

is it not with... as with the... use,
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o heaven itself for ornament doth...
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h Adonis, first-born flowers, and all things rare
t beauteous air, and all the large rondure

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Tributaries

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Tributaries

2013-2014 Staff

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Tributaries

Mission Statement

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 in 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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Tributaries

Fiction

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“Salty”

by Richard Goss

2014 Prize for Fiction

“See if you can catch this popcorn in your mouth.” Mark said.

George readied himself to catch the popcorn... mouth wide open. Mark reared back and pitched, like he was on the mound for the Cincinnati Reds. The only problem was he didn’t have popcorn in his hand. It was dog food.

The sound of laughter reverberated through the room. So did the sound of George spitting dog food on the floor. George pointed at Mark and said, “What comes around goes around!”

Yes it does, George.

It was 1975. We were all around ten years old, give or take, and me and my brothers sat in our basement with our friend George watching Tom Sawyer. The smell of buttered popcorn was in the air, and so was anything we could get our hands on to throw at each other, a typical Friday night for us. The commercials ended and the movie introduced Muff Potter by showing him stumbling around drunk and looking for his liquor bottle. Apparently Muff had liquor bottles hid everywhere and he had a technique for finding those bottles. He would extend his right arm, stick his thumb up in the air and stare down the length of his arm, like he was aiming a rifle. His thumb would twitch from side to side and guide him to the bottle. This time he found one in a woodpile. Ol’ Muff continued stumbling around taking swigs on that whiskey bottle.

My brother Mark hollered, “That’s Old Man Christy!”

We laughed till our sides ached.

Old Man Christy was the Muff Potter of our neighborhood. He would drive his Oldsmobile up and down the alley, hiding his bottles in a bush, behind a trash bin, wherever he could hide them. We figured his wife wouldn’t allow him to drink in the house. It must have been pretty close to true, because he didn’t hide his bottles after she passed. Anyway, the next day we saw him creeping down the alley. We hid off to the side, where he couldn’t see us. Rocks popped and cracked as his tires rolled over them. As soon as he got close, we spilled into the alley like ants onto an ice cream cone. We stuck our arms out and did our best Muff Potter imitation. To our surprise the old man gave a devilish grin, stuck his arm out and did the Muff Potter right back at us! It became our thing. Every time we would see Ol’ Christy, we’d do “the Muff”, and he’d do it right back.

He wasn’t a sloppy drunk like Muff, at least not in public. When he was away from his wife he had a friendly yet hurried demeanor. He was in his late 60’s or early 70s, about 5’10”, slender, with gray hair and glasses, and had the air that he was once a disciplined man. He wore clean pressed clothes and held his liquor well. We didn’t know why he drank but we had a good guess, his wife. Bill Christy always looked twice as happy leaving home as he did when he was coming back. Mrs. Christy only made appearances on Sunday, shaking her head in judgement while she rode shotgun in her husband’s maroon sedan. Medusa had a kinder cou-

-ntenance than her. Every time we saw her, she had a Bible in her hand and was dressed for a funeral.

There were four of us boys and our friend, George. Our orneriness knew no bounds. We played pranks on everyone in our neighborhood. One of our favorite things to do was find Ol' Christy's bottles, pour a little liquor out, and pee in them. We thought that was hilarious. Sure, we did the classics, soap on car windows, toilet paper in the trees, we even did the old burning bag of dog poop thing, but our favorite was to pee in Mr. Christy's liquor bottles. A few years went by and Mrs. Christy passed away. Sure Mr. C. mourned, but he also bore the look of a man who just got pardoned by the governor. He stopped hiding his bottles in the alley, but we still did the Muff when we saw him, and he still did it right back at us. In the winter time he would just sit in the house all day and drink. When it snowed we would ask for the job of shoveling his walks. If he was really drunk, after he paid us we would put the snow back on the sidewalk, then knock again about an hour later. Sure enough Ol' Christy would hire us again!

We were teenagers who loved to stir things up and George was The Lord of the Dance.

"Let's get drunk" George said.

I replied, "Where are we gonna get the booze?"

We wanted to get drunk. We couldn't buy our own booze and swiping it from our parents was out of the question. After a few minutes of pondering it came to George like a lightning strike: "Mr. C.!" he said. High fives all around.

We came up with a plan. When Mr. C. went somewhere he would back out of his garage, press the button on his remote garage door operator to close the door, and then head down the alley while the garage door was still closing. We deduced that we could hide beside the garage and after he started heading down the alley, we could quickly roll under the garage door before it shut all the way. This would give us access to the beer fridge in his garage.

The plan went off without a hitch. As the hum of the garage door opener started closing the door, Mr. C. put her in drive and pulled away. George rolled on the concrete and under the door just before it closed. He opened the entry door and let us in. Mr. Christy's garage was neat and organized. All of his tools were mounted on pegboard. Shelves with paint supplies and such were neatly stocked, just like the hardware store. In the corner sat an old white Kelvinator refrigerator with a chrome locking handle. We opened the fridge and there was Mr. Christy's beer: Black Label long neck bottles.

"Where're we going to take them?" I asked.

"Let's go to Kutter's woods" Mark said.

"How we gonna open em up?" George chimed.

"Damn George, they're twist-tops. We don't need an opener!" Mark said.

We took that beer to the woods and drank it. It really didn't taste that good, but pointing that out would have been—unmanly. Things went on like this for a while. Mr. C. would leave, and we'd swipe a six pack of long necks. He never let us down.

There was always a cold six pack in that fridge. The only problem was the beer seemed to taste worse than the first time we drank it. It was funny tasting, and flat, hardly any fizz at all.

In the summer, Mr. C would sit on his back porch, drinking beer, watching us boys play ball in the alley. One day we decided we needed to do something about the funny tasting flat beer that Mr. C bought. We decided that we would simply try to get him to buy a new brand. We thought maybe we could convince him that some other brand might be healthier for him. We nominated our friend George to talk to him. So me and George went up and sat down on the porch with Mr. C, with the idea that we would talk him into a new brand.

After a little small talk George said, "Mr. C. you ought to try a new beer."

Curious, Mr. C. asked, "Why's that George?" "Well maybe there's one that's better for ya. Heck, maybe it would even taste better to ya."

Mr. C. looked at George like a man studying a chess board then said, "I'm sure a couple men of the world such as yourselves have tasted this brand before, you didn't like it?"

Bolstered by Mr. C's acknowledgement of our worldliness, I replied, "No, tends to be a little flat."

