him in past cases.

***

Later in the morning the family was gathering in the sitting room for tea. Rosalind's father had headed to London on business, so he was the only family member not at home. Rosalind and Celia had taken Vance's words to heart and though excited at this new venture knew this was a serious situation.

"Vance went to talk to Scotland Yard today about the jewel robberies." Rosalind said to the group gathered in the sitting room. She rose her cup of tea to her mouth and sipped some after she had made this statement.

"Scotland Yard, that's a bit over the much isn't it? Why would he go there asking them about jewel robberies. He's supposed to be worrying about murder, not jewel robberies!" said Aunt Julia; she seems rather annoyed and even upset by this revelation.

"I believe Vance thinks the two crimes could be linked somehow." Celia commented from across the room. "They were both happening around the same time, were they not?" she questioned placing her tea cup and saucer on the small table next to her chair.

"That doesn't mean one has anything to do with the other." Inserted Phillip turning from the window where he had been wishing he were out playing cricket instead of stuck indoors with this blasted snow.

"I believe Vance is a thorough fellow. He must have good reason for checking into the robberies." Uncle Wilfred said from behind his paper.

"Yes, but what could one have to do with the other? I still don't see why he's wasting valuable time looking into jewel robberies and gallivanting all over the countryside to talk to Scotland Yard. For pity's sake, Scotland Yard has better things to do than satisfy his curiosity. I think he's getting distracted!" Aunt Julia said in a huff, her cheeks were spots of red and she seemed to be getting more upset. She stood abruptly and walked over to the fireplace.

"I'm sure Vance would never waste time, Aunt Julia." Rosalind interjected, "He cares so much for Roland, I'm sure he would not do anything to jeopardize the case."

"I'm sorry I'm late for tea." Lady Fairfax said as she entered the large room. "I had a phone call that I simply had to take; it was important. What are you talking about jeopardizing the case, Rosalind?" The older woman said as she sat down on the sofa.

"We were just talking about Vance seeing Scotland Yard today about the jewelry robberies, Grandmother." Rosalind answered from across the room. Lady Fairfax stopped pouring her tea and looked up.

"Why did he go to see Scotland Yard about that? He is supposed to be finding out who committed the murder that Roland is sitting in jail for." Lady Fairfax sat down the tea pot frowning.

"That's exactly what I was saying, Mother." Aunt Julia said turning to her mother-in-law. "I think that this Vance Grafton is wasting time and money on things that are of no consequence to the case at hand!"

"Julia, the man is well known for his success in winning cases. I believe we should give him the benefit of the doubt, don't you?" Uncle Wilfred said bringing down his newspaper and looking sternly at Aunt Julia.

"I agree with Mother." interrupted Phillip, "It sounds like a lot of rot to me, and maybe he's just here to get a handsome fee. I still don't know why he's here anyway. The murder happened in New York! Why isn't he there doing his job instead of staying here in England asking a bunch of fool questions?"

"Now Phillip I don't think that very fair. Vance and Roland are good friends I don't think he would risk Roland's life for money." Rosalind retorted as she frowned at her cousin. Sometimes he could be such a bore.

"It's not as though Vance needs the money, Phillip." Celia reminded him.

"That is true Celia; you are quite right. Mr. Grafton has his reasons I have no doubt." Lady Fairfax said before taking a sip of her tea. She paused and looked around the room.

"I am also concerned though that he is wasting valuable time, despite his suspicions."

"That's exactly what I've been saying!" Aunt Julia declared. She had taken her seat again after her husband's reproach.

"After all, this is Roland's life he has in his hands. This is not a game!" She finished, purposely averting her eyes from her husband's glare from across the room.

"Well, Vance said he would return this afternoon." Celia interjected into the tense room. "We can perhaps find out from him ourselves what he is thinking, as well as, what he's found out."

***

Vance walked about the gardens of Fairfax Hall. He wanted to clear his head and put together everything he had learned so far. The two women had relayed the conversation during tea to him when he had first returned. He thought it curious that Julia Fairfax had been so outspoken in the conversation.

She was a rather excitable woman though so he wasn't quite sure it meant anything at all. The other reactions were very much what he had expected. He wasn't sure if he had gained anything from that venture. Vance looked down at the small notebook he carried with him when he was working on a case. Inspector McNeal, at Scotland Yard, had said that several jewel robberies had occurred at large parties in Sussex and London. The parties were always the wealthy of England, which made sense. Vance flipped back a few pages and stopped his pacing. Vance's friend Detective Barlow in New York had told him that there had been several jewel robberies there in the past year. These had to be connected! Then there was the fact that Detective Barlow had been watching Mr. White before he was murdered. Barlow had said that they suspected White was transferring stolen or illegal goods with his business trips. This all had to come together somehow. There had to be some connection with Roland and the Fairfax family, but what? How could it all be strung together? Vance looked around him at the opulent lush gardens on the country estate. This place seemed such a paradise, a wonderful place to get away and enjoy fine living. But there was something wrong here. Oh well, trodding a path into the gardens wasn't going to give him the answers. Maybe he would be able to put more pieces together at the party tonight. Many of the wealthy British who had attended the parties last year would be at this party.

Vance walked out of the stuffy ball room. There were so many people here; one could hardly breathe after a while. He walked toward the front of the house where the library was. Maybe he could gather his thoughts there. Once out of the fray, he would be able to reconstruct anything that would pertain to the case. He had just entered the library when he heard footsteps coming toward the room. Celia glided into the room and a grin on her face.

"There you are! I wondered where you had gotten off to." She said as she came nearer to him. She held out a glass of lemonade.

"Here, I thought you could probably do with something cool to drink. It's dreadfully hot in that room!" He took the glass from her and smiled.

"Thank you, I needed this. It was so hot in there I couldn't think straight." He took a drink of the lemonade and then was caught in his thoughts of the evening again.

"Is it too sour?" Celia asked bringing him out of his thoughts. "No, it's just right. Was I making a face?" He looked at her quizzical expression.

"Yes, you were frowning." She said with a laugh. "

I'm sorry, I was trying to reconstruct the evening and see if anything came together with the case." Her pretty face lit up.

"And did you find anything? There certainly are most of the people here from the night Marianne Fairfax died."

Vance was shocked. Why had he not thought of that?

"The only thing that can even remotely connect the robberies, White's murder and Roland is his mother's death. That's the only thing that makes sense. But what's one got to do with the other?" He ran his hand through his dark hair in frustration. "Well, I don't think Marianne's death was an accident or suicide, I never

have." Celia said thoughtfully her eyes looking at the wall across from them as she spoke.

"In fact, I saw Marianne in what looked to be a heated discussion the night of the party. She was speaking with Mr. White and that Miss Milford."

Vance had almost forgotten about the mysterious Miss Milford Roland had been looking for. The more he talked to Celia the more things tied up. This was a lot better way to spend time that roaming the gardens alone.

"Maybe then Marianne had found out something she wasn't supposed to." He said looking over at Celia.

"If her death was no accident then maybe she was silenced. Who then does that mean silenced her? Was it someone at the party?" Celia looked up suddenly.

"No it couldn't have been! Marianne died in the middle of the night. I was the only guest staying at Fairfax Hall. No one else was staying here after the party." Celia's face had turned white as she realized what this meant.

"That means it could only have been a family member or a servant." Vance felt a rock of dread settle in his stomach. This meant that someone Roland knew and perhaps loved in this house may have killed his mother.

"That's simply awful to think of!" said Celia wrapping her arms around her thin waist. "But it must be true; there is no other possibility, poor Marianne." Vance put his hand on her arm.

"It's a sad fact, but often the murderer is close to home."

"Vance what are you going to do now? This is very dangerous." Celia looked up at him with worry in her face.

"We'll have to be careful..." Vance stopped talking and put his finger to his lips. They both turned to the door as they heard faint footsteps walking away from the library.

***

Vance, Celia and Rosalind had planned to meet at Marianne's bedroom at 2 a.m. They were hopeful that everyone would be in bed by then and they could search Marianne's room in hopes of finding something that would further help them. They had been looking through Marianne's things for half an hour when Celia, picking up a diamond studded evening bag, commented on how lovely she had thought it the night of the party. Vance quickly crossed the room.

"This is the bag that Marianne had the night of the party?" he asked taking it from her.

"Yes, I remember Mother buying that especially for the party that night." Rosalind said joining the other two. Vance opened the small purse, but found only lipstick, ladies face powder and a small bag that clasped like an envelope.

He opened the bag and found a small mirror inside. He was about to close it when he noticed a piece of paper hidden behind the mirror.

"What's that?" Celia asked in a hushed tone. He held the paper up to their flashlights and read it out loud:

"Stealing to save the name."

"What does that mean?" said Rosalind, her eyes wide.

"I'm not sure," Vance replied his brow furrowed, "but Marianne left this either as something she had discovered or a warning. This has to have something to do with the jewel robberies. And that means that her death and the jewel robberies are indeed connected. Things are starting to become clearer to me, ladies."

Vance carefully put the piece of paper in his pocket and they continued one last sweep of the room. The three searchers found nothing else, however, so they bid each other good night and went to bed.

***

Vance was up at sunrise having spent most of the night going over his next steps. He needed to make some phone calls and then go visit Inspector McNeal, at Scotland Yard again. But first he had a few questions to ask Rosalind. As everyone was venturing downstairs for breakfast Vance stopped Rosalind and Celia.

"Can I ask you a few questions Rosalind?" he said motioning to the library.

"Of course Vance, anything I can do." She said smiling as the three went into the library. After looking down the hall to ensure their privacy Vance closed the sliding pocket doors.

"I was wondering two things." Vance said in a low tone, just in case they had another spy at the keyhole.

"First, what do you know about a Miss Milford and do you know her first name?"

"Well," Rosalind said thoughtful as she put her hand to her chin, thinking.

"I do know that her first name was Constance. Grandmother had said she was a daughter of an old friend and was introducing her into London society. I remember Constance saying she traveled a lot. But, I really can't say I know much more about her. I'm sorry Vance; I don't think that's very helpful." Rosalind ended looking up at him with a frown.

"No, that is very helpful. Thank you, Rosalind." He said reassuringly.

"Now, secondly, has anyone in the household made an extended trip within the last few months?" Rosalind's eyes lit up.

"Why yes, Parks, our chauffer, was gone for a whole month. He's only just returned a few days ago. I was staying in our London home for part of the time but remember Phillip complaining about having to drive himself about. He's rather lazy, you know. Does that help?" she said hopefully.

"Yes Rosalind, you have been more help than you know." Vance replied.

"Does that mean you've figured out something, then?" Celia asked excitedly.

"I think so but I have to follow up on a few things first. Let's go have breakfast and then I'll be gone for most of the day I think. Thank you, ladies." Vance smiled broadly at them as he slid open the doors and they headed to the breakfast room.

***

That evening, Celia and Rosalind were surprised to see Vance accompanied by Inspector McNeal. The women were surprised but also excited because they knew Vance had discovered something important. Vance told the family that he had invited the Inspector for supper and hoped they wouldn't mind. Being the proper family they were of course they did not protest but anxious looks were exchanged

between them. The meal was tense— Celia, Vance and the Inspector being the only ones with much conversation. Rosalind felt on pins and needles as she looked around the table wondering which of her family members had killed her mother. Finally, as desert was finishing, though not much of it eaten, the butler announced two police had come to the door. Before Lady Fairfax could reply the Inspector interjected.

"Have them come in here. They are expected." Vance turned to Lady Fairfax as the two policemen entered the room and stood quietly by the door.

"Where is your chauffer, Lady Fairfax?"

"Why, I expect he's in his quarters above the garage." That lady said with surprise. "But, why in the world?"

Vance cut her off before she could continue.

"Pardon me, Lady Fairfax, but we've figured out who killed Mr. White and I think Parks should be here for this."

The inspector nodded at the policemen and they left the room. Vance decided it was time to begin.

"As you all know there has been a rash of jewel robberies here lately. What you possibly don't know is that there have also been many in New York as well. I discovered this by speaking to the authorities in New York. Once I found this out the one link between these events was Mr. White. The police have suspected Mr. White of smuggling illegal objects through his travels. This makes sense when you connect him to the robberies. He must have been couriering the jewels in the disguise of traveling for business. I also checked on the other person Roland was trying to find, Miss Constance Milford. Until two years ago, no one has any record of Miss Milford. She suddenly entered society and became popular both in Europe and the States with the upper class. Interestingly, Miss Milford was at every party where a robbery was reported."

Everyone had been silent until this point. But Julia Fairfax interrupted:

"Yes, but didn't you find that Constance was robbed herself at several of these parties. Why, I know she was. She said she'd had a diamond bracelet and several other things stolen."

"That may be what she says ma'am, but no one remembers seeing her wearing any of the jewelry she claims to have been robbed of." interjected Inspector McNeal.

"Yes we've made some inquiries into Constance Milford and contacted the Argentine authorities. Constance Milford's fingerprints match a Mrs. Darwood with a rather long list of alias's and arrests for various cons and theft." Vance said to the group.

"Why, I simply don't believe it!" Lady Fairfax said with an angry tone.

"She told me she was the daughter of a dear friend of mine. I introduced her into society and linked her to the Fairfax name." By now Lady Fairfax's face had become quite red.

"It's alright, Mother" Lord Fairfax said from the other end of the table.

"This young woman must have been very good at what she did, she had everyone fooled. You are certainly not to blame. Isn't that right Grafton?" Roland's father said turning his attention to Vance.

"Well, not quite Lord Fairfax" Vance said looking at the man; he then turned his attention to Lady Fairfax.

"I'm afraid you're lying, Lady Fairfax." Gasps filled the room.

"How dare you speak to my grandmother like that!" Phillip retorted hotly from his seat.