Mr. C. started to get a little twinkle in his eye, like he did the time we taught him to do "the Muff".

"Was it a little salty?" he grinned.

"Sure was, Mr. C." we acknowledged, "It was salty."

"Well boys, alcohol will do that sometimes." A full-on smile crept across Mr. C's face, "A few years back, I had a whole bunch of gin go salty on me." He leaned back in his chair, put his feet up, and smiled as we sat in silence.

Checkmate.

“Warm Feet in a Cold Creek”

by Rick Goss

Clara's Café is the center of this little town in Kentucky. The left side is the café and the right side sells dry goods, gas, and such. The café can hold about thirty people, eight at the counter, the rest in little booths along the windows. Wooden floors are well worn and so was the decor. A window opens to the kitchen where Johnny cooks and passes biscuits, gravy, eggs, hash browns, ham, and whatnot through to the girls to serve to customers. When he's not cooking he's leaning in the window, talking and gawking, just like everyone else in the café. Rev. McCoy glanced at his watch. He was not surprised to be kept waiting. Men like Judson Boone keep people waiting... they don't wait. The wooden floor creaked as Elsa brought his coffee to the table. She set the cup and saucer down and laid a spoon down on a napkin. Elsa smiled and the good reverend nodded as she turned and walked back to the counter. The smell of coffee, country ham, and fresh baked biscuits filled the air. It was mid-morning and just a few men sat around sipping coffee, smoking cigarettes, and discussing the news of the day as if they could solve all the world's problems. The Reverend stirred milk and sugar into his coffee while he watched out the window.

He finally saw Judson Boone approaching the café. The little bell rang as Judson stepped through the door. Everyone looked out of the corner of their eyes, sneaking a peek, they didn't want to be caught staring. Judson Boone was the most powerful man in this little town, he practically built it. Most everyone worked for him, or in a business that served him. When he first came here, this small café and general store were about the only going concerns in town. Judson spotted the Reverend, strode over to the table and slid into the booth. Elsa had his coffee sat down before he stopped sliding.

“Good morning Reverend.”

“Good morning Brother Boone. How are you this morning?”

“Well, thank you.” Judson sipped his coffee.

“And the retirement... how's that going Brother Boone?”

“It doesn't seem to suit me Reverend. I'm not much for sitting around like a lot of folks.” Judson nods to the group of men that sit around the café every morning.

“That's why I wanted meet you this morning. Ever since I let Junior take over the factory I don't know what to do with myself. I thought perhaps I could help you so in some way.”

“Judson there is several good charities you could work for here in town.”

“I don't know Reverend. I've already given everyone in town a job. Most people who want charity just don't want to work. I'm a self-made man Reverend. They could follow my example and have everything they need.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“Oh yes.”

Elsa came back.

“What can I get for y'all this morning?”

"Elsa, just bring me some grits and a biscuit" the Reverend said.

"Do you have any of that good ham I like Elsa?" Judson said.

"Sure do. Mr. Boone".

"I'll take that and one of those biscuits."

Elsa walked back behind the counter and slid the ticket to Johnny who commenced cooking right away. Judson and the Reverend sat silent for a few moments, sipping coffee and pondering.

The Reverend broke the silence.

"Judson, many people in need go to the Appalachian Relief Center for help. Volunteers come in, talk, teach, and donate to help people in need. Maybe you should stop by Tuesday. I'll be there."

"OK Reverend. As long as it's a hand up and not a handout."

Elsa brought their breakfast. They quietly ate then departed.

On Tuesday morning Judson Boone did the same thing he does every other Tuesday. He got up drank two cups of coffee, reviewed the numbers from the factory (even though he had turned management over to his son), then went to the café for a ham biscuit. He read the paper while he ate. The paper is dropped off at the café every morning by a man from Lexington. Judson finished the paper and biscuit then headed to the relief center.

The relief center was actually a beautiful brick building, the most modern in town. It had a paved parking lot and all. It was nestled in at the foot of a mountain. A creek that zigzagged down the mountain, curved around the parking lot, then went under the road. Judson walked in and saw Ruth, the receptionist.

"I'm Judson Boone...Reverend McCoy asked me to come today"

"Good morning Mr. Boone, Reverend McCoy should be in soon. Please have a seat, sir. May I get you some coffee?"

"Black, please"

Judson wasn't the type of man used to waiting like this. He made people wait, not the other way around, but today he sat. He browsed the magazines but nothing caught his interest. He gazed out the window and saw a man wading the creek. His bib overalls rolled up his knees. He had his work boots tied together and slung over his shoulder and a straw hat on his head. The man stopped at the edge of the parking lot and let his feet dry. He then reached in his pocket and fetched a pair of socks that had been mended more times than he could count. He slid them on his feet, stuck his boots on, rolled his britches down, and then walked to the doors of the relief center.

"Good morning Sunshine" the man hung his hat on a hook by the door.

Ruth smiled. "Good morning Mr. Jimbo. How was your walk down?"

"Uneventful" as he poured himself a cup of coffee from the pot. He sat down near Judson and said, Good morning.

"Good morning" said Judson. He eyed the man who had just come down out of the hills as if he had appeared out of nowhere.

"Do you live on the mountain...uh...?..."

"Jimbo, Jimbo Southerland, and yes I do, sir. What's your name?"

"Judson Boone"

"Are you the furniture fella?"

"Yes. I built the factory."

"You built it? Wow! That must have took some time." Judson seemed a bit confused at Jimbo's surprise.

"Jimbo, now that's not a name I hear all the time. I think the only time I heard of that name is at the café. They sell this ham down there; it's called Jimbo's Ham."

"Yep, that's our ham."

"Come again?"

"We raise pigs and sell sausage and ham. I'm Jimbo."

"Well, I'll be..." Judson was surprised. "You make that ham up there on that mountain?"

"Yes sir. I make ham and sausage. I used to just sell it in the café but one day a fella was down here from Lexington and tasted it and ever since I sell him my ham then he sells it to restaurants up in the big towns, Lexington, Louisville..."

"Is that the guy that brings the paper?"

"Yep. I cart hams down to the creek with a mule then carry em across on foot. He loads em on his truck and sells em."

"On foot? How many people do you have working up there Jimbo?"

"Oh it's just me my Lizzy up there. Liz's my wife. We raise hogs together."

Judson now seen a hardworking man sitting in front of him, he liked that. He thought he was the only one around but here was a man that had started something with his own two hands.