"I dare, because the facts don't lie, Phillip. Your grandmother knew exactly who Mrs. Darwood was. She had found her specifically because of who she was." By now the two policemen were entering with a very disgruntled Parks.

"He was trying to get away sir." said one of the men.

"Where were you off to, then, Parks?" the inspector said standing and looking at the chauffer.

"I wasn't trying to run away, I'd have no reason to be doin' that." declared the man.

"Well, I have a rap sheet here that says you would have a reason." The inspector took a sheet out of his pocket.

"It says here you've spent quite a lot of time behind bars, Parks. In fact, you're known better as Freddie the Nip. Quite a pickpocket aren't we Freddie?" The chauffer's face reddened but he said nothing else.

"Go ahead, Grafton." The inspector said sitting back down in his chair.

"After looking over your bank statements Lady Fairfax, we noted large amounts of money coming in. My lady, you've been running quite an operation. You found Mrs. Darwood and Freddie here who already knew the trade. They led you to Mr. White who they knew was a well-known fence in the underworld. Then, when Marianne discovered what you were doing you killed her."

"This is outrageous!" Lady Fairfax said getting up from the table. "Why, I won't sit here and hear this pack of lies." Lady Fairfax began to leave the room but the Inspector halted her.

"Why don't you just sit down there my lady and let Mr. Grafton finish his story." He led the irate woman firmly by the arm back to her seat. She sat down reluctantly, glaring at the Inspector.

"What's this all about, Grafton?" Lord Fairfax interjected into the tense room.

"This story is fantastic! Why would my mother do such a thing?" Vance looked at the man, he felt sympathy for him. This was not going to be an easy ordeal for him.

"Your mother had made a great deal of bad investments with the family money. She realized to keep up the name and lifestyle society associated with the name Fairfax; she was going to have to get more money. The jewel robberies must have seemed a quick and discreet way to accomplish this. Lady Fairfax was most concerned to make sure the fact that the Fairfax estate needed money was never found out."

Vance turned to Lady Fairfax then.

"It was so important to you that no one find out that you killed your daughter-in-law."

"No!" cried out Rosalind, who then buried her face in horror at this revelation. Celia put her arms around Rosalind comforting her while she watched Vance to see what he would say next.

"You can't prove a word of this nonsense." snapped Lady Fairfax indignantly.

"Yes, we can back this up with facts and records, Lady Fairfax. As far as the murder of Marianne Fairfax, you made a big mistake by using your own prescription of sleeping powders. It was easy enough to find out that you had refilled your prescription early. You told the pharmacist that you had dropped your other bottle."

"I did drop my bottle, how dare you accuse me of such a thing." retorted Lady Fairfax.

"No, my lady, we talked to your staff and no one cleaned up or threw away a broken bottle that day." Lady Fairfax went silent and white.

"But what about Roland and this Mr. White?" Julia Fairfax spoke up.

"That was Parks doing" Vance answered looking over at the chauffer.

"Lady Fairfax knew Roland was getting to close to finding out about the whole thing. She sent Parks to get rid of the two people that could tell Roland what he wanted to know, Mr. White and Miss Milford, or rather Mrs. Darwood."

Upon this statement from Vance, Parks ran toward the window trying to get away. The policemen grabbed him pulling him back into the room.

"Here now, where do you think you're going, you blighter?" one of the policemen said as he clasped handcuffs on the man.

Vance turned to the rest of the family.

"I'm sorry that you all have to go through this." He said sympathetically. Everyone was sitting in shock. Lady Fairfax had still not uttered another word.

"Alright, my lady, you're going to have to come with me." The inspector stood breaking into the silence. The police took the two and left then.

"Thank you, Grafton, for all you help." The inspector said shaking Vance's hand. "We wouldn't have put all that together without your knowledge."

Inspector McNeal nodded to the family said goodnight and left the stunned occupants of the room. Vance sat down and looked around the table. It would take a few minutes for this all to sink it. It was a terrible shock. Finally, taking a deep breath Lord Fairfax spoke. "What I don't understand in all this Vance is why my mother would put Roland in the position of being accused of murder. Surely she would have stepped forward before he was convicted?"

There was pleading in the older man's eyes as he looked at Vance.

"I don't think she would've, sir. Roland is your wife's son from her first marriage. You adopted him but he is not a blood relative to Lady Fairfax. I believe in her mind he was expendable to save the rest of the family. She felt she had a better heir perhaps in Phillip because he was of the Fairfax bloodline."

Vance looked at Lord Fairfax with compassion as he told of his suspicions.

"I simply can't believe it." The lord said, shaking his head.

"Roland is like my own child. I can't understand why my mother would care so little for him."

"Your mother is a woman possessed with the idea of money, name and position in society. It just simply drove her to do terrible things in her pursuit of them."

Vance said looking to the rest of the family.

"If you have any more questions, I would be glad to answer them. Perhaps though it would be better if we all headed to bed, you've all had a great shock." The family mumbled agreements and headed off to bed quietly.

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Vance had gone into the library after the family had headed off to bed. He was wide awake and hoped he could find something to read for a while. He had been in there for about an hour when Celia came into the room.

"I finally got Rosalind off to sleep. I think she is relieved for Roland but mourning her grandmother's misdeeds." Celia was quiet for a moment standing at the window looking out into the dark night. The clock struck midnight as they both stood in silence. Celia then turned smiling. Her pretty face lit up.

"I don't mean to make light of what happened tonight but I thought you were wonderful!" She beamed at him and crossed the room to where he stood by the bookshelves. Vance had to laugh. It had been such a serious evening but the delight and resilience in Celia made him smile.

"Celia, you're a delight. You've just been through a tense evening of discovering you've shared a house with murderers and you still find something positive." He smiled down at her putting his hands on her arms.

"Well, I don't mean to be morbid." She said biting her lip.

"But, I find it all very interesting. I'm very sad for the Fairfax's though. They have always treated me well and are a really nice family."

"Yes I know, greed does bad things to perfectly good people wherever it rears its ugly head." Vance said somberly, and then he smiled again, with a twinkle of mischief in his eye.

"I believe you're in danger of becoming a thrill seeker if you enjoy a murder." Celia laughed.

"Well I don't think I'm going to begin chasing ambulances! But, I think I would like to write about it. I write articles about my travels but I think it would be much more interesting to write about your cases." She said slyly, looking up at him with a conspirator tone.

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A month later, Vance had wrapped up the Fairfax case and was working on two cases in New York. He was sitting at his desk at his office downtown when his secretary came to the door.

"There's a woman her to see you, sir." The older woman said. "Are you available?"

"Yes Joan, have her come right in." Vance said, distractedly looking at his papers.

"Well, here I am ready for adventure." A familiar voice said. Vance looked up from his papers in surprise. Celia Wingate stood in the doorway in a long fur coat and a perky green hat atop her head; beaming with delight.

"Celia!" Vance said, recovering from his surprise and coming around his desk to greet her.

"I didn't know you were coming to New York." He said taking her hand and smiling down at her.

"Oh no, how did you think I was going to write about your cases without coming to New York?" She said sassily, grinning. Vance burst out laughing and put his arm around her guiding her into the room.

"Alright then, you thrill seeker. What do you want to know first?"

"Part One: The Sock Bandits"
by Katie Leve

Lost Socks

Mom was beginning to think that she was going crazy. Every washed sock taken from the dryer was missing its mate. For quite some time it had not gone unnoticed. Washed socks never seem to match up. There is always one or two missing. It was an annoyance at first but now it had become a perplexing mystery. At first she was sure I was the culprit. My sloppy manners and inability to keep things together had been evident ever since I was a little kid. It's her fault for being so lenient and accommodating. For as long as I can remember, socks were a constant source of squabbling between my mother and me. She claims to have spent more money on socks over the years than shoes.

"Mom, I need socks." I would announce every time we shopped one of the local Marts.

"Deano, I just bought a six pack of tubes for you last week! You can't possibly need new socks!"

"Well, all I know is none of my socks match and I can't wear shorts to school if my socks don't match!"

And so the conversation repeated itself over the years until it became a joke in our family. I adjusted well to the inconvenience. My creative sock inspirations spread like fire through school and soon half the kids in my class sported mismatched socks. I even cut the tops off of tube socks and fashioned them into colorful wristbands and headgear. It was amazing what could be done with one odd sock. Mom did not adjust as easily. The problem not only repeated itself, it began to multiply. Sometimes both socks would disappear and now it wasn't just my socks, her socks were mysteriously coming up short too.

One day, Mom had purposely paired every sock to its mate as she gathered the wash. And just to be sure, she fished each sock out of the wash and matched them again before she tossed them in the dryer and left for work.

More than hours had passed between the final spin of the dryer and Mom's folding routine. More than time had intervened. The clean laundry, stacked and sorted, proved a startling revelation! Eight pairs of tube socks were missing their mates! Two nylon knee-highs, one white and one black were gone. A brand new pair of green plaid dress socks had vanished. No defining answers, no reasonable explanations, only haunting questions lingered in the air.

In the past she would pretend it didn't happen. But now it couldn't be ignored. Mom was full of indignation and determination. She intended to catch the prankster red handed!

"Who could it possibly be? What are they doing with all the socks?" She suspiciously questioned me and would not rule me out as the prime suspect. She jokingly prodded the moms on her block and discovered sock disappearances were common in the neighborhood. Oddly enough, no one seemed to think it strange.

or even unusual. No one that is, except my mom. I know I wasn't an ordinary kid. I walked to the beat of a rhythm in my head. A combination of thumps, slaps, clicks and snaps propelled from my hands just to annoy every adult and fascinate all the kids in the neighborhood. In addition to my striking personality and quirky sock affliction, I acquired the gift of gab. I could weave an astonishing story from common occurrences so vividly embellished that you could not distinguish between the mix of fact and fiction in the telling of it. So it was, during this time that I began to plot the shenanigans of the "Sock Bandit."

Looking for Clues

You could say Mom was kind of obsessed with this notion of a sock robber. Dad and I mercilessly teased her about it and I suppose we are responsible for escalating her resolve. I have to admit that I was fascinated by the thought of a thief prowling around in our basement, but even more intriguing to a boy of 14 was keeping Mom off balance by consistently making her think that I just might be the mastermind behind "The Great Sock Caper." She was easy prey for my pranks and I couldn't resist getting even for all the times she fussed about it. Once she told me: "I won't be mad if you just fess-up" she added. "and give my socks back!"

"Really Deano," she howled. "this joke isn't funny anymore!"

She tried to punish me once, but it didn't work. Mom wasn't good at following through when it came to dishing out chores or punishments. She was too easy to reason with.

"You're right mom," I said sarcastically.

"I confess, over the last three years I've been involved in an underground sock conspiracy."

"Here, lock me up," I would say as I held up my surrendering arms.

Mom just stifled a laugh, shook her head and stomped her foot in an admission of defeat.

It wasn't until I reached the age of 15, that I began to seriously look at the socks we had sacrificed over the years. This was the year I got my first job, bought my own clothes and mastered my own laundry. Isn't it interesting how something once so trivial can suddenly be momentous when it impacts your personal investments? I had taken the habit of washing a load of assorted whites and jeans much to Mom's dismay. "It's more efficient," I would argue, "I'm saving time and money."

The routine was to get the wash into the dryer right before bed. By morning I would have just enough time to run to the basement, pull out the specific items needed for the day's attire, and leave the rest for Mom to deal with. It was on this specific morning that I had washed a brand new purchase, a mint condition, vintage pair of green and purple argyle socks from the seventies that I found on the Internet. I wouldn't have been upset over a missing sock, since I rarely wear like socks on the same day, but this particular purchase was a swap between friends. Ben Jernigan and I had agreed to exchange a very cool, geometric sock for a

drumstick once owned by my favorite Punk/Rock percussionist. Ben's dad worked for a lighting and audio company that "set-up" all the big concerts in town. It was through this connection that BJ had acquired the sought after sticks. It took weeks of negotiating for a trade to be considered. When Ben saw the argyle originals, he agreed to relinquish a stick for a sock. Anyway as you might guess the sock was missing...Mislaid? Misplaced? Lost? Stolen? Gone! Unintentionally, and without deliberation, I joined ranks with my mother and began my own personal quest to solve the mystery.

"Could our socks have somehow gotten sucked into another area of the machine?" I asked my Uncle Jack.

Uncle Jack, just out of the Navy, spent his first civilian years as a washing machine repairman. He said you'd be surprised what can get lodged inside the working parts of a machine and agreed to take a look. Of course, my dad would have none of that. Mentioning Mom's brother dropping by to check out the machine was all it took to get Dad on the task. Within the hour, the head of our house had removed every nut, bolt, switch and belt only to moan: "I told you so." I admit, it was a long shot, but seemed to be the most logical conclusion. After all, I had looked under, beside and around the machine; there was no place else to go but inside.

Dad was quick to point out: "Lost socks are a product of your own doing. They do not mysteriously vanish, nor does anyone else want them."

"But Dad, don't you want to help Mom find out what is happening?"

"Son, let me give you a word of advice about women. They do not want your help. They just want you to listen and sympathize. If you can remember this, it will serve you well."

That went in one ear and out the other. I was intrigued by the prospects of what was happening and beginning to think that socks had a life of their own. When they don't get along with their mate, I fancied, they file for a separation and leave the premises.

Deano The Detective

I took on the persona of a Private Investigator and began to formulate a plan. First, I needed the assistance of my friend Ben who already had a vested interest in this case. Ben was a connoisseur of tech toys and video gear with a passion for adventure. He loved the challenge of "whodunit" and just as I expected, jumped at the chance to partner with me. We stole away to the basement, making our plans, checking out every nook and cranny.

"We'll catch the perpetrator in the act!" Ben announced, all scrunched inside the dryer, checking out any possible escape routes.
Filming wet clean socks as they were being thrown in for a spin around the drying cycle was the easy part. Getting surveillance cameras set up to capture a thief was another matter. We weren't sure what we would find, but we were bound and determined to uncover any secret the basement would offer up.

"Look at that," Ben said as he scaled the basement wall, hoisting his slim torso into the crawl space.

With flashlight in hand, Ben spotted an opening just above the footer under the front porch. Facing the neighbors' house, just below what we determined was our porch swing, was a gaping hole.

"Wonder what kind of critter squeezes through that?"

"Much bigger than a mouse," I surveyed.

"A squirrel, or maybe a tom cat?" Ben questioned.

"We'll get a better look at it in the morning," I added.
That night, as I lay in bed, I began to count all the varmints that could have found a way into our basement over the years and I'm reminded of a summer full of tall tales and small tails.

Nana and Robin

Mrs. Mabel Nation lived right beside us in the big blue house on the corner. Most of the kids in the neighborhood avoided her like the plague. She despised kids running through her yard; tracking through her gardens and scurrying around her flowerbeds. For some reason she had taken a liking to me. Mom later admitted her fondness was probably motivated more by her lack of admiration for my father. Dad had grown up in the neighborhood and survived countless accusations of vandalism and mischief in his younger days. Whether he was responsible or not, as a youngster, Dad reveled in the fact that the old lady held him in contempt whenever a prank was played on her property. Even as an adult, every time her yard was graced with a fresh load of toilet paper, she would scowl at my Dad as if he had personally placed it there.

Dad was always telling wild stories about his youthful tomfoolery but would quickly add: "Son, a bad reputation is hard to overcome. Let this be a lesson to you."

When I was five, I believed every word my father said.

"Mrs. Nation doesn't like little boys; you'd better stay off her brand new fence!" But I wondered why Mrs. Nation didn't like little boys. Just as she stepped into her side yard to tend to her roses, dad was pulling into our driveway from a hard day's work. I quickly scrambled over the fence to question her. As he stepped out of his Old Chevy pickup late that afternoon, I was running across the yard yelling at the top of my lungs: "She does too like little boys!"

It was this innocent act of indignation toward my father that won her heart. From that day forth, we shared a special bond that confounded my parents and tickled the lonely, widow woman I called Nana.

Nana Nation had a granddaughter who was talented in a most unusual way. Robin was different from other girls. Short tousled hair, scabby knees and baggy clothes never exposed her gender. She visited her grandmother every year during the summer. Several summers flew by before I thought of her as a girl. She had a gift with animals that intrigued me and we became inseparable for one whole month every summer.

The year I turned eight, Robin's visit was most memorable. One day we had this discussion about animals. She said they knew a whole lot more about us than we knew about them and swore that they could talk. When I accused her of being

crazy, she huffed off to her grandmother's house and didn't speak to me for two whole days. On the third day, I found myself knocking on Nana's door.

"Nana, do you think that animals can talk?" I asked when she met me at the door.

"Master Deano," she said. "do you believe in the Bible?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

"Well, you know the story about Adam and Eve don't you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, didn't the snake speak to Eve? And don't you imagine that Eve would have run to Adam and said that snake can talk, instead of here, eat this apple, if animals couldn't talk? It doesn't make sense to me that Eve would make such a fuss about an apple when a snake had a perfectly normal conversation unless it was a natural thing. Think about it." Then she added: "I suppose you're missing my Robin, she's going to want an apology, you know."

"Yes ma'am," I said.

Nana escorted me through the house and opened the door that led to the backyard. That's where I found Robin hovering over a shoebox that was sitting on the picnic table next to the shed.

"Hey, what's in the box?"

Robin just glared at me with the evil eye and I knew that skirting around an apology was out of the question.

"Listen, I'm sorry about what I said. Can we just forget about it?"

"Not until you admit that I'm right and you're obtuse!" she smirked looking me right in the eye, nose to nose.

"I don't even know what that means."

"Ha, so you are obtuse!" she laughed. "Say it, I'm right and you're obtuse."

"Okay, I'm right and you're obtuse," I said.

"Say it," she demanded.

"It," I said just a little louder.

"Deano, I mean it!"

"No you don't."

"Yes I do."

"No you don't."

"Yes I do."

"Do what?"

"I mean it," she repeated.

"What do you mean? You're confused. You're not mean. Don't say that about yourself."

Robin shook her head to keep from laughing and get her thoughts straight when a small noise from inside the box distracted us both.

"Look what I rescued." Robin sadly declared as she raised the lid. Inside the box was a baby raccoon no bigger than a kitten.

"Her mother was run over by a speeding teen just past the public pool two blocks up the street. I was there when it happened."

"How did you find her baby?" I asked.

"She was trembling on the side of the road less than a foot away from the accident. Nana said I could take care of her until she is ready to take care of herself."

"How long will that take?"

"I'm not sure, but tonight we're going to call Mom and see if I can stay the whole summer."

"Really...the whole summer…Wow...have you given her a name?"

"Her name is Pixy. Pixy Thicket."

Robin fed the little critter with a baby doll bottle, and fashioned a makeshift bunting out of an old thick cotton sock with the top cut off. She layered the box with moss for a bed and laid Pixy down for a nap. She slid the box into a small pet carrier that was stored in the back of the garage. That's when we saw the big one. He was standing right in the middle of the driveway just glaring at us. I swear it was the biggest raccoon that I had ever seen. He was standing erect, in an authoritative stance. His demanding demeanor was frightening. I was so scared. I couldn't catch my breath. Robin immediately put both her pinkies in her mouth, pushed her tongue back and let out the loudest whistle that pierced my ears and sent the raccoon for cover.

"Wow, what's up with that?"

"I don't know, but I don't like it," Robin said. "I'm taking Pixy to my room."

"Will Nana let you?" I asked.

"I don't think she'll mind as long as I keep her in the pen."

"What do you think that big ole coon wanted?"

"I'd say, he wanted to get his hands on Pixy. We'll have to keep a close watch to keep her safe."

Robin grabbed the cage and I followed out the side door of the garage, up the back steps and through the house to the sewing room that's transformed into Robin's bedroom every year. The room was full of small stuffed animals. Tons of bears graced the bed, cats and dogs draped the dresser and a group of farm animals toppled a huge laundry basket on the floor. The closets were loaded with more varieties of colorful stuffed toys. The only place I've ever seen so many at one time was in a store.

"Pixy looks just like the rest of your animals. If she kept real still, you'd never be able to tell her apart from the others. Where did you get all these animals?"

"Nana collects them for me. They are valuable and one day I'll be able to sell them and go to college. She doesn't really like me to play with them. I can't even take the tags off. It will ruin the value."

Myths from the Past

Robin's extended vacation was celebrated with an old fashion cookout gathered around a small brick fire pit that stood in the back corner of Nana's spacious back yard. We sharpened long thin sticks to house our marshmallows and pulled up folding chairs to comfortably settle in for the roasting.

"Today," Nana said. "I was reminded of one of the many stories my mother used to tell. My momma grew up on an Indian reservation and learned the art of

storytelling from her mother, my grandmother. Her beautiful hair, long, shiny and black as the night was always tucked up in a bun but right before bed she would shake it out till it fell past her shoulders and down to her waist. Sometimes while she brushed her hair she would tell me stories of forest magic and Indian lore. My favorite went something like this."

Long ago, when the earth and the stars were new, men and animals could talk to one another. It was over a thousand moons passing when the animals stopped talking to most of us.

"Man is too deceitful and greedy!" said the Wolf.

"He will cheat and lie to gain power over us." said the Bear.

"He will kill our children to feed his own!" said the Deer.

"He won't follow the ways of honor and compassion." said the Buffalo. "He cares only for himself." all agreed.

Slowly all the animals quit communicating with humans. And so the art of speaking to the animals was lost. Only a few special people had the gift, even fewer knew how to communicate back. Those who did talk to the animals could not share their secrets or brag about their talent, for to do so would break the bond and the gift would be lost forever.

"That's a good story, Nana, tell us another one," I pleaded.

"Yeah Granny" Robin added. "Tell Deano the story about the Raccoons."

"One day," Nana continued. "the animals held a meeting and agreed that each would select a plant to nurture themselves and all of their descendants. The first choice fell to the Raccoon. He slowly eyed each and every plant and picked a tree with huge pendulums of small green flowers that hung from hundreds of limbs. These are plentiful, and beautiful! He had picked the Sycamore Tree."

"All the other animals made their choices too! The Bear chose the huckleberry. The Opossum, the persimmon trees, the Squirrel took the Acorn and so on until all the animals had established a plant to sustain his offspring forever."

"As all the animals dined on the fruit of their choosing, Raccoon climbed the sycamore tree to partake of the golden beauty. Unfortunately, though appetizing to the eye, the flowers were bitter and lacked any nutritional value. He had chosen foolishly, and now he was hungry.

"Raccoon had to figure out a way to feed his family. He searched high and low for sustenance and discovered that all the trees and plants were spoken for. Out of desperation, and the survival of his kind, Raccoon was forced to turn to a life of thievery. With his masked face and cunning, he became adept at night robberies. He took pride in scavenging and taught his children the tricks of the trade. That is why, even now, the Raccoon thrives today.

Pixy's Parting

That night, I excitedly bolted through the back door to our kitchen where Mom was loading the dishwasher.

"Robin gets to spend the whole summer at Nana's and she found Pixy Thicket a baby raccoon and she wants me to help raise it until Nana says it's time to let her go!"

"That's nice," Mom said. "But you better make sure that raccoon stays over there. Your dad is not going to be too happy to know that a raccoon is taking up residency next door."

"Mom, do you think animals can talk?" and just as I was asking the question Dad entered the room.

"Son, how old are you?"

"Almost nine." I said.

"Well, that's what I thought." he said. "Far too old for such foolish talk...of course animals can't talk."

"Well," Mom said. "I guess that depends on what you mean. Animal psychologists can tell a lot about what an animal is saying by their mannerisms. I had a Golden Retriever who was extremely smart. She understood about a hundred words and could distinguish her blue ball from her red bone."

"You're right," Dad added. "Jamaica was a smart dog, but most animals aren't that smart. And I can assure you that they do not talk."

The summer flew by and Pixy grew like a weed. She was the most mischievous, curious little pest we both grew to love. Pixy had a fondness for Robin's red bull "Tobasco." According to Nana, it's one of the most valuable pieces of the collection. Nana would have a cow if she knew that Pixy had touched it let alone packed it around the room like it was her very own baby. Robin didn't mind and made sure that Nana never knew.

Every now and again, we spotted that big raccoon hanging around. In the evening, we sometimes watched him strut through the back yard and peak into the garage. We did everything to discourage him but nothing seemed to work. One evening, as Robin's vacation was coming to an end, Pixy went missing. She must have scrambled out the back door while no one was watching and took Tobastian with her. We spent days looking for her, calling out her name, all around the neighborhood. There was no sign of Pixy. She was gone for good and we knew it. Robin was so upset she cried every time we talked about it. She just wanted to know that Pixy was okay. She didn't expect to keep her, but she worried that she wouldn't survive on her own.

On the day Robin was going home, Nana tried to cheer us up with an old fashion root beer float.

"Take it to the picnic table and enjoy some of this beautiful sunshine while I get this kitchen cleaned up. We'll have to leave for the airport in a few hours, so you kids stay close."

Out the door we went and to our surprise, right smack dab in the middle of the picnic table sat Tobasco. Robin had all but forgotten about the most valuable collectible she owned. And there it was...all Robin needed...a sign from Pixy. Robin was so excited that she started hugging and jumping and screaming and laughing. We both did, that's when Nana stuck her head out the door.

Robin quickly slipped the little red bull behind her back as I chimed in

"Nana, Pixy's alive! She was just here!"

"Well, thank you, Lord." she said. "I've been praying all week and what a great ending to your summer vacation."

"Yes," we both agreed. As Nana closed the back door, I sighed with relief and whispered: "That was close!"

Robin nodded as we examined the little red bull closer. He was soiled and his tag was bent.

"Nana is going to kill me when she sees this."

"No, she won't. My mom can get anything clean."

We high tailed it over to my house and asked mom for some assistance. She had her own concoction; a mixture of rubbing alcohol, ammonia, and water that would get anything clean and sure enough, it did the trick. Robin had just enough time to sneak it back into her collectible menagerie before her departure.

"Wasn't this the best summer of all, Deano?"

"I'm never going to forget it." I said.

"I'm never going to forget it either." she said and planted a great big kiss right on my lips. It happened so fast that I was dumbfounded.

"You're as red as Tobasco!" Robin laughed. "I'm going to miss you, Deano."

"Yeah, me too." I awkwardly admitted.

With a lump in my throat and a knot in my stomach, I hugged Robin goodbye. Something changed between us and I knew things would never be the same.

That was the last summer Robin spent with her grandmother. She came for visits but never for very long. She had summer camp, piano lessons and other obligations. The difference in our age seemed to broaden with each passing year. Still, never a visit passes without some word about that summer and some wonder of what became of Pixy Thicket.

Caught in the Act

All these memories slipped past the silence of my bedroom, wandering aimlessly through my mind as I began to doze. Suddenly, a quiet thrashing, like scurrying about deep beneath the rafters of my bed drew me back to wakefulness. Instinctively I knew that socks would be missing in the morning.

Barely dressed in flannels and a T-shirt, I crept down the basement steps in a panic of excitement. As I gripped the banister, at the bottom of the stairs, I distinctly heard voices. Crisp, clipped, small sounds unlike anything I had ever heard before. More curious than frightened I stopped to quietly peer beyond the wall passed the piles of dirty laundry to the machines side by side.

"That green one will be great... any pink? We could really use pink. Grab one each of those white pairs and we'll dye a few."

"Hey, Honcho, why don't we just take all of 'em? It'll save us time and this house has the best!"

"No, we can't do that! Each of these will be processed as a one of a kind and besides, we don't want to call attention to ourselves. This method has worked great

from the beginning. It insures that people just think they've lost a sock...if we took the pairs it would be suspicious?"