"I'm pleased to meet a fellow self-made man, Jimbo. It's rare these days."

Now Jimbo seemed confused, "Oh I ain't self-made."

"Didn't you start that company?" Judson asked.

"Well, yah but not til that fella tasted my ham and offered to buy it. If it weren't for that guy I don't know. Besides, my dad taught me about making ham, so I got to credit him. I surely didn't plant all those trees that use to smoke em. Heck, I don't even know who did that. My wife near outworks me. And then there's the people... people like yourself that eat my ham. They work to buy my ham. No, I'm not self-made. Are you?"

"Sure am. There wasn't much here when I came."

"I have always wondered how you got them big machines up on the roof of your factory."

"The air vents?" Judson looked over at Jimbo, "I hired a crane."

"Oh..." Jimbo sounded almost disappointed that Judson didn't carry them up on his back.

"How long did it take you to build that factory? I built my own cabin. It was a lot of work cutting them trees down. Bet it took a while to build that big building."

"No, they built it in about eight months."

"They? You didn't build it?"

"I hired a company out of Louisville."

This time Judson noticed the disappointment on Jimbo's face. He felt funny,

like he just found out his fly was open or something.

“It’s been nice talking to you Mr. Boone. I’ve got to go to class now. I’m learning about readin’.”

It was then that the Reverend came in. “Good morning, Judson.”

“Good morning, Reverend.”

“Come on back to my office, Brother Boone.”

Judson came in and sat down for a moment then asked, “What do you want me to teach these people Reverend?”

“Teach? Brother Boone, I asked you here today to learn. I have to step out a moment.”

Judson sat and thought about the things Jimbo had said, sharing credit with those around him and approaching life with such humility, but still being one of the hardest workers Judson had ever met. There was a mirror in the room and Judson caught a glimpse of himself for the first time in forty years, a real look at himself. He began to see everyone else differently too.

After that day, Judson Boone became a much more charitable and approachable man. He began having coffee with guys at the café. Life was much fuller for Judson Boone now.

And even after Judson built Jimbo a bridge, on occasion, you could still see Jimbo wading the creek with his boots slung over his shoulders, smiling and breathing deeply the clean mountain air.

“Time Can Heal”

Chelsy Nichols

She got out of the car and examined her surroundings. The air was fresh with the scents of early spring. The trees lining the long stone walkway were covered in tiny lavender buds. The large circular white building before her was adorned with decorations that attempted to pass it off as a fancy dining hall, but it was too obviously just a small town expo hall spruced up for a special occasion.

She was utterly alone, despite being surrounded by at least one hundred girls just like her. Long, bright dresses, perfect make-up, carefully styled hair. She looked at her own reflection in the doors of the expo hall: long, straight pale yellow halter dress, light, subtle gold make-up, and long chestnut brown hair in a half-up do and spiral curled down her back. And she almost thought she saw him standing next to her in a perfectly pressed black tux. But, of course, it was only her imagination playing yet another cruel trick on her.

Carley had had a best friend, Braiden, since she was two years old. At age twelve, as they watched her older sister get stood up on prom night and his older brother deal with a snobby date, they could see the pressures of making it a perfect night get torn apart by being with unreliable people. Right then and there, they promised each other that they would go to prom together in high school, no matter the circumstances in their lives at that point.

But neither one of them could have guessed what circumstances they would face.

Just a month ago, Carley had been awakened by a phone call from Braiden's mother—and it's not usually good news that comes over the phone at two in the morning. Carley was shocked to hear that Braiden had been in a car accident. She had dropped her phone, not even bothering to change out of her flannel pajamas, and rushed to the hospital. After six and a half hours of desperate surgeries and unexplainable agony, Carley lost her best friend, her biggest supporter, and her prom date.

Carley wanted to move on. She tried to get up in the morning and not check her phone for a text from Braiden saying that he was waiting outside. She tried to go to school and ignore the people asking her how she was doing or telling her some random memory of him that they had just thought of. She tried to go out with her other friends on the weekends and not be reminded of some inside joke she had shared with him and turn to laugh about it with him, only to realize that he wasn't standing next to her.

But after Braiden's death, Carley realized just how much she had depended on him. They were always together, and everyone in the school knew that they were friends. She spent nearly every moment of the past fifteen years with him. They had shared first days of school, learning how to ride a bike, even the loss of Braiden's father. And throughout it all, it was Braiden who always told her “It will be okay,” or “I'm still here.” It was Braiden who always made jokes about the people

people who would put her down in order to make her feel better. It was Braiden who always knew that Carley needed rainbow sherbet ice cream and a *Harry Potter* movie when she was having a bad day. Braiden was the one who understood, who came to her when she most needed him.

But this time, he was the loss, and Carley felt empty, scared, and lonely.

Now that prom was finally here, she wondered how her mother had convinced her to come alone. She felt like crying, and as she walked toward the building, she desperately wanted to stop the sorrowful, sympathetic stares that every couple seemed to be giving her. And she wanted so badly to ignore the quiet comments that the girls walking past her were making.

"It's good to see you here, Carley," Ally Baker said, gently patting Carley on the shoulder.

"I'm glad you came, Carley!" said Rachel Parks, a little too much perkiness in her tone.

"I'm sorry you had to come alone, Carley," Kelsey Lawrence said, holding tightly to the arm of her date.

Carley said a silent prayer to Braiden, asking him to somehow find his way back in the nick of time, even though she knew how utterly impossible that wish was.

The interior of the expo hall was decorated in accordance with the cliché Under the Stars theme. The ceiling was dark blue with tiny silver lights scattered over it. Blue and silver streamers shimmered throughout, and the floor was coated in sparkling silver glitter. Carley knew it was everything a teenage girl should have wanted, but the shine of the decoration was dull through her exhausted, sad eyes.

Carley went straight for an empty table next to a large silver Styrofoam star. Her goal was to stay unnoticed. If no one spoke to her, she wouldn't have to hear Braiden's name.

Of course, that wouldn't stop him from taking over all of her thoughts.

Whenever she sat down and had an extended period of time to think about Braiden, her thoughts always went from good memories to horrifying visions of the accident. She wondered what he had seen. She wondered if he had been in any sort of pain. And she wondered if he had thought about her.

Carley almost felt like she was being selfish. She was upset about not being able to go to prom with her best friend. She was upset about never being able to share a laugh with him, or call him up when she felt bored or scared or just needed to talk. But what about all the things Braiden's family was going to miss out on? They would never see him graduate high school. They would never send him off to college. They would never see him marry some beautiful girl and raise his beautiful children. What had been taken away from them seemed so much more significant than what had been taken away from her.

But he was still her best friend of fifteen years. She was supposed to be beside him when he graduated high school. She was supposed to drive off to college with him. And she was supposed to be smiling up at the altar as he said his vows to his bride. A part of her had still been taken away.

Carley kept her head down, twirling one of her curls around her finger over and

over again. She knew that if Braiden was with her, he would be commenting on how revealing Katelyn's dress was; how Brooke and Cody slow danced even when the song was fast-paced; and how the music sounded more like they were at a wild party at some rapper's mansion.

Carley willed herself to look up. At least six people immediately turned their heads, making it obvious that they had been watching her. But one person didn't turn away. He stood leaning against the wall on the other side of the room, smiling kindly at her.

Logan had always been the popular guy. Star basketball player, honor roll student, and the guy that every girl wanted. But he was so sweet and humble that he just didn't seem to care. Braiden had become friends with him when they played basketball together sophomore and junior year. Braiden had introduced Carley to Logan, and they had had a few casual conversations about what they might do after graduation or the activities they enjoyed, but Carley had never thought of Logan as anything more than an acquaintance.

And yet, he was striding across the room straight toward her at that very moment. He was old-fashioned Hollywood handsome, with smooth tan skin and calming blue eyes. He looked classy in his plain black tux and light blue tie, but she couldn't make herself feel happy or even comfortable with him approaching her.

"Hi," he said, his voice raised over the music. "It's good to see you, Carley."

She simply nodded.

He flipped his short brown hair off of his forehead. "I saw you over here by yourself. I'm alone too, so I thought I'd join you."

Carley nodded again. "Yeah, I, um—I had a date, but—" her voice trailed off, and she started twirling one of her curls around her index finger again.

"Yeah, I know," Logan replied, his voice sincere even over the sound of the music. "Braiden kept telling you guys had planned to come together. He was really excited about it. I'm really sorry about what happened."

Carley sighed, biting her lip and looking down at the table. More apologies. More empty sympathies for the girl struggling to make her way without the person who had always been by her side. Even though Logan was kind and thoughtful about it, it didn't sting any less.

"He really cared about you, you know," Logan said. "Every time I talked to him, he would always bring you up. You meant everything to him. I know he would have given anything to be here with you tonight."

Carley could feel tears building up in her eyes, but she looked up at Logan anyway. She didn't want to hurt his feelings, but she didn't want to hear him talk anymore, either.

"Logan, look, don't take this the wrong way, but I don't really want to dance with you, if that's what you're getting at. It's really nice of you to come over and talk to me, but I just—I can't. Not yet. Not tonight."

She didn't realize until she finished that a few tears had escaped and drifted down her cheeks. She also didn't realize until that last word had left her lips that she was feeling an overwhelming fear of never being able to let go of Braiden, but at

the same time feeling an equally significant fear of someday forgetting him altogether.

A small smile spread across Logan's face, and he stepped around the table to take the seat beside Carley. He leaned in close to her.

"You are Carley Hamilton. You got a full scholarship to NYU for your drawing project from junior year art class. You were on the dance team freshman and sophomore year. When the teacher calls on you in algebra to answer a question, you start twirling your hair around your finger. You gave this amazing speech about how to stop bullying at a pep rally junior year. You love Adele and Michael Buble. And you got up this morning, dreading what tonight might bring, but you still put on that dress and did your hair and your make-up, because deep down, you want to get up and talk to your friends and live up your last few weeks of high school, no matter what's happened to you and the people you love."

Carley stared at Logan, at a loss for words. He knew her. He remembered her. And he cared about her. The only other person who had looked at her with such kind, protective, sincere blue eyes was Braiden himself.

Finally, Carley shook her head.

"Why do you know all that stuff?"

Logan reached forward and gently pushed a curl out of Carley's face. "Because you're not just Braiden's friend, Carley. You're not just that girl whose best friend died. I know how close you guys were, and I know that right now, it seems like you won't be able to do anything without him. But I promise you that you'll find a way. You have a future ahead of you, and you're going to be okay."

For the first time in who knew how long, Carley smiled. A full, bright smile that even came through in her eyes. She felt the tears falling down her face, but she knew they weren't the same as all the ones she'd cried in the past month. And sure, plenty of people had told her that she'd be okay, that she'd get through it. But Logan had made her remember that she was her own person, no matter how much her heart belonged to Braiden and all of their memories. It wasn't a solution to her heartache, but it was a light shining at the end of a very long, very dark tunnel.

Carley wiped away her tears, not minding that gold sparkle eye shadow was now all over her hands. "Thank you, Logan," she said. "I didn't realize how much I needed to hear that."

Logan nodded, smiling. He sat up straight, running his hands through his hair. Instead of holding out a hand and asking her to dance like she expected him to—which would have been sweet but still much too soon—he sighed and looked back up at her.

"So tell me about NYU."

The sounds of the accident in her mind were suddenly drowned out by the sound of the here and the now. The sounds of a senior prom, the sounds of a boy wanting to get to know her, the sounds of finally releasing a breath and taking in the world around her. And she began talking about her acceptance into the school of her dreams, about her deepest hopes and ambitions. She began talking about her future.

“Draguignan”

by Brandi Masterson

First Runner-Up, 2014 Prize for Fiction

With the war ended, the citizens of Cynthania, Kentucky held their breath and waited for the final tally of those killed and missing.

Lucille DeGrasse was not among them. Her nephew Frank had been confirmed dead years before the treaty signed, leaving her forced to find comfort elsewhere. She had her distractions, mostly account books and meetings, but nothing that could pull her mind completely away from grief.

So life carried on uneasily. What had happened remained jagged- such violence was senseless, and it had cost her so much. Worst, yet and horribly so, were the living returned, young men who were not Frank, their lives paused rather than ended.

She grappled with anger for years, not least of all because she felt so little claim to the same grief that grayed the faces of those who had lost their sons. An aunt is not a mother, she was forced to remind herself on too many occasions. No matter how many scraped knees tended, or fevered brows kissed.

It wasn't until a friend recommended visiting Frank's grave in Draguignan, a town near the southern coast of France, that Lucille felt the soft breeze of hope once more.

Hope for closure, and an end to old bitterness.