As I slowly glimpsed around the corner of the stairs, on the wide-open dryer door, half in and half out, was a grayish-brown, furry, striped tail tucked inside a load of scattered clothes. Another tail, just as striped and furry hung off the top of the machine. Connected to the tail, his back to me stood a large round robust raccoon stuffing socks inside a sock. I was frozen dumbfounded, unable to move, muscles tense as I strained to catch more of their conversation. The leader perched on top of the dryer spoke with authority barking orders and instructions.

"Hurry up...we haven't got all day. Make sure you turn the socks inside out before you hand them to me."

The rookie rooting through my clothes was clumsy and loud. "Hey, look at these...we hit the jack-pot!" There he was, dancing a jig, holding up both of my favorite red and black diamond dress socks.

By their antics, I could tell that these two were related. The eldest held an overbearing posture and a bossy attitude toward the other. The younger was impetuous and silly. While the first took his job seriously, the other took nothing serious at all. One gave the orders. The other did the fetching. And the whole time, both were so familiar with the other, that as a team they were almost flawless.

Just as I was beginning to gather my courage, the rowdy one saw a blue ribbed bobby sock lying on the floor right in front of me. He instinctively jumped to inspect the find. That's when we both got a good look at each other sharing the same expression of shock and terror. The moment hung in the air, as if time was cut in half. It played out in slow motion until suddenly time broke into chaos. He hit the floor running, hysterically screaming: "RETREAT!"

Quick as a snap, the pair had jumped the wall, scrambled into the crawl space, under the porch and through the hole taking the sock bag full of my favorite foot coverings.

Without a second thought, I scrambled up the steps, through the kitchen and out the back door. As I rounded the corner of the house, I watched the tail of the last one clambering out of the hole. The two scurried down the street, unaware of my pursuit. Oblivious to the strangeness of it all, my only thoughts were to retrieve my belongings and demand restitution.

The Chase

Honcho and Pell Mel were less than a half a mile from the house when they realized they were being tracked by the boy who interrupted their tryst. In the wooded bamboo thickets, at the edge of the park, they stopped to discuss their options.

"We've got to split up." said Honcho. "You take the goods, the long way home following the creek. tay out of sight and don't dawdle! I'll catch up with you around dawn."

"Jeez, why do you get to have all the fun?" Pell Mel protested.

"I can out run, out smart, and out think this kid with my eyes closed." Honcho gave Pell Mel a look that instantly melted his enthusiasm and sent him down the road.

Honcho was experienced in tracking and knew that the weight of his footing would send the boy in his direction. As Pell Mel began his own escape down the creek and out of sight, Honcho swiftly prepared a series of tail-tell signs to keep the boy moving in his direction. Though logical and expertly executed, Honcho's maneuver was useless, for as soon as Pell Mel swept past the blackberry patch at the bottom of the hill a different plan began to unravel. Focused on his mission and fast on his feet, Pell Mel never looked back. He hastily hopped the creek, hurried past the pines, circled the duck pond and quickly crossed over Beaver's Bridge into the woodlands known as Springbrook Forest. From one end of the woods to the other, Pelly successfully scurried the long way home with a sense of pride. He passed through the gate of his humble abode, took a long worn out breath then suddenly discovered the error of his way. Pell Mel's demeanor plunged from satisfied to petrified as he surveyed the tiny pieces of threads grasped tightly in his clutches. The whole bag of socks never made it home, only a few rows of loopy white threads with a trailing line of yarn. Pelly trembled at the thought of leaving a well-marked path for the boy to follow and wondered how things could have come so undone.

A Thread of Evidence

As the gangly pair made their way down the street toward the park, I stopped to catch my breath. It was way past midnight but a full moon made them easy to track. I watched the two slip into a patch of bamboo and birches near the edge of Rock Springs Creek. My vision was distorted when I entered the woods. A canopy of trees blocked the moonlight casting shadows across the ground. An oddly warm October wind made me shiver with an eerie feeling that sunk to my stomach. I crossed the reality line by chasing after two talking coons and knew that any convincing would require proof. I also surmised that talking animals must be capable of great deal more than ever suspected. What secrets lurched beyond the forest façade? What dangers awaited my intrusion? I rubbed my crossed arms to help shake off a swelling fear that threatened to turn me back. I stopped to rest on a downed tree to weigh the evidence and the risk. My scrawny bottom, damp from the slick dewy log, gave me one more nudge to head home. I sat just long enough to convince myself of imagining the whole scenario and worried what early rising neighbors might say to find me out and about in pajamas. I spoke my convictions aloud to a passing rabbit that froze at the sound of my voice.

"Did you see two raccoons carrying a sock bag?"

"Can you tell me the direction they went?"

He quickly scurried into the grassy blades of wild flowers and weeds without so much as a squeak. Surrendering to the thoughts of my crazy imaginations, I turned toward home when a single white thread caught my eye. Closer inspection revealed it was caught on the thorn of a blackberry bush and left a clear trail through the

park. Without so much as a second thought, my retreat melted, fears vanished and curiosity drove me onward. Following a dirty white string beyond the murky, damp woodlands had its rewards too. Along the path, I found a sock trail of my own stolen footies and all the evidence needed to restore my questionable sanity.

I caught up with the perpetrators just as I reached the thorny thickets of Rose Cove just beyond Springbrook Forest. It was a standoff, reminding me of the kind you see in the Westerns, except neither of us had guns. I found myself trembling as I slowly approached the two. They stood firm without so much as a word. I was unsure of what to do next. The big bossy one stepped forward in a protective stance. We just stared at each other while the other cowered behind him. Just as I started to speak, the leader said: "You got your socks back, now leave us be. It will be better for everyone if you just forget you ever saw us."

I couldn't believe my ears.

"What?" I said.

"Your presence puts us all in danger. Go back and never speak of this."

"Never speak of it? What have you done with all my socks?" I demanded.

"I'll make sure your house is never targeted again, just promise me that..."

"I'll promise you nothing until you tell me why socks are important to raccoons."

"Listen, he said, as he nervously scoped the surroundings, I have a family. Talking to you puts them in harm's way. Talking to us puts you in danger too. We must get back to our business before any suspicions are aroused."

"Look," I said, "I don't want any trouble, but you have got to..."

"Listen to me," he said in a harsh whisper as he swiftly leapt upon a log that perched right beside me. "We've already got trouble. Just go home...now PLEASE!" he pressed with pleading eyes. I suddenly saw the terror in his urging.

"Okay," I said feeling alarmed by his insistence. Just before turning to go, I impulsively dropped my socks at his feet and added: "If you need my help, you know where to find me." I worked my way back the same way I came and fell into bed just before the rising sun took over the morning.

Deano never saw the raccoon that witnessed the whole scene from the back entrance where Rose Cove acts as a barrier to their little community. Though she recognized him immediately, Pixy Thicket resisted the urge to interfere and silently watched as Deano departed.

NEVER KNEW LOVE 'TIL NOW by Jami Dingess

Nonfiction

"Writers' Block"

by Teresa Price

I have a disease and its official name is "Writer's Block." As far as anyone knows, it isn't contagious, but it's there, taunting me like the fly that waits until dinnertime to buzz around my hair. The food has been prepared, the table set, and the guests are seated when suddenly "buzzzz" cuts through the air, disrupting the flow of gathering. That's what I imagine my head might sound like should anyone care to listen—just a buzzing, or perhaps a whirring sound like the computer beneath my fingers; the promise of great things being accomplished with just the touch of the keys. But I have writer's block, and thus, the simple act of putting my fingers to the keys elicits something like crickets chirping on a warm summer's night—or worse—complete silence.

That can be another issue associated with writer's block: Noise—or in my case, lack thereof. I know it sounds crazy, but this condition seems exacerbated by varying degrees of noise; too much and the words get angrier and edgy; too little noise and everything gets soft and sleepy—neither of which account for good writing. Thus, I seek out tunes on the computer and hope that the music of Narnia or Pirates of the Caribbean will entice my brain to fire in appropriate succession, like the cannons on the ship of the Black Pearl as it sails into battle, armed with only cutlery but willing to fight lest she end up at the bottom of the ocean—or worse—in Davy Jones' locker.

Perhaps that's where my brain has gone missing – the bottom of the ocean; I imagine the area of the cerebral cortex as a deep chasm, where the unimportant or warm fuzzies swim near the top, easy to spill out into daily conversations or in my writing, while the quality thoughts are buried deep, sinking into an abyss that lies in wait for an earth-shattering event to force them to the surface. Typically, this writer's-block syndrome is somewhat alleviated by driving time; the longer the drive, the deeper I swim in the abyss, whereas a quick trip to the store barely scratches the surface. Even then, when the moment comes to put pen to paper (or my fingers to the keyboard) my brain suffers from some random power outage, thus rendering even the best phrases or intelligent ideas lost once more.

These brain outages also happen at other inopportune times, like during an argument, or at gatherings of not-so-close friends or acquaintances where I'm forced to smile awkwardly and share stories that no one finds interesting or humorous. My husband's class reunion was this summer, so to prepare I wrote and rehearsed various quips and short snippets of stories that – from nearly anyone's perspective – would be well received, politically neutral, and lightly entertaining. Of course, Deron's idea of engaging in conversation is to simply nod his head and laugh, giving anyone in a 20 feet radius of him the notion that he is having a great time; however, this rule does not apply to me. I find myself shifting from foot-to-foot, sipping on a lukewarm beverage and wishing I had stayed home to stare at the blank screen on my computer.

Like impatient fingers tapping away the seconds, waiting for something—anything—the cursor sits on the bright, white screen insisting that I get busy putting my thoughts out there. It ticks away the time and with every blink, I get more and more frustrated. I see that same frustration when I look at my father-in-law. He lays in a hospital bed that looks as though it's made for a midget; his feet press against the cold, hard plastic. Dad seems to imperceptibly scoot downward in the bed, finally hanging his size 13s off the edge of the blue inflatable mattress. The stiff, white sheets cannot contain him as he pulls on the covers stamped with the hospital's logo in some vain effort to get comfortable.

Dad is suffering from long-term writer's block—or perhaps it's something a little different. Unlike me who spends time staring at a computer screen, Dad stares intently at each of us. His thoughts are there, but I imagine they are stuck somewhere behind his eyes. I can almost see the words drifting across his face; his mouth frowns and his brow furrows, creating deep lines across his forehead as a particularly unpleasant thought jabs at his conscience. Yet, at other times, a soft smile appears and his eyes twinkle. It is those moments that I know he's singing to himself.

His weathered hands lift into the air and he sways slowly in the bed, causing the air to shift noisily in the mattress. Glancing from his wife to me, he beckons us to join in this silent song. Nancy, his wife of nearly 53 years, smiles; her face too tells a tale – one of thanksgiving, hope, desperation, and grieving one who has not-yet gone. Bob opens-and-closes his fingers, much like a baby learning to wave; that is his sign that he wants to hold hands—to simply feel her touch. Mom willingly obliges, standing next to his bed, her hand fitting within his own as though it was a matched set.

Dad looks up at her and his eyes fill with tears; I see them, more words, stuck there – held behind the skin and flesh. A large sigh is all the sound he can muster, or perhaps the occasional word, "Well." This, coming from a man who has been a civic leader, an arm-chair politician, the sounding board for many a head-of-corporation, father, brother, husband, and friend is shocking.

He has terminal writer's block; his mind is taking his words one-by-one and hiding them so deep that they are irretrievable. My version of the disease comes from many things—stress… and I can't remember the rest; Bob's comes from something else—old age, kidney failure, dialysis, congestive heart failure, and most recently, a fall which created a bleed in the brain. The doctors call it a hemorrhagic stroke and we have only a little time left with him.

The specialists stand in his room twice daily during shift change at the hospital, surrounded by interns, nurses, and varying physicians coldly dictating Dad's condition, diagnosis, and prognosis.

We, his family, are asked to step out for these precious few minutes as the less-than-spacious room is not equipped to accommodate more than a few people. I strain at the door to listen, hoping to catch a familiar phrase or new terminology to research, but it sounds more and more like one of the old television programs on a bad signal; I can only make out bits-and-pieces and the rest is just static noise

which leaves my mind racing to what might be going on behind the curtain.

Suddenly, the door flies open, and in a blur of white coats, the medical team passes by, headed to the next room. My mother-in-law calls out a question, like the media at a press conference, but not one of them stops – and no one answers. It reminds me of a covert club where unless you know the passphrase or secret knock, you can't gain access. She looks to me, hoping I'll demand an answer, but my mind locks down tight, mimicking the feeling of putting my fingers to the keyboard.

Late into the night, Mom finally rests as I take the first watch with Dad. She refuses to leave the room, and instead, slumps painfully in the hard, upright chair, snoring in fitful sleep while Dad floats in-and-out of awareness; his eyes reflecting his state of consciousness. Day-by-day the light I saw there becomes dimmer, finally settling into cloudy nothingness. Yet, I sit and watch, silently willing him to breathe in-and-out. His broad chest rises ever so slightly, pauses, collapses quickly and rests before the journey to breathe began again. The hospital monitors beep in congratulations of every heartbeat, and scolds loudly if the oxygen levels fall too low.

My father-in-law's face twitches and I worry, wondering if he is in pain. His tall, distinguished brow gathers in deep, soft folds and his lips pout; for a moment, he looks like my 11-year-old just before a good cry and I smile in spite of my sadness. How did we get here so fast? My heart screams within my chest and I sit once again, staring at a blank screen, longing for a release. Somewhere along the way, I have lost the connection between my heart, my mind, and my fingers; the dreaded writer's block. Dad has lost his connection too; but somehow, as I sit holding his hand, his seems more final and resolute. Yesterday, he could tell Mom what he wanted for breakfast, while today, he could only shake his head. Yesterday, he hugged his grandchildren, and today, he didn't say Mom's name.