* * *

The steamer that took her across the Atlantic was more festive than her pilgrimage, and Lucille desired nothing more than comfortable quarters and a place to walk. Her last vacation was spent in Frank's convertible. The car and the trip had been a gift before his graduation, giving them an opportunity to explore the country outside of Eastern Kentucky. Those weeks had been open air and a new hotel room every night, and she was often forced to abandon the memories lest the cabin air grow oppressive.

After the sea voyage came Sainte-Maxime on the coast. Lucille spent two days as a boarder in a large villa within view of the water. There were other patrons, some of whom Lucille recognized as fellow grieving, but only one approached her, as she was taking dinner.

The woman was gracelessly tall, with faded ginger hair tied at the nape of her thin neck. She carried a bag handled as if it contained every thought and feeling she possessed.

Inside was a camera. Her life's work had been nursing, but photography was her true passion. The scars of war were a fascinating subject, marring though they did her youth.

"I was born in Cogolin," she spoke English in a staccato. "I took to Marseilles for a...bad marriage." She lit a cigarette that was brandished and knocked against a ceramic ashtray when the ash grew long.

"Are you married?"

Lucille watched the dancing smoke for a moment.

"I had my chance, once," she shared at last and without regret. "It happened when we were both fixed in our lives, and neither wished to uproot the other."

The woman, Harricourt, tapped her cigarette and shrugged.

"For the best, no doubt," she pointed to her bag. "I visit the cemetery in Draguignan every fortnight. It is a lovely place. Visitors commission me, though I have prints in my room I sell. My home is still Marseilles, but I like it here," the word hung for a moment as her expression fell. "Do you know where your..."

"Nephew," Lucille provided, impatient for privacy. Her dinner was finished, her room beckoned. "And I know where he is. They sent me a number," she pulled a card from her handbag without looking. "I try not to think about it."

Harricourt dragged at her cigarette once before pressing it into a pile of ashes like broken pillars.

* * *

On the bus to Draguignan, Harricourt took a front seat while Lucille kept to the rear. Ahead of her was an elderly couple fussing over a camera that challenged them both. They were so loud that Lucille wondered why Harricourt didn't offer them her services.

The drive was a fog, and the cemetery a surprise. Lucille hadn't imagined how the newest monuments would gleam, stark white under a viciously blue sky.

341 was Frank's number, and she didn't need the card to know it. The night before had been spent in a kind of meditation, a calm sharpening of mental defenses against what it meant to be here.

There were guides and groundskeepers helping visitors find their loved ones. Lucille ignored them, checking the placards at the end of each row until she found 335 and stopped. She listened to the air and attempted to make sense of how she could have come so far and not want to take another step. Before she could commit or withdraw, she heard a pointed cough. She wasn't surprised to see Harricourt, unlit cigarette twisting in one hand and her camera bag unopened.

"I am not here to make commissions," the Frenchwoman answered the unasked question. "I did not lie, but I was not truthful."

Lucille listened.

Harricourt continued, rushed by fear that her bravery might fail her. "There was a wounded soldier, a young man. Too young for me, but he was so kind," she hesitated, studying Lucille before continuing in her defense.

"I loved him. It was not right, I do not pretend that it was. But it was love, all the same. Even now," she pocketed the cigarette and pulled out her camera. "I take photographs, see? I did not lie about that."

Lucille remained silent, eyes on the woman's face and it wasn't the shock of an illicit affair that kept her still, but anguish.

"I can make a photograph for you," Harricourt was steadfast after her admission and only when she spoke again did Lucille understand the spirit in which she had made it. "Of your son's grave."

If the sky remained blue over Draguignan, Lucille could not say.

“No,” there was a sense of iron bands around her chest, but she remained unmoved. If she could not confess to him, it would remain forever unspoken.

“Not my son.”

“Finding My Sunshine”

by Andrea Sebring

“Jenna, she will be here any minute! Hurry!” I looked at the movies surrounding me, thinking this was absolutely ridiculous. Lorraine entered the room and her eyes widened in horror.

“Oh my God! You’re not done? She’s going to freak out!”

She pushed me to the side and started grabbing our collection of movies and putting them back on the shelf in alphabetical order. I had lived with Lorraine for two months now, and up until now I thought she was normal. This crazy behavior all started two days ago when her mother called to say she was going to stop by for a visit and “check out” her daughter’s new roommate. Lorraine had explained to me that her mother was a little bit of a control freak and also, that she had been diagnosed with OCD when Lorraine was nine. Ever since then we had been alphabetizing movies, rearranging dishes, and cleaning doorknobs.

“Lorraine, come on. I’m sure she won’t even notice. I have tests to grade!”

“Second graders are not going to care if they get their spelling test back on time. Mother will care about our movies being in order.” She was the only person I knew who actually called her mom “mother.” The doorbell rang and Lorraine scrambled to the front of the house, straightening her skirt as she ran. Usually, she likes to sport jeans and a hoodie. This woman had a major effect on her. I could understand mothers putting a little tension in the air. Mine wasn’t thrilled about me being a twenty-six year old teacher with a roommate instead of a lawyer with a husband and three kids. Even so, she didn’t cause me to put everything in my house with a title in ABC order.

After completing the unnecessary alphabetizing, I trudged down the wood-paneled hallway that led from the TV room to the foyer to meet this dreadful lady that had caused all this insane behavior.

“Um, Jenna!” Lorraine shouted as I made my way to her.

“I’m on my...” My sentence was cut short when I entered the living room. The chunky, red-headed lady that stood in the doorway was not Lorraine’s mother; I had seen pictures of her. Lorraine’s mother was tall, slender, and had killer blonde hair. I didn’t know the hefty woman, but my heart jumped when I saw the young girl coming up the steps behind her.

The girl’s long black hair shone in the sunlight, making it look impossibly soft. Her green eyes pierced right through me and I could tell they held a hint of gold flakes. Her small frame didn’t make her look lanky like most girls her age. She walked with a confidence that I would recognize anywhere. This girl, whoever she was, looked identical to my sister.

My sister disappeared fourteen years ago when she was sixteen years old; just a couple years older than this girl appeared to be. I knew it was impossible that she was standing in from of me. Even so, I couldn’t help but ask.

“Sarah?”

I could feel my face getting red and tears had started to stream down my cheeks. Who was this girl and why did she remind me so much of the girl I'd lost long ago? My heart was racing now and I had to sit on the arm of the beat up leather couch to keep my composure. The cops couldn't find my sister. They told us it was a run-away and there was no evidence to prove otherwise. I had convinced myself that she was still out there somewhere, waiting for me to find her.

"My name is Olivia. Sarah was my mom." The girl's voice was quiet, but the sound made me cringe. It was Sarah's, too.

"What do you mean was?" The word scared me. The fear of my sister being gone had always crept into my mind, but deep down I couldn't help but think that she was still alive. Now, this girl, her daughter, my niece, was telling me she was dead. The tears were coming faster now and I knew how this must look to Lorraine. I had never told her about my sister. I never talked about it to anyone. I glanced to where she had been standing and saw she had ran outside to talk to her mom across the street, probably telling her to come another time. All of the door-knob cleaning was for nothing.

The redheaded lady interrupted my silent breakdown, "Jenna, I'm Kathy Stevenson from Social Services. Olivia was left in our care after Sarah passed away two evenings ago. No other family was listed in the will, except for you. I'm sorry for the unexpected visit but we couldn't find a phone number for you." I just stared at her and Olivia stared at me. The room was silent. No one knew what to say next. "They need you to take care of me," Olivia said sharply. "I have no other family. My dad died when I was seven. My mom just died. If you don't take care of me, I'll go to a foster care." Olivia's cold attitude surprised me. She wasn't crying. In fact, she didn't look upset at all. Her demeanor was almost... annoyed. I looked at the social services lady, Kathy, I think she said her name was. She said nothing but nodded in reassurance.

"We have a guest room. I... I have a roommate. We, uh, yes. Yes, I will take her." I felt like I was dealing with an old piece of furniture, not a human being.

"I'm sorry. I'm just so... shocked. Sarah ran away from us. I didn't know you..."

I had no idea... I never knew I had a niece, Olivia."

"I know she told me the story," Olivia said. "Where can I put my things?" I hadn't even noticed that she had her luggage with her. All she carried was a duffle bag, a suit case, and a small purse. Her whole life was packed into such a tiny space. I suddenly became very curious of Olivia's life. I wanted to know everything about her. She was my only niece, and I was never given the chance to be her aunt.

"The extra room is at the end of the hall. There's a twin bed. I'll move the exercise equipment out, so you will have more room." I smiled at her. It was so odd how things changed so fast. An hour ago I had never seen this girl before, and now she was living in my house. Olivia walked towards me and handed me a small yellow envelope and continued silently to her new bedroom.

"A Case Manager has been assigned to handle your case. Her name is Danielle Bloom. You should contact her to fill out the paperwork tomorrow, or as soon as possible." Kathy handed me a business card, shook my hand, and walked out the

door, leaving me with my new life. This was just her job; she changed people's lives every day. I don't think she realized I was clueless on how to raise a teenager. I looked at the envelope in my hands. "Jenna Joy" was written in cursive on the front. Sarah was the only one who ever used my middle name. The tears were back, slowly leaking from my eyes. After all these years, her handwriting had never changed. I opened the envelope slowly, careful not to rip the paper inside:

Jenna,

I'll start by saying I know that you're confused. I know that you probably hate me for leaving you. I know that leaving you with a thirteen year old girl is probably cruel, but I also know that you are strong. You are the strongest girl I have ever met. You're Jenna and you will figure out how to do this.

I didn't want to run away from you, and I never left you completely. I've been with you all of these years. I kept track of you and what you were doing... I had to know that you were okay. I can't ever make it up to you Jenna, but I will try to help you understand.

You know that dad always had a temper. You saw him drink from that bottle and turn into a monster. He would yell and blame us for things that we had no control over. Mom just stood by and let it happen. Night after night was always the same. You never knew that there was more to it than yelling. I tried to protect you as much as I could. He hit me, Jenna. He bit me a lot. I always had an excuse for why I was bruised, and you never caught on. I'm thankful for this. Don't ever blame yourself. None of it was your fault.

When I got pregnant, I knew that dad wouldn't let me keep it. Mom wouldn't stop him. I was so scared, and I knew that I needed to raise my baby. I had to leave for her. For Olivia. I met a boy named Jeff right after I left. He gave me a place to stay, and helped me with Olivia. He was the only father she ever knew, and he was taken from her too soon. I've given her the best possible life I could, but now I'm going to be taken from her, too. The cancer is spreading and it won't be long. So, please take care of my baby, Jenna Joy.

"Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you." —Walt Whitman

I love you.

Sarah

I knew that quote. She had found it in a book when we were kids and wrote it everywhere. She always whispered it when dad got mad. I had forgotten all about it. How could I forget that? The tears wouldn't stop now. I hadn't cried in so long; it was like the tears had built up over all these years. Every emotion hit me at once. I was mad at Sarah. I needed more information. Why did dad hit her? Why didn't she tell me? Who was Olivia's father and did she know that it wasn't Jeff? All of the anger boiling inside of me couldn't outweigh the sadness I felt. She knew me so well even after being apart for so long. I missed her. I missed her more than I ever had before.

Sarah trusted me with her only child, and I wasn't sure that she should. I admired my sister for everything that she had done. She had always protected me,

even when I wasn't aware of it. I knew that I had to care for Olivia. Sarah sacrificed everything to make sure that her daughter was safe and provided for. Now, with Sarah gone, I was all she had. I thought about Lorraine. In my eyes, her mother was crazy. In her eyes, she was the woman who gave her life. She loved her with everything she had and never wanted to disappoint her. Everyone deserved a love like that.

I took a few minutes to try and catch up with everything happening around me. I felt like it was all changing and I wasn't changing at all.

"She loved you, you know," I jumped at the sound of Olivia's voice. "She told me everything about you. I know that you love tacos. You would eat them every day if it were up to you. Your first love was Scotty Jones. Your favorite color is green, and it shows," she grinned as she looked at my décor: green curtains, green rugs, and green couch cushions. I couldn't help but giggle.

"She talked about me?"

"Every day. She missed you. She told me that I acted like you. Every time I refused to eat my peas, she would say 'Okay, little Jenna. Stop being so stubborn.'" We both laughed out loud this time. It felt so good to talk about Sarah and not feel a giant hole in my chest. I was happy to share her memory with someone. Olivia made her way to the couch and sat down beside me. We sat silently, staring at the landscape picture hanging above the bookshelf, but not really looking at it.

"I have no idea what I'm doing," I said, quietly.

"Me either." Olivia put her hand over mine. Her touch somehow helped me breathe easier. I had been so empty for so long; it felt good to relate to someone. I had lost my sister. I was never getting her back, but now I had a piece of her. I had Olivia and I wasn't letting her go.