Writer's block or whatever the vocal version would be seems to affect my whole family at this point; no one seems to be able to say the right thing to comfort one another, or ask the correct question of the doctor, or sign the paper… the paper—the paper that is presented to Mom day-after-day; the paper that is supposed to be the "kind" thing to do for Dad—the paper that is supposed to "end his suffering" – the paper that Mom pushes away each and every day.

"The paper" now sits on the side table, next to Dad's uneaten breakfast. While he is away at dialysis, I sit and watch Mom slumber. She listens, even in her sleep, for the sound of an alarm, a breathless moment, or the sound of Dad's return; even though he's not in the room, she listens, and she stirs. I attempt to commit to memory all of the things I notice today—all the things that should go into my writing about this seemingly unimportant day; the way the reflection of the window glass reminds me of the triple mirror at home, throwing my own face back at me time-and-time again; how a busy hospital floor can feel so empty; and how a collage of children's colorful drawings only brightens one small spot in the sterile room—yet, when I come to write it all down—it escapes that outermost layer of accessible reasoning and dives to a greater depth than the thoughts before it, pain-

For what seems like hours, I study the various drawings of abstract stick figures, flowers, a dog, and even a purple cow that are pinned tightly to the cork board in that hospital room. Every inch of the once-white paper is lovingly covered in color, glitter, and foam cut-outs of get-well-soon wishes and I-love-you-Papa messages. There are only as many as Mom can grab in one minute; she is a speedy packer and a minute is about all the hospital gives you when necessity calls for Dad to be transported to ICU and back again. For a time, this jaunt to the ICU was fleeting, but lately it has been occurring on a weekly—and sometimes daily—basis or more. Mom has become an expert and swift packer, stuffing clothes, artwork, medicine, and various "busy" material into her duffle bag and suitcase. By the time we would reach the hospital after one of the many "He's been taken back to the ICU," phone calls, Mom would be sitting on a pile of bags, all stuffed full of her life.

And that is where we found her—that last day—sitting in ICU. But something is different—there is defeat in the air and sorrow gathers at her feet like wet snow. Mom is bent over; her small, frail hands hide the tears, but not the quiet sound of her sobbing and yet, that noise seems deafening. The paper—that dreaded, damned paper—is signed. Part of me is glad that Dad's suffering would soon be over, while another part of my screams for a do-over, for time to stand still. There are so many unanswered questions, so many things still left to say, moments to enjoy—all stripped away from us in the stroke of a pen.

I often wonder what's worse: Diving head-first into temporary writer's block or the slow realization that permanent loss has occurred. For my father-in-law, I think maybe it isn't just words that got lost in the chasm, but his entire existence is lost there as well. And in the end, perhaps what Dad didn't say was just as important—or more important—than what he did manage to say. It was the tilt of his head when Mom touched his hand, the smile on his face when his grandchildren were near, and the twinkle in his eye when we looked at one another; that's what I will cherish—those quiet moments, unburdened with the noise of words. Maybe someday this writer's block will clear out and my fingers will dance across the keys once more, but for now, I think I'll concentrate on that wordless communication Dad had taught us during his last round of writer's block.

"A Story about a Bike"
by Deidra Purvis

In our usual formation, I sit curled up in my PJ pants and tank top on the recliner end of our oversized beige corner couch, scribbling ideas for my college senior thesis in a notebook. Mom is in her pink nightgown sitting in her "spot" by the picture window in the rocker-recliner that used to be Grandma Purvis's. Dad relaxes in his "spot"—the right side of the couch—leaning his left elbow on the armrest, his other hand resting on his potbelly, and his knees bent and stacked on top of each other. In front of him, the couch extends like a peninsula where our toy poodle-mix lies sleeping on a pillow in her "spot." We have all been watching a mixture of the evening news and *The Andy Griffith Show*, Dad flicking the channel during commercials.

"Dad," I ask, "what were the major events in your life?"

He furrows his brows a little.

"Major events?" he asks in his sweet, child-like voice.

"Yeah, like crushing your nose, cutting your pinky off," I say.

Mom rocks her chair back using her tip toes and adds: "Getting married, having kids…"

"Ohhh..." Dad says, looking up to the ceiling, lacing his hands together on top of his belly as he thinks.

"Well, I got a new bicycle once."

Mom and I laugh together. Mom rocks her chair more vigorously.

"They really broke the mold when they made you." Mom says, laughing more. Dad smiles at both of us, making his eyes squint and revealing his missing two front teeth.

Time freezes as I look into my dad's face. I love him for how cute he is. For being a permanent child. Dad is my son, my little boy, not my father. But I wasn't there for his real childhood. Like a mother, I want my son to tell me about his day. I want to know why this bicycle was so special to him, so special that he named it a major event within his fifty-six years of life.

I'll never forget the day I got my first bicycle. I was four years old and living in Eldorado, Ohio, with my mom, dad, and two older brothers, Casey and Lucas, in a one-bedroom house. In those days, Mom stayed at home to take care of us kids. She would put us in a red wooden wagon and pull us around the small town as she ran her errands. We would always be outside playing. Mom let Casey and Lucas ride their bicycles around, and I had a little, pink tri-cycle that I would ride up and down the sidewalk.

Dad was a garbage man, which meant he would proudly tote home treasures that he found on the job. Only one piece of treasure, though, do I actually remember.

Dad came home and told me he had something for me. I felt a numb excitement brewing inside.

At the age of five, a candy would have sufficed. I traced his steps out to the garage, where I could see that Uncle Melvin and Uncle Larry—two skinny grubby men in flannel shirts, roofing caps, and beers in their hands—were both in the driveway. I looked at Dad; he was rolling a light blue bicycle with bright white tires towards me. I couldn't speak, couldn't move. A ball of excitement grew larger and larger inside of me. Was that bicycle really for me?

"Get on it!" my uncles encouraged. "Take it for a ride."

My smile encompassed my entire face, but I couldn't speak. I had never ridden a bicycle without training wheels before. My dad placed it beside me at the edge of the garage and helped me on. I put my right foot on a pedal and rode down the small driveway, between the parked trucks and cars, screaming inside,

"I'm doing it! I'm doing it!" At the sidewalk, I stopped and planted my feet onto the ground. I looked back at my dad with squinting eyes and a giant smile that said: "Thank you."

Throughout the next few days, Dad shares the story behind his major event. I'm sure he felt a similar excitement to mine when his oldest brother, Ernie, gave him a new bicycle for his twelfth birthday—a brown one-speed equipped with bells, whistles, a horn, streamers, a cargo rack on the back and front, fenders, a headlight, and mirrors.

"It was the Cadillac of bikes," my dad told me proudly.

Dad grew up poor in the 1960s—bikes were more than a luxury. He and his brothers managed to own various old bikes throughout their childhood. They would zoom around on the streets, ride to town, do tricks, and make all kinds of fun for themselves.

When Dad was thirteen, a friend at school had his eye on Dad's bike. I imagine the conversation went something like this:

"You wanna have my pony?" said the boy. "Boy, I could jus' see ya ridin' it all 'round!"

"Y'll gimmie y'r pony?" my dad asked.

"Hell no, I won't give it to ya!" he said. "Wanna trade?"

"Wha' 'zac'ly do'ya want?" my dad asked, trying to act like a tough salesman making a deal.

"How 'bout I give ya my pony for y'r bike…'n y'r BB gun."

Dad thought about it for a second. "'Kay," he said, smiling at the idea of riding a pony around like a cowboy.

Having never been around anything like a pony before, Dad was afraid of his new pet. A friend had to walk it to my dad's house for him. And the pony turned out to be mean. The boy wanted to get rid of it because it had given his brother a concussion when it bucked him off for the hundredth time. Dad never was able to ride it. Eventually, he got rid of it, too, but his bike was still gone forever.

After hearing this story from my dad, it consumes my thoughts. I feel—*feel*—my dad's disappointment. His vulnerability. The feeling of getting played. I can't stop feeling sad, completely bummed that my poor little dad lost the bike that he proudly recalled as a major event in his life.

It doesn't matter that it happened over forty years ago. Stained into my mind is the image of my dad's smiling face when he named that bike as a major event in his life, proudly describing all the features. I want to go back in time to stop him from trading his most prized possession for that sour pony.

But I can't.

All I can do is look into my dad's smiling face as he chooses to remember the moment his brother wheeled the bike towards him, not the moment he traded it off. Sitting in our spots on our beige couch, I watch my dad stare intently at *The Andy Griffith Show*. I imagine all that my dad must have been through in his life, but all that matters is that bike and that pony—my dad's everlasting search for happiness, rerunning through both of our minds much like his favorite shows on TV.

"Forget Me Not"
by Senta Sanders

Three young nurses in colorful scrubs take turns patting me on the back as I walk down the hall of 6th South at Saint Mary's Hospital. All of the doors to the hospital rooms are closed. All of the doors except the one I just left, the one with the purple forget me not on the door.

A week ago someone had hung up a sign with a ruby red slipper on it. Once I had become tired of the sound of my own voice and run out of things to say to her I wondered about that slipper as I lay on the pull out couch they had put next to her hospital bed. I remembered the girl, Dorothy, who had woken up from the dream that had taken her so far away from home. I wished that I could also wake up and find that everything was fine and that Mama would be able to talk and laugh with me again. Today, after she died, they replaced the ruby red slipper with a bluish purple forget me not. I will never forget. Never.

I have almost reached the elevator, when look back I see two men from the funeral home enter her room. They are pushing a gurney that is covered with a shabby yet shiny blue blanket. It goes well with their unkempt appearance. I guess you don't have to worry about your appearance when you're driving the dead. I feel threatened by them. I don't want them to take her. I am not ready to let her go. I want to run back and shout at them and tell them to keep their hands off of her. They know nothing of her. They don't know that her favorite color is purple or that she always laughs when we order something at the drive thru or that she has spent the past years waiting for better times that never came. They don't care about her. To them she is just a corpse. My mother is a corpse. A sixty-seven year old corpse. Sixty-seven is not an age to die. There isn't an age to die. Death sucks. Her favorite color was purple. She was happy to see me happy. I was her little girl. She thought the world of me. She replaced the walls that I encountered with bridges. She smiled at me and told me to live my life. I never said enough. I never found the right words. Now she is dead.

I force myself to walk on. After a few heavy steps I stand facing the elevator doors. I press the arrow down and wait for the elevator to take me away from here. I want to escape from the thoughts that are wreaking havoc in my head. I crave stillness and darkness. I wish that I could simply fade into nothingness. I continue to wait. The elevator door opens and a lady holding a blue plastic basket of hygienic articles smiles at me as I get in. Her loved one is probably coming home. Sometimes you're lucky. Sometimes you're not. I imagine her to be lucky and nod at her and look at my worn out sneakers as we ride down to the lobby together.

I let her out first. I don't care about time anymore. The counting is over. Finality has set in. Nearly two hundred and thirty four hours after I received the phone call that brought me to my knees, I grasp that the need to count is over. I have spent all of my mother's last moments counting. I could rely on numbers more than my own thoughts and feelings. I step out of the elevator and walk through

the lobby to the main doors. I pass many people on my way. They are all foreign to me. They are not the always understanding nurses and CNAs of my sixth floor live-in sanctuary. My steps become heavier. I carry the weight of my own sadness and memory.

Walking feels unnatural and mechanical. It is impossible to walk away. Life in the hospital is different from the outside world. I want to return to the beeping noises that comfort me. They tell me that people are still alive and that organs are still functioning. There is a victory in every beep. I have grown accustomed to the hospital. I have to sit down in the lobby. I cannot bring myself to leave. I am afraid. I am afraid of moving on. I am afraid of stagnation. I sit down in one of the leather recliners in the lobby and watch a film about the hospital.

It's strange to be able to recognize the majority of the people that are moving across the screen. I have seen them walking down the hall of the ICU, the 6th floor and watched them eat in silence in the cafeteria. I watch people coming and going through the hospital doors. I wonder how long it is going to take me to bring myself to leave. I hear a familiar voice and recognize Father Francis on the screen. He is showing the chapel and smiling. The woman interviewing him says his last name wrong as she thanks him. I close my eyes as memories flood me.

He is holding me and rhythmically half patted half slapping my back.

"You have to believe. You have to believe it for her. You have to want it. You must let her go."

He says it over and over again. His voice is loud and clear. He really believes what he is saying. His belief almost comforts me. Then I hear the gurgling sound. I look away from him and watch the doctor slowly extracting the tubes from my mother's esophagus. She looks as if she is in pain and starts to gag. I try to free myself from the Father's embrace. He knows better. He holds me back.

"For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are pardoned; And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

He continues to pat my back. He continues to hold me as he prays.
The doctor touches my shoulder. I look up from the Father's black shirt that is almost as dark as his skin. I try to look at the doctor but can't. I am afraid of what the doctor is going to say to me.

I am going to vomit. The Father notices a change in me and tightens his hold. I concentrate on the Father's alabaster clerical collar. The nausea disappears.

"If she holds on for another thirty minutes or so we'll be able to transfer her upstairs where you can be with her."

The nurses smile at me like this is good news. The Father releases me from his embrace, takes my hands and leads me to my mother's bedside. She is breathing irregularly.

"Talk to her. The hearing goes last. Talk to her!"
I look at my mother. I am speechless. The Father begins to softly pat my back again. Syllables form at the palate of my mouth and become words as they pass my lips. The Father is my coach. He is helping me form words. He is magically patting them out of me. I want her to make it to a room upstairs. I want to win

some time. It's okay Mama I am here. It's Binky. I love you Mama. You're doing a good job. I am proud of you. We're all here. Tommy and Mia are waiting in the waiting room. They are waiting to visit you upstairs. The room is next to the sundeck, Mama. Doesn't that sound nice? You look much better Mama. Everything is fine, just relax. I glance at the clock on the wall. Time seems to be standing still. It's okay Mama, Binky's here. I am proud of you. I love you Mama. You're doing a good job. Tommy and Mia are waiting in the waiting room. Mia will be able to stay upstairs with us. She wants to see you Mama. Tommy wants to see you to. There's a sundeck upstairs, Mama. Doesn't that sound nice? You look much better Mama. Everything is fine, just relax. Again I look at the clock; we are more than halfway there. I hear the nurse ordering a room on 6th south. The father is still patting my back.

Mama, Binky loves you. We're going to upstairs in just a few minutes. Tommy and Mia are here, too. As soon as we go upstairs you can see Mia and Tommy. You're doing such a good job, Mama. I love you Mama. There's a sundeck upstairs, Mama. Doesn't that sound nice? You look much better Mama. Everything is fine, just relax.

Two men dressed in black scrubs come and get us. Father Francis accompanies us to the elevator and rides up with us. Mama looks much better. She is going to make it. Silently, I begin to plan her passing. I should have someone get some scented candles. Rose or lavender would be the best. I need the CD player and her CDs. Enya, Pavarotti and Bocelli; I'll have to write it down.

"Are you okay, honey?"

I look up at a lady in her late fifties or early sixties. I am still sitting in the leather recliner facing the main doors. Tears flow down my cheeks, make their way into my unironed shirt and collect in puddles at my breasts.

"I just lost my mother."

"You poor thing, she must not have been very old."

"She was sixty-seven." She bends down to hug me.

"Is there anything I can get you?"

"No, thank you. I am fine. I was just going to go for a walk and then meet my husband and daughter."

"Well you take care then, honey."

I watch her walk toward the elevators and hope that luck is accompanying her. I gaze at the TV screen. The familiar faces are now telling someone's miraculous story of survival and recovery. I look around. Two teenagers look at me nervously and then at each other. The main doors of the hospital are right in front of me. I need to get up and leave. I understand that even if I make it out that part of me will still be sitting here unable to go. I hope that Father Francis will find that part and pat it right out of the hospital so I can be whole again. Who am I kidding?

I rise to get up. I look at the teenagers. They feel my eyes and avoid them. They are probably still unaware of the unbearable weight of grief. I hope that they will also be among the fortunate ones. I walk out of the door. I want to turn and look back. I hesitate but don't allow myself to do so. The fear of looking back and

finding myself still sitting in that recliner in the hospital lobby is too great.

I walk along the trail that leads into the park that once belonged to the s anatorium. Mama and I used to walk our old dog here years ago. It feels good to be out in the fresh air. I walk towards the path that surrounds the lake. I am almost out of breath when I reach it. I slow down and look around as I walk. It looks different. The path is lined by unevenly numbered groups of trees that stand too close together. Bare branches of birch and maple trees are twisted among the prickly branches of large evergreen firs. The trees do not complement one another. In the midst of the tangled mismatched branches a single ash tree appears to have somehow succeeded in raising its branches above those of the others. I walk up to the tree and examine it closely. It must have been a passing victory, since all of the tree's skyward branches have been pruned so that the ash looks more like a huge desert cactus than a foliage tree. They have all encountered various knife blades and other more or less resourceful carving tools. Each tree has its wounds, where the bark has been scraped away to tell of springtime confidence that love will last. The trees are the quiet witnesses of hopeful and hopeless lovers alike. The initials remain, long after the last word of longing has been spoken. The initials remain.

I glance up at the sky. I wonder where she is. I had expected death to be more momentous, possibly even beautiful. Maybe I am the flaw in the equation. Maybe I have to believe it to see it. I close my eyes and try to imagine my mother. I try to see her happy. I cannot focus. I cannot put the puzzle together. I give up. Death is like being erased. Someone comes in with a big eraser and obliterates you from the story. What is going to become of my own story, now that I am the only one who can tell it from memory? How accurate will my recollections be? How much imagination will be able to slip into past images that form in front of my mind's eye? I am lost. That is the only certainty.

I am cold. The shade of the trees is chilling. I get up and walk down to the lake. I sit down on the pebbles and look out at the lake. I pick up a few pebbles and throw them into the water in front of me. They trickle into the water like raindrops and disappear. I lay back and try to find my mother's face once again. I need to see her happy. I close my eyes and concentrate. Nothing but darkness and then our voices inside of my head.

"Why do you sound so strange, Mama? Are you alright?"

"Yes, I am thine. My thu-pid bidge is loose."

"You sound so short of breath. You haven't been smoking have you?"

"No, I feel mutt better now that I've thopped."

"Well, please have it fixed before the wedding, Mama. I can hardly wait. Did you get your plane ticket, yet? Alice told me that she was going to mail it last Tuesday."

"Yes, it's heel."

"Okay, Mama. I am going to let you go and go to bed. It's already 11:30 here. Please remember to have your teeth fixed. With our luck you might drop them into one of the buffet items."

"I love you, Mama. I'll see you in three weeks."

"I wuv ou, too."

I cannot remember her face. I cannot catch a glimpse of her while she was still my mother. That was our last conversation. I should have said Mama, I am sorry that I live so far away.

Mama, I know how hard your life is and I think that you are a wonderful woman for taking care of daddy for all of those years. Mama, I am happy that you are going to come to our wedding. Mama, thank you for being there for me. I love you. I miss you, Mama. Maybe then I could see her happy. Instead I can only picture the woman who unfortunately got a piece of chicken lodged deep in her trachea. She remained seated at her place at the kitchen table and let go.
I want to see her face. I try to find her.

I hear her breathing. I stand over her and watch her body for signs of mottling. I hold my breath as I listen to her breathing pattern. Once again I am counting the moments between each shallow breath half fearing half hoping that the next one will be the last. She stops breathing. I run to get a nurse. Two come into the room with me. She breathes once more and then remains silent. I ruined the intimate moment. I apologize to the nurses since they are in the room. I cannot cry. My hands are shaking. I played the music much too late.

I open my eyes. The sky is dull now that the sun has disappeared behind a thick blanket of clouds in the sky. The still water that lies before me is as gray as the overhead sky. A small flock of swans land in the water. Their loud touchdown creates little ripples on the otherwise motionless lake. A family of four is slowly approaching the swans to my left. I watch them. They pass the trees in silence. The man is carrying an old plastic bag from which the store name has faded considerably. He walks up to the edge of the water, reaches into his bag and pulls out a handful of left over bread and crumbs. He throws the bread in the direction of the swans. The swans snap the bits of bread up greedily. The man tells the woman and the girl to do the same. The woman and the girl smile at the man as they each reach into the bag to take a handful of breadcrumbs. He shows them where they should throw the bread in. He nods approvingly as first the mother and then the daughter throws the food at the hungry swans. He does not smile. The boy runs up and grabs the bag from the man. The man's face twists into a furious grimace and then slaps the boy across his face. Tears run down the boy's flushed cheek as he unenthusiastically accepts a handful of crumbs from the man. The swans emerge from the lake and walk up to the boy.

He creates a trail for the swans and watches them fight over the food as they follow him toward the trees. He picks up a big branch and begins batting at the swans. I want to say something but cannot bring out a word. He likes this game and laughs as he strikes and hits the swan closest to him on the neck. He strikes the animal again on the head, just for the fun of it. The swan squeals in earnest pain. I want to scream. The father starts to laugh out loud. The mother and daughter smile as they watch the group of hissing swans retreat to the water. Again the stillness of the water is broken by an interlude of gentle ripples. The

sun remains in hiding. The family smiles at me as they pass. I glare at them. That's all that I can manage. I am glad to be alone again.

They approach me from behind. I don't notice them until I feel his hands on my shoulders. I am glad that they have come to get me. Mia wraps her little chubby hands around my neck to hug me. It is too much for me to bear. One day she and her siblings will lose me, too. I love her more than words can say and yet I brush back a strand of her curly brown hair and whisper, "I will love you forever" into her little ear. I look at Tommy. We are speechless. I am glad that I don't need to speak for him to understand me. I tell him that I love him with my eyes. I tell him that I need him now and always. I tell him I never want to say goodbye. He forces out a smile and nods. I walk in-between them. We hold hands in silence as we walk to the car. The ride home is short. I look out of the car window and watch things pass. We pull into the driveway and get out of the car. I open the door and go to my father's room. I sit down on the wheelchair next to his hospital bed and look at him. He looks in my direction but cannot see me. His eyes are failing. I look at him and tell him that everything went well. I tell him that she passed away peacefully. I tell him that everything will be okay. He knows what I mean. He loved her longer than I did. He called her Sam. She's all mine was his explanation. He collaborates with me. We don't cry. This is how we hold each other. Her favorite color was purple. She was often sad. She is dead.

"The Fresh View"
by Heather Barnes

The little boy bursts out the back door to explore this wilderness around him. He runs to each thing that catches his eye, a bird, a Peter Rabbit statue with a broken ear. His little face puckers with worry at the rabbit's missing ear. Stopping in his romp he looks up at the woman following closely behind him.

"Grammy fix!" he says, pointing to the concrete statue. Being told she can't fix it right now, he is satisfied and runs on to the flowers growing along the chain link fence. He giggles with joy at the "fly, flies" as they flutter around the yard, their bright colors reflecting off the sun.

Suddenly he stops where he stands and looks up.

"Tweet, tweet?" he says, looking again to his Grandmother. She points to where the bird sits in a nearby tree and says yes it is a bird. The delight of the small, fenced yard is seen anew by everyone who would watch this toddler. As he rambles around what looks like a rather small and uneventful back yard, it becomes a place where magic lives.

"Lost on Grandpa's Farm"
by Tahna Moore

I was a city girl who grew up in a modest, yellow, two-bedroom bungalow, on a dreary, dead end street on the west side of town in Richmond, Indiana. My house was located about eight blocks from my elementary school and about a mile from my parents' local factory jobs. It was a quaint, quiet, working class neighborhood. Since both of my parents worked I guess you could say they had inadvertently conditioned me to the theme of "convenience." The microwave was the best invention of my childhood and quickly became my new best friend in the after-school hours alongside my favorite sitcom *The Wonder Years*. Growing up with all of the quick amenities of the city, it seemed easy for most, to take it all for granted. I would have been guilty of it too had it not been for my mother forcing me to go with her to visit my grandpa's farm for a whole week every summer, which felt similar to a child being force-fed spinach. I have to admit it though, after all of those years visiting grandpa's farm, it left me with a keen awareness to another way of living. It was a simpler way of life but it was a way that I didn't understand and wasn't at all interested in at the time.

So there I was, packing my bags, careful not to forget my Debbie Gibson cassette tape or my Judy Blume book. If push came to shove at least I could waste some time away reading under the pear tree. We pulled up in front of my Aunt Cheryl's house, across town. I yelled from the passenger side car window: "Hey Tommy, don't forget to bring your *Thriller* tape!"

"I know, I got it, I got it," he replied with that familiar dreadful tone. Apparently he wasn't all that excited about spending the week at grandpa's either. He shoves his bags into the back of the wood grained station wagon and offers me the rest of his Pop-Tart. I reject it by pushing it away from my face and begin singing along to the words of "Billie Jean.'"

As we drove further away from the lights of the city and closer to the stillness of the country I remember the smells of French fries and burnt plastic gradually shifting into the overpowering smells that seemed to alternate between the intense smell of skunks to the penetrating smell of "fresh fertilizer" as my grandpa referred to it. He believed in the "natural" way of raising his livestock and fertilizing his grains. By today's standards he would probably be considered "an organic farmer" and a wealthy one at that, judging by the high-priced cost for organic foods at the grocery. I guess he was a man ahead of his time but back then we just thought of him as "old-fashioned" or "cheap." Being raised in town, I had quickly conformed to the conveniences of the materialistic, fast-paced, "get it while you can" way of living. It was the 1980s and things were quickly changing all around me, but not for grandpa. Stonewashed jeans, parachute pants, and who had the biggest boom box on their shoulder were the topic of current events for me at that time. But none of that would fit as suitable conversation in my grandpa's world. He wanted to discuss meaningful topics; topics of substance—politics,

religion, corruption, and the cost of corn dropping that year. He didn't see the point in all that materialistic rubbish and I couldn't even spell the word "corruption" at that time.

Grandpa lived on a sixty-acre farm in an old, white, drafty brick farmhouse just outside of Greenville, OH. The paint was peeling off, exposing the red brick, painting the image of a striped candy cane. It had an old faded wooden screen door on the front that would squeak every time it slammed shut. There was a huge bright red barn to the left of the farmhouse that housed the cows and the hay and a small bright red chicken coup in front of the barn. Sitting vertically next to the big barn was a smaller barn, matching in color, for the pigs.

Grandpa drove an '81 white rusty Ford truck with a radio in it that only played one station. You could hardly even make it out because it was so filled with static from being so far out there in the sticks. He owned a few big, green John Deere tractors, cows, pigs, chickens, beans, wheat, corn, tobacco, grape vines, peach trees, pear trees, and about a half an acre garden of any kind of vegetable you can imagine on that farm, but there were no modern conveniences. No TV, no boom box, no VCR, no microwave, not even a bathroom! He had an outdoor bathroom—also known as an outhouse! He said he didn't believe in all that "stuff." "If it ain't broke don't fix it" was his theory.

He claimed he had everything he needed to survive and I have to admit I never went hungry while I was there. He was a serious man, an opinionated man, but he had a genuine heart. Everyone that knew him, liked him, respected him, and even admired him. I did too. My cousin Tommy and I thought of him as our hero. He was tall, strong, genuine, and confident. When he spoke, he spoke directly and he meant what he said. Grandpa lived in a time where a man's handshake and their word was as solid as gold. There wasn't anything he couldn't do. To us he was invisible. At that time I didn't know it, but I learned a lot about integrity from him.