“An Unexpected Discovery”

by Betty Osthoff

Elise picked up another bundle of files out of the safe before sitting down at the desk. It was a large mahogany piece that was the focal point of the room. Behind her a picture frame holding a old forest walking path covered in winter snow was sitting on the floor, revealing a large safe built into the wall. The smell of ink reached out from the safe from papers newly printed and papers which never sat on a desk for long but put away for safe keeping; seventy-five percent of the safe had been turned over to shelves of files. Despite the neat labels sitting on the top of each folder, she picked up another one setting it on her knee she flipped through the pages with one hand, the other twirling a loose strand of dark cherry red hair in her fingers absently.

“You would think you put things away, so when you go back for them they would still be there.” She looked up across the desk at the speaker as he growled flipping through the papers in the folder. He tried not looking up too much, pushing the brown hair that fell into his face off and on. He had unbuttoned the sleeves of the black shirt and had them rolled up his arms, and the first few buttons on the collar undone since they started looking through the papers. The stacks that were growing next to them stood as a testament that they had been back and forth between the desk and the safe a few times that the desk was covered with growing stack of manila folders; each had labels on their tabs in either a fluid handwriting or a tight scrawl.

“Alex, you put it in there what almost ten years ago? How many other important papers have you added since? It most likely slipped into another folder.” She looked up, leaning back in the big chair behind the desk. Moving in the chair she could smell the well cared for leather as the air released from the cushion. Her frame almost fit into the indentation just a bit smaller than the normal inhabitant who picked another chair.

“I understand,” he replied running his fingers through his golden brown hair, “it is just one of those documents you become alarmed at when you cannot find.”

“How often were you expecting to produce your medical license anyway? Twice when you got it and when you got hired here?”

“Something like that, I still think this formal presentation of things is unnecessary.” The normal speaking voice that could put almost anyone at ease had a hint of aggravation in it.

“If it did end up with something that is not here, how long to have a replacement produced?” She asked as she tried to pull her hair back off her white shoulders that could have used a little sun, tucking the ends in the back of the shoulderless black shirt.

“Two weeks or something like that.” He replied moving over to the wall, and pulling out another stack of folders. After looking at the titles on the folders, he glanced over at the other stack for a moment. The look was focused on the stack

that Elise had just put down in front of her, after a moment he looked back at his own stack of papers.

"We're been at this for a while. If you want to stop and get something for lunch," he suggested while flipping through pages." I can get through the next chunk." He stopped after the first folder and walked around the side of the room, and the bookshelves that were filled with old leather bound books and picture frames, filled the whole wall except for the window. Family photos, of a few dozen men and women dressed formally sitting in front of a white colonnade house. The pictures facing the door were of just the men from about ten to a sixty year old sitting or standing around a couch.

Elise smiled over at him, "This is just a warm up compared to what your dad throws at me on a normal basis."

Alex nodded as he traced his fingers along a carved silver picture frame, his ten year old face looked back at him in the small tux tight around his neck, her arms around him smiling over his shoulder was a ten year old Elise red hair pressed into tight curls falling down the side of his arm. The frame was tucked into the bookcase, visible from the desk but not the door. "You have always gotten along with most of my family so well, if it wasn't for the hair, you could have been switched at birth with one of us."

Elise snickered looking over the top of the files, "There is no black sheep among you that would be the real me."

"Would there have to be?" He had moved on to another photo along the wall, still hidden from the door. The frame was bronze and the edges smooth as he ran his finger the frame. His hand was behind her head, with two fingers sticking up over top of the quarter board hiding the top of the red hair. Her hand was in the process of batting the tassel into his face as the picture had been taken.

"As nice as that concept would be, we both know that won't happen."

"Why?" He asked as he lifted the top of an ornamental box of antique silver, looking at the three bands of silver and diamonds carved inside before carefully placing the top back down.

"A thirty-something year old is a little too old to adopt; besides there are enough of you as it."

"He may if he thought it would give him a break on the fees you've been charging him all these years as his lawyer." He reached another picture closer to the desk, both figures in their twenties this time. The figures were dressed to the nines, neither of them were looking at the camera, he held his hand out formally, the face of the woman dancing with him had been obscured by a cloud of red hair and the black fabric that started low on her back was a swirl of skirts that flared out as she had been turning and filled the bottom corner of the photo. Behind them you could see two older gentlemen in their fifties, one with a kind face another more morose.

"For what he sends me, he should be glad I don't charge him more. Besides, I charge him less than I charge my father."

"Wait. You bill your dad?"

Elise looked up the set of blue eyes glinting. “Do I send one mafia boss of our fair city a bill for every headache he sends me even though he’s my father? Yes.”

She smiled softly, “Besides I like working for your dad more, he doesn’t fight me for doing what he needs me to do. My Father, I’m pulling teeth to get all the pieces, and they are both in the same business.”

“I knew they say lawyers were cold-hearted,” He teased with a smile.

“A lot of bridges were burned, and most of them not by me.” She looked up almost sad for a moment.

“I know, most just forget a lot of the time, with everything else you try not to remember the unpleasant stuff.”

“We seem to survive by doing that. Either you become one with it and become a monster, or we turn it into background noise.”

“We are not monsters Elise.” He said softly, as he put a picture he just picked up from the bookshelf back in its place.

“We live in a world of monsters, if we look at everything. What does that make us?”

“People trying to be better than that; did you—did I—go through everything if not to be better than that?”

“We may have but we are still here, just different. I write the paperwork to get them out of hot water; you patch them up when they show up bloody and in pieces.”

Alex slid around the table. He gently rested his hand on the side of her face. “You’re nothing like them. You still know the value in people for themselves; you still care about things around you and not for their intrinsic value.”

She looked down shortly blushing for a moment, still flipping through folders. “I wish that was a good thing, but none of that helps with survival in our families.”

“Why does it matter—if we still survive—if we are something more than them?” He asked thoughtfully.

“No matter how much if we pack up and move away we would, we are still the children of two of the largest ‘organized families’ for lack of another polite term. It would still follow us some day and then we wouldn’t see it coming.” She replied running her fingers across the edge of the next folder, sound of her nail scratching along the stiff manila filling the silence for a moment. She leaned back into the chair her knees crossed underneath the neat black skirt that stopped right above the knee high boots.

“We can at least see things coming here.”