"Ahhh, the joys of country living. Remember that life isn't about living to work. It's about working to live." my grandpa told my mom and uncle as he sipped slowly on his cup of black coffee, picking over his peach pie that his lady friend, Ms. Buckingham, brought over earlier that day. His face was wrinkled and tanned from the long hours working in the sun, a clear contrast to his pale upper arms. One hand was wide, hard, and callused from years of hard work in the fields and caring for his livestock. His other hand had been replaced with a wired metal hook that was attached to a hard hollow plastic sleeve that fit just below his left elbow. He was in an accident before I was born. His hand was caught in a corn-picker and had grinded his entire left forearm into what my mom described as "raw hamburger meat."

Gruesome, I know, but that's how my family are—blunt and straightforward about matters. They tell it how it is. It didn't matter to me that he had one hand though because it was all my younger cousin and me had known. I guess it didn't really matter to grandpa either, unless it made someone else feel uncomfortable, and then he would begin to act a little self-conscious about it.

We sat there in my grandpa's kitchen, Tommy and I, bored to tears, listening to the idle adult chatter and trying to slip out to the barn without being noticed so we could play hide and seek in the haylofts. We would climb up to the top of the barn then jump off of the top loft onto the hay bales below. It was our latest form of entertainment that we had recently invented to pass time there on the farm. If we would have gotten caught we would have been in big trouble though. Grandpa didn't like the idea of us jumping from those high haylofts in the barn. Tommy was about a year and a half younger than me. He was quiet and passive, and easy to persuade. I found it humorous at the time to boss him around and pick on him a little bit. Besides, there really wasn't much else to do around there. We could read a book under the pear tree, steal some grapes off the grape vine, provided it wasn't swarming with bees, play freeze tag, kick ball, play hide and seek in the haylofts, or read. There wasn't much else to do. It was peaceful out there in the country, though. You could really get your thoughts together out there. Grandpa's farm was dark, cool, windy, and very quiet…silent even. There were no lights around for miles, except for the dull light of the moon. There were no streetlights to warn you of the oncoming creatures in the night. You just had to "know" your way around.

It is a "nice little drive to the country," I remember my dad would say, referring to the drive to grandpa's farm. To me it seemed to be an understatement. As a careless, self-centered, impatient young child, that desolated sixty acres was the same as infinity to me. It was like being trapped on the moon. I was stranded and secluded. I felt lost and isolated every time we visited. And it was no wonder as to why I felt this way. Clearly, this was a much slower pace than what I was used to at home. There was none of this "run around the corner and buy a soda" type business going on there. There, you couldn't even ride your bike to the closest seven-eleven for some bottle caps. They didn't even have bottle caps there; no twizzlers, no pezz, no pop-rocks - none of that! According to my grandpa, the closest I was getting to candy would be to "try some of Ms. Buckingham's raspberry preserves," that she had canned last fall. "Well thanks, but NO THANKS" was my thinking. I politely responded with a "No, thank you."

I would never disrespect my grandpa or Ms. Buckingham for that matter. She was a sweet, kind lady who seemed to have the cure for whatever your ailment was. She had this homemade salve she made that was like the miracle cure for everything. It really was. She didn't have a name for it so we just called it "Ms. Buckingham's salve." If you had a cold she would make some hot tea and mix half a teaspoon of salve into it and voila—you'd wake up feeling fresh and renewed! Not even a hint of a cold would follow you. If you skinned your knee, strained a muscle, had a black eye, anything aside from a broken bone or surgery, her salve would do the trick!

Grandpa would take Tommy and me for rides around the farm on his big John Deere. We'd sit in front of him and he'd let us "drive." We felt like we were on top of the world! He showed us how to milk a cow and feed the chickens and pigs. One time I got in trouble for picking on Tommy. Grandpa told me to go to the

chicken coup to "collect eggs." If you've never been on a farm you probably wouldn't understand. Let's just say, you don't want to mess with a mother hen and her eggs —especially when she's been sitting diligently, guarding them all day to keep them warm! That mother hen went flying down off her stoup, charging at me like a lightning bolt! She chased me all over that farm until I ran into the house! I learned a lot that day, though. I never did succeed in stealing an egg from her. I never went back in that chicken coup again and I never picked on Tommy in front of my grandpa again either!

It was the summer of 1989, I was eleven years old when mom received the phone call that changed my whole perspective on life. After an eight-month battle with cancer, grandpa passed away in his sleep. For the first time I was viewing the world now through a more cynical and questionable perspective. The news shot through me like a dagger in the heart. I dropped to my knees and began sobbing hysterically. My hero, the brave, strong, invisible man, that I always knew, always depended upon, was now gone?! Grandpas aren't supposed to die! Thoughts raced through my head as I lie there sobbing on my bedroom floor. Who would take me on tractor rides around the farm? Who would show me how to shuck corn? We never got a chance to pick out the pony he was going to buy Tommy and me that following Christmas. I could feel the lump in my throat rise as I realized the depth of what we had lost. Reality hit me in the face like a ton of bricks—I was angry! Angry at the world but more so angry at myself! All of his wisdom, philosophies, advice, and his carefree worldview about simplicity that I had taken for granted had gone now too.

It was a rainy, dreary Sunday that we buried him. Tommy and I stared down at the empty, stiff body lying there in the cherry colored casket in disbelief. We placed a yellow pillow inside that read "gone for now but your memory lives on with us forever. We love you grandpa." It was the first experience I had of someone close to me dying.

Something changed inside of me that day my grandpa died. I felt the overwhelming sense of loss as they lowered that cherry casket in the ground, yet I had gained too. Suddenly, I realized that it wasn't the "things" that mattered in life – parachute pants, Michael Jackson cassette tapes, or the latest British Knight shoes. It is the "people" in our lives that matter the most. Money cannot buy the wisdom that is passed down from our elders. I realized that nothing last forever, especially people. It is so important to appreciate the time we have and to make the most of each day. I reflected upon the time that seemed to idle on forever when Tommy and I sat there in that kitchen floor for hours thinking up ways to entertain ourselves on that farm. As I thought about it, I felt guilty and ashamed. "What I would give to get back five minutes of that time again with grandpa," I thought to myself.

Years have passed since my grandpa's death. My uncle lives there on that old farm now. He scrapped the rusty white Ford. The old crumbling brick farmhouse, the chicken coup, and that rickety outhouse have all been bulldozed over. A modern, contemporary three bedroom, two-bath tri-level home with a two-car garage, attached deck, and a fancy doorbell sits there now. If it weren't for pictures, I'd be hard-pressed to recognize the memories of that old farm. And though you'll never find him written in the History books or *Forbes* magazine, he too existed, that great man I have so many fond memories of; that man that taught me so much about life—my grandpa. And for me he changed the world, at least mine. Not all was lost on grandpa's farm.

"The Bitter Chill of Divorce"
by Maranda Ladd

People had warned Debbie about the chill in the air. It would wrap around her on lonely nights and leave her trembling in her linen sheets. It would fill her nose and seep into her dreams then continue to cradle her in the morning. Debbie had slept each night for a year in this little beige bedroom surrounded by empty walls and the bitter chill of divorce.

Debbie was a hard working church secretary by week, and a wife and mother on the weekend. Her exact words to her children were always, "you can't do that because I am the church secretary and your father is a deacon."

Debbie was raised in a family where you don't let the outside world see your flaws. You iron your skirt, put your make up on, and hide anything that has gone wrong in your life from view.

Debbie got married at sixteen and raised two children with her husband Jim in a little town called Connersville, a town where little old ladies can tell you every- thing about everyone even if you don't ask them. It's a town known for countless white churches, large brick industrial buildings, and rusted railroad tracks. If you travel to the east side of town you can see antique trains on your way out of town. Debbie's path could never have been foreseen by the little white haired Bible toters from this town, but one must wonder if Debbie already knew where the path she was traveling would lead her all along.

Jim, her husband, was a wandering man. For weeks at a time he weaved in and out of lonely roads watching the golden sun set only to rise again on the same road the next morning. Truck driving is known as the land of opportunity. It's the opportunity to see, touch, feel, and taste what you might be missing out on at home. Every weekend Debbie could feel the chill in the air of her ranch home as she waited for Jim's return.

She often sat covered with a red blanket in her recliner, anxious for his big orange semi to pull into the driveway. Surrounded by Danielle Steele novels and the Bible she tried to keep herself entertained as she waited.

Night would fall over the front bushes lined in red lava stones as a large orange semi pulled into the driveway crunching the gravel as it found its place of rest. Debbie lunged up out of her chair to see Jim as if she were meeting her long lost lover. Debbie spent the entire weekend catering to Jim hand and foot bringing him bowls of vanilla ice cream and steak dinner on a silver tray. Debbie's main concern was fulfilling all of Jim's wishes. Her children were grown now and they could fend for themselves.

It wasn't until the spring of 99 when the white walls of her modern home began to close in on Debbie. One afternoon, Jim began to admit to his daughter that he had a sexual relationship with a woman a few times, while talking over a bowl of spaghetti and garlic bread. Jim's daughter had always had bad feelings about her father's faithfulness. She was a nineteen year old beautiful dark haired girl with blue eyes and an inquisitive nature about her. All it took was for her to utter the words, "Dad have you ever cheated on mom, and be honest with me" and the walls began to crumble around them. "Well I might have, but it's none of your business," he told her. This was the beginning of the truth that Debbie would soon find very hard to hide.

Debbie began to quiz Jim day and night.

"Who else"? "How many?" she pleaded for the answers still dressed in her soft sweater and skirt. Long screaming matches ensued as their daughter lay crying on the grey carpet holding her mother as if she were a best friend and not her parent. This same scene would occur over and over for the next few years.

As the winters blew in and out you could still find Jim and Debbie sitting in the back row on Sunday surrounded by grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, acting as though they were living the picture perfect marriage. The choir sang "How Great Though Art" and the sermon on how only the Baptists are going to heaven began. Jim would caress Debbie's hand and she would often lean in to whisper sweet nothings in his ear. They had worked through their issues without anyone knowing there was ever a problem. This was an accomplishment that Debbie was very proud of as she sat in her cushioned pew. Little did Debbie know that her biggest worries sat three rows up and went by the name of Nadine Baker. Nadine was Debbie's youngest sister, and soon to be her worst enemy.

Word got out that Jim made a trip up Nadine's long winding driveway one Friday to pay her a visit. He slammed the door to his green 1995 Camaro and walked into the garage to knock on the door. Once Nadine had answered he was led inside and down a narrow hallway into the living room. Jim had bought Debbie an anniversary present and wanted to get Nadine's approval of it.

"I wanted to get your opinion on what I bought Debbie for our anniversary if you don't mind." he asked as he sat down in a large blue recliner.

"Sure." Nadine replied as she continued on messing around in her kitchen. Jim reached in his tiny gift like bag and pulled out something that resembled men's underwear, but was made of a material you could see right through.

"You want me to try them on for you?" he said in a half joking manner to Nadine.

"Sure, whatever," she replied as she paced the hardwood floor in her kitchen. Jim made his way back down the narrow hallway into a small restroom and slipped into the underwear. He joyfully modeled his present for Nadine and both went on as though nothing had changed.

Months passed and word got out of what had transpired between them on that hot day in July. Debbie could no longer disguise her feelings with makeup and a glossy smile. All members of the family were in disarray and divorce was in the air. Debbie's children were angry and could no longer forgive their father for his adulterous act this time.

The for sale sign hung in the fresh mowed grass as Debbie lay on her carpet once again screaming "why" to God! The house was sold that autumn to a landscaper and his wife. It was the house Jim and Debbie had built together a total

of seventeen years ago. It held so many memories of Christmas, birthdays, and newborn grandbabies, but it couldn't hold the family together.

Debbie packed her boxes and stored her belongings in a storage unit on the west side of town. She loaded only the things she most needed and headed to live with her daughter in Laurel. Debbie took the spare room across from her now two year old granddaughter and covered her bed with the flowered Martha Stewart comforter she once shared with her husband. Nights were cold as she sat in her little back bedroom reading about divorce and wishing she could just stay with him, but she couldn't. Too many people knew the truth this time. Every sordid detail of all of Jim's affairs was coming out like water released from a damn. Divorce was her only way of saving face if she didn't want to look like a fool.

Jim packed his bags and headed out on the road as usual. All he needed was a place to lay his weary head on the weekends as he spent his week on the cross roads of America. When the weekend came he would show up at his daughter's house looking for a place to stay. Jim's temporary home would not be inside his daughter's house with his family, but outside in the back yard.

Wood panels lined his walls. Orange and yellow fabric adorned the benches in his new weekend home on wheels. The bathroom was barely big enough for a hundred pound woman let alone a well over two hundred pound man. There would be no need for a well-lit fire, marshmallows, or a roasting stick. In this place he was anything, but a happy camper.

This same scene would play out for months. Debbie continued to live in her daughter's spare bedroom, while Jim spent weekends in his daughter's back yard camper. This was not easy on their daughter, Maranda. She had a husband and a child of her own to take care of, and now the responsibility of housing her parents had been bestowed upon her.

Maranda felt herself stepping into a role she had never in her life experienced before. She was giving her parents advice, providing them with a place to live, and ultimately becoming their parent. She began to become bitter and angry. It was as though she was the one going through the divorce. It wasn't easy on her marriage, but her husband continued to be by her side.

Time went on and month's turned into years. Jim and Debbie each found houses of their own and began living new lives. Debbie entered into a relationship with a man nearly half her age and Jim continued having girlfriends that his family never met. Maranda continued to be the stable one along with her brother, but he lived 800 miles away in Alabama.

Jim and Debbie never completely moved on. They still meet up from time to time, and have dinner and watch movies as if they are dating or perhaps still married. The children and grandchildren have gone on with their lives trying to leave the wounds of the past behind. The bitter chill from the divorce has subsided over time, but there is still a strange coldness that lingers on in the air.

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SEE THE LOVE PT. II by Jami Dingess

Poetry

"Immortality"
by Claire Asher

The boy dreams of rocket ships and remembers campfires, of wild nights on rocky earth just returned from the sea, and of humans who forgot their humanity, relearning how to be.

"I never knew what it meant, to live forever," he whispers to the sea-salt air. Galileo. Elvis. Einstein. New York City is a myth, Egypt a fairy tale. So many different names and places from times that only he could remember. All lost, in the Armageddons. Had he only imagined a man named Bach and a haunting Fugue? Or Beethoven and a Moonlit Sonata? It's all gone, at least for now. Humanity is starting to regain itself. There's an island in what used to be called the Atlantic, and the people there have built sailing ships and sundials.

The world begins again, again.

The boy counts centuries as others count moments, and he's had to say goodbye to too many memories. Names and faces from the beginning, and from Before. The ritual is the same at every millennium. A paper lantern, folded around a tiny candle. Sometimes the paper is neat, the product of a machine age. Other times it's papyrus, pounded from reeds, or wooded pulp mixed with berries. The candle changes, too. Animal fat and wild hair, or beeswax chunks wrapped around a braid. He makes them all himself.

The boat bobs in the swells, riding currents out to sea. His lantern lurches, jumping from his clasp, caught on the wind as it finds its way and rises to the sky. The boy's hands clench upon the railing. What will he forget this time? What will be left, when he's forgotten everything?

He's not the same boy he was, all that time ago.

He says goodbye, whispering names and remembering faces, and watches his lantern jerk into the night. The paper flame rises, joining the stars above. The waves curl beneath his boat, and the stars shift across the watery surface.

The night is full of ghosts. He remembers, everything.

"If There Were Not a Compliment, But One"
by Andrew Davis

Love was, every year, a winter bear
who saw luster of despairing autumns.

Above a blank and latent snow, between the shivering fang
that gestured an empty tree, beneath that dampened frost,
along the bark, and long brown hair would blow.
Where was the cavern lost?

And they would brood spring's buds somewhere,
and they would vow, "Somewhere love was not that cold";
Love is comfortable sleep
and the morning after it.

Marie, your eyes are matrimony
Of the Atlantic and the Moon.
In their toned depths, a Spanish ship sunk,
Scattering coins a hue of gold.

"Richmond"
by Andrew Davis

Bands of vinyl waxes, vinyl grooves, instruments that lived in tune
with train-people, with greasy-spoons,
the crash of twenty-nine that took their food,
bent, warped, all oblong circles underneath the needle
wobbled, skipped and popped.

"The Seashore"
by Emily O'Brien

Piers rely on the sea
and the sea relies on the shore.
Clockwork, every evening at seven sharp,
the pier lights up and the tide goes out
in and out, in and out:
Predictable, consistent and sure.

Like the pier and the tide, the children arrive
Every day at the same time.
Six o clock on the dot they frolic,
like gravity, paddling, dancing down the shore.
Up and down, up and down,
easy, innocent and sure.

With their buckets and spades,
and imaginations in tow.
They build castles that reach the sky.
Relentless, regardless of judgment and scorn,
they build castles that line the shore.
The gulls egg them on, cooing in time,
to the kiss of the waves on the shore.

Up above on the pier the ignorance reigns
at seven sharp, the elders play on
slots after slots, the losses build up
and the lights flash on and on,
flashing, flashing, again and again,
and they think it's the heart of the shore.

Like two separate worlds, the
young and the old, continue their daily songs.
But when the pier shuts down,
and the elders come out,
the castles, the castles live on.
Reaching up and up 'til they touch the sky,
to the real heart of the shore.
In and out, in and out,
predictable, consistent and sure.

The yin and the yang and the pier and the shore,
slow and steady versus fast and forward.
As the elders disperse, the balance is restored.
Peace, silence, and the shore.
The sun glides across the sky and balance is restored,
easy, innocent, and sure.

"My Charlie"
by Krisann Johnson

Wiggly, wobbly,
a fishing bob
on the water,
trying not to fall
on the ceramic tiles.
So much energy,
I want to bottle it up.
Such a rugrat,
as you laugh and smile.
You are my flower,
reminding me
that I am you
and you are me.

"Silky Sheets"
by Kaylyn Flora

The smoke furled and unfurled
like lovers' legs beneath silky sheets,
engulfed in stratosphere,
yet the scent stung and did not die,
but soaked into the lungs,
the thin, wispy tendrils smothering them.

I asked of her to leave.
The work had been done beneath silky sheets;
the loath and bitter work
of mechanically exacted lust:
her fingers did not love,
but for the pleasure mine could provide.

She smiled a sultry smile,
deceptive in both its will and desire,
and smoked her cigarette
with a damned ease I had come to resent.
'You don't want me to go.
You were as trapped then as you've ever been.
Today's no different.
And neither will be your call tomorrow.'

She leaned in towards me
and kissed my breasts over those silky sheets.
Her mouth burned me with its cold
yet in her thighs there burned that fire.
She invited me in.
Her smoky smell pervading my body.

"That Awkward Moment"
by Kaylyn Flora

When the glass fell to the floor,
milk triked an angular path
through the geometrically aligned grout,
and stretched with spindly fingers
away from the sharp fragments
of its downed captor.

From its plummeted death,
the glass radiated outwards
like planets radiate from the sun:
Mercurian sized and Jupitarian,
angular in shape,
dangerous in its fractured points,
yet innocence
was captured
within the fragments,
like light.

Staring at those pieces of light,
I filled with a slow and steady,
intoxicated terror,
taking sick delight
in the exaggerated drama,
of broken glass.

As I tip-toed my way out
of the sliver-edged solar system
and grabbed the broom,
I took delight
in the chinking
of fractured planets
applauding
their release.

"The Carnival"
by Kaylyn Flora

The carnie sat in the corner of the tent,
making cat calls
to the women with push-up bras
and painted faces.

I had been making my way,
to the Fantastically Fat Bearded Lady
when he called to me:
"What's your name, Soldier?"
"Umm…"
"For fuck's sake, all I asked was your name, Soldier."
"Kaylyn?"
"Well, are you or aren't you!"
"I am."
He paused and wisely stated,
"Damn straight, you are."

He had a nose for a face,
one eye, and a grouper mouth.
"What do you do for a living, Kaylyn?"
"I write and paint, and stuff."
"Are you happy?"
"Yeah."
"Are you sure?"
"Yeah."
"You see that lion over there pacing in its cage?
"Yeah."
"I want you to set it free."
"Why?"

"'Cuz you ain't lived a single day in your life."

(He put his grubby finger to his nose,
and winked his one eye. And made
obscene gestures
to the double-D's in a short skirt,
in dismissal.)

I walked away,
and saw the Fantastically Fat Bearded Lady,
who galoomped around,
and flashed me
her pigs' swell.
Yet, I thought about the grouper man
and the lion in the cage.
The image haunted me.
Like a craving—
like the feel of fizzy carbonation down
a desert-like throat.

(It was dark,
and the carnival went quiet
as I sat comatose-like
on the abandoned bleachers.)

I wanted to set that lion free.

"Floating"
by Maranda Ladd

It's a delight to sway through the tranquil air of noontime. Holding blossoms in my hands, all I feel is small lenient stems. I cannot feel the pains of the planet. I cannot feel my own warmth, but the affection of the sun I can measure. I have reveled in the looseness of the heavens.

"Cover Girl"
by Maranda Ladd

She hides behind a veil of beige and gloss,
hoping the universe won't see her stains.
Afraid that someone may see into her loss
she strokes frost to cover the charred remains.

Translucent expressions expose her truth,
her perfect mask unravels with her soul.
A threatening reminder, decomposition of youth,
she commits one last attempt to preserve control.

Suddenly, she grasps that nothing has succeeded,
her truths she can no longer disguise.
A love of her soul was what she most needed,
forgiveness she began to recognize.

She hides no longer in fear of herself.
Sovereignly, she positions her cover on the shelf.

"Wind"
by Dwight Madden

Wind chime wakes me from deep sleep
I peer through the window
Notice the leaves buffeted by nature and forgotten
Debris trapped along a fence line.

"Time"
by Dwight Madden

The young vine runs over the wall
In search of a promised land to
Mountains ancient and mystic
Escape to freedom, old man.

"Janeth"
by Dwight Madden

Joy she brought into our lives
And private her despair
Noble in action and word her
Empathy heartily shared
Trustworthy her banner and to
Heaven she does fare.

"Homeland Security"
by Monica Young

A strike at the soil
littered with last year's
Lantana reveals
a thriving ant colony.
Some abandon ship,
some stay to fight,
protecting this
subterranean nest,
removing precious
ova, pupae,
the tribes children,
leaving the queens to
stagger blindly in sunlight.

"Incantation for Compost"
by Monica Young

To invoke the spirits
of decomposition
one must have the right
ingredients and a
faithful disposition.

Twelve apple parings,
one dozen carrot tops,
coffee grounds, a week's worth,
and one hundred strings
from snow pea pods.

Flesh of potato,
carbuncles of squash,
rind of the melon,
and celery gone soft.

A chemistry of death and rot,
an alchemy of old,
witness organic magic as
a rebirth into black gold.

"Oliveraie"
by Monica Young

Gnarled they stand
in groves and rows,
spines twisted in
ancient resistance
to him who would tame
their feral nature.

He, Aristaeous,
pastoral Apollo,
bid them bear fruit
in the warmest of lands.
Bending and arching
they spiral toward freedom.

"Daisy Extermination"
by Michele McClellan

In the infinite sea
of green, one color pops
out. A lonely daisy, swaying
in the wind. Keeping cadence with
the grass. Watching the rhythm, I contemplate
to myself, what happened to the others? Can only
one just grow in this spot? The sound of the mower transports
me back to reality. I open my eyes and the rhythmic daisy is gone.

"You Are Beauty"
by Garrett Michael Deaton

Like a star on the darkest of nights;
So bright--so full; you are beautiful.
Like purple and orange skies at sunrise;
The sun coming up at nine--so divine.
Like a poem full of allusion;
So esoteric--so angelic.
Like a cascading waterfall;
Its water pleasant--so resplendent.
Like the sparkle of the morning dew drops;
Dazzling--so fascinating.
Like the waves we call tidal; you are delightful.
So listen to me and then you will see;
You are the definition of Beauty.

"Raptured"
by Hannah Clark

Later I will ask you
How to begin the story
How do I possibly start?
I will knock upon your door
Stand in the pouring rain
You will peer through the curtains
And I will stand there
With rain clinging like fingers
To my hair and eyelashes
It won't be the first time
So you'll open the door
And let me inside
And I will ask you
With wet paper and running ink
How do I start this story?
How do I possibly begin
What word, what sentence
Could pull all the others forwards
Other than sorry, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry
Later on I will choose to start here
It isn't the beginning
I could go back, to tears that slide
Like crystal rain down porcelein cheeks
Or I could go back
to the screams of rejection
The cold-cutting words
with edges like knives
Or back even more
to eyes that meet
Across a crowded hall
Or bars that play
Christmas carols
I could go back to the time
We met at the door
With pain lingering like blood
Upon my freshened wounds
Or maybe the night
When those words were spoken
To the feeling of panic, fucking panic
And that feeling of Why?

Or even back to silent commands of
Look at me, damn you, look at me!
But I don't, I start here
On this day and it's good
Everything is fine
It's normal
And it's just me and him
All alone
But we're perfect
Always holding
entwined like vines
Growing and strangling
Because that's what love is, right?
This constant need
This constant desire
Please don't leave me
Holding, is he still there?
Eyes looking, are his straying?
Love.
How can this go on?
He's holding her
Touching her, kissing her
He's telling me to leave
How can I just leave?
Where, who?
Him.
That man
The one who held me
That night so long ago
Was it love?
It was strange...
It was heat and desire
It was frantic ache
and chants of good, so good,
And without a word
He branded a mark upon me
A bruise can heal
A scar can fade
But not this
It leaves a jagged wound
That gapes and bleeds
And when the bleeding stops
It is like the burn from the cherry tip
Of his lit cigarette

And it stings, and there are words
They might have been mine
Or maybe they were his
But they were something like
Don't leave, please, please don't leave
Love.
That's love, right?
A world that swims in darkness
Soon is swamped in light
Hold me, please, don't leave me
And he is there
And he is holding
And he is comforting
Why did it have to be him?
Why could it not have been him?
What is love?
Later, much, much later
I will ask her how to end this story
How can you possibly end this?
The beginning seems so simple,
So easy, now
The beginning could be anywhere
Eyes locking across a crowded hall
A rainy night in a bar playing Christmas carols
Could be a young woman on a train
Writing lines of romance
Between two people she has never seen
How do you end this story?
You don't.
We kiss, and the story doesn't end
It never ends
In fresh air or sunshine
or spelled out between the lines
It makes no difference
It's all the same
Sunlight dims and vanishes
Paper browns and crumbles
But love...
Love, it leaves a mark

MONSTERS IN PARADISE by Jami Dingess

Acknowledgements

Thank You!

The *Tributaries* advisers and editors wish to give thanks to all writers and artists who contributed to this year's journal. Your work showcases an array of voices and talents that best represents Indiana University East and its creative community. We are proud of your work and we hope you enjoy the journal. We encourage everyone who submitted, as well as those who haven't, to consider submitting to future editions. Remember: this is your journal, too. We also encourage anyone interested to become involved with the *Tributaries* staff.

As work on this edition has come to a close, we remember the central idea of our mission statement: pay tribute. We encourage our readers to do the same. Continue to aspire, continue to be inspired, and continue to pay tribute to the greats who influence you.

In the words of Garrison Keillor: Be well, do good work, and keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Ian Holt
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