“In the mean time getting dragged in the middle of the irrelevance of it all; the gossip, the drama, the politics of it all.” He replied with an annoyance, sliding back on the desk. Despite the polished and formal setting of the desk he was sitting on the jeans didn’t look out of place, or the fact that they ended in black socks instead of shoes.

“You enjoy second guessing your father at politics, Alex.” She replied still flipping through the papers.

“Well, it can be a mental exercise but I don’t like everything else that goes along

with it.” He shrugs.

“For the years that I’ve known you, Alex, you’ve enjoyed out-thinking other people.”

“Well yes, until I got caught in it and had no way out.”

“You didn’t ask your father for a way out of an arranged marriage?” She asked over the next folder in the stack, balancing the rest on her knee. “He would have given it to you in a heartbeat had you asked—unlike mine.”

“I thought it would be more something like he had. Rough for the first year or so but you get used to it. Not that.”

“Not a wife that is never home has more lovers in a month than there are months in a year and doesn’t care who knows.” His jaw clenched as she said that while she looked over at him with absolute calm, “it doesn’t help ignoring it.”

“What the hell would you know about it anyway?” He practically snapped moving back on his feet and pacing between the desk and the window like a trapped cat.

“The cleaning it up when you father asks since he can see no wrong as long as your involved or the part where you had to carry me and the blood soaked wedding dress out of the church?”

“Sorry,” he dropped down heavily into one of the pair old fashioned leather chairs on the other side of the desk from her the smell of old well treated leather filling the room as he did. “I didn’t mean to.”

“She gets under everyone’s skin these days.”

“Just these days?” He asked sarcastically rolling his eyes.

“Okay, since we all met her.”

“Could have been worse,” he shrugged.

“You know how hard it was not to put her through the church windows?”

“That would have been copying—get your own way to ruin a wedding.”

“When you did it, it did make a statement.”

“Sorry I didn’t get to watch the falling through glass part while stopping you from trying to walk on a broken leg.”

“And you think that we never do anything interesting in life?”

“Normal would be nice for a change, and not have to always be looking over our shoulders.”

“We can’t change what they are, and we can’t change a lot of things that happen in our families that we want to never deal with or know about. It’s why being different like we are. It’s not immunity against it or anything. It just makes us different from them not better.”

“It can,” Alex started but was cut off.

“Alex! What—is—this?” Elise asked each word in its own moment of time.

“What?” He asked.

“Certificate of Marriage,” She looked up over the two almost identical pieces of paper she was holding one in each hand the same spacing and coloration were on each page that she was held in the official looking thick paper, “only it is certified years before your marriage to Michelle.”

“Oh,” Alex mentioned with a pregnant pause as he shifted, sinking further into

the chair. "Please don't kill me; it's not what you think."

"Not what I think? It's a marriage license in both of our names. What am I supposed to think?" Her voice wasn't loud but it held an icy chill to it.

"That I'm an idiot—okay, that I was a wild-eyed stupid kid who thought he could fix the world and make everything better." His voice started increasing in volume till he was practically shouting.

"Does that make you happy?"

She sat back in the chair calmly looking over at him, and in a simple emotionless voice.

"Why?" Her hands gently set each piece of paper on the arms of the chair.

"What?" He looked over at her and blinked.

"Why?" She asked again, "I've known you long enough to know you like to fix things. This was before your marriage, but what were you trying to fix?"

"I didn't want to see you hurt anymore. I didn't want to see you hide the bruises, cuts, broken bones anymore. I thought if I gave you another option. A way out, come hell or high water it would work and you'd be safe." He replied, collapsing back further into the chair.

"I didn't get to before things happened. Anyway it was never filed. I got you to sign it one day when you were dealing with other legal papers."

"Alex," she spoke softly.

"Look I understand it I screwed up, I don't know why I couldn't just toss it away."

"Alex."

"If you hate my sorry ass from here to eternity, I get it. I understand. I deserve it."

"Alex."

"I just wanted to stop what happened from being a normal part of your everyday life."

As he kept talking she got up and walked over next to him. His eyes were closed and his head tilted back as if looking at the ceiling. She leaned down as he finished the last diatribe against himself. Her lips brushed against his and he finally looked up confused. The scent of orange and jasmine reached his nose.

"I always wondered if that really got men to stop talking," she replied.

"You realize that is not a smart move to make to a married man that has not..."

He started to blush and after a moment.

"Do I need to finish that statement?"

"Only if you want to," she replied softly.

"And that's the second reason why such things are not a good idea."

"After all these years you really want me to stop teasing you."

"You don't want me to answer that." He responded.

"Only issue is with that Alex, is that it was filed." She picked up one of the documents from the chair with the back of it towards him where all the signature lines were filled in and the document was stamped.

"What? I never took it to get signed." He looks confused holding the piece of

paper.

"You asked me to sign it while I was at the courthouse didn't you?"

"What does that matter?"

"You caught me in the hall; you were so happy that you were finally filing for your medical license?"

"Something like that, I didn't think you would ask too much about it. Back when you were an intern you mentioned you witnessed for different documents being filed."

"I thought I was just your preferred choice for witnessing your license. I was standing next to the clerk, I was trying to save you time and got it verified which means it got processed and handed right back to me after being filed. You had gotten caught up in a conversation with the deputy mayor, who was still trying to get you to join his office."

He stood up from the chair and wrapped his arms around her. "I'm sorry it was a stupid thing to have done, I should have told you, or better yet, just took you away from this life."

"I guess we need to figure out what to do now."

"What do you mean?"

"It's valid—signed—and filed."

He leaned back on the edge of the desk, running a hand through his hair.

"Serious?"

She nodded. "Yes, it will take some looking into as why there was not any questions when you got married again."

He lifted her off her feet, spinning in place. "Does this mean what I think it does? That I couldn't be married because I was already?"

"It could," she replied, looking serious. "then what is the fall out that your arranged marriage is no longer valid mean to the rest of the family. If you want me to try and untangle everything it could be listed officially as everyone thinks it is now. If that's what you want."

"Do I look insane? Elise, why would I knowing what I know now want this as real when it could be over and done with? Do I want to deal with a wife who cheats on me and doesn't care if everyone knows?"

"Yes, but your family, if they knew and would care about it, they did set up your marriage for political reasons." She replied.

"At least if dad really wants out of the alliance that was formed with the whole other marriage thing this does give him an out. I just need to figure out how to break it to him."

"Something along the lines of 'hi dad, you always known I was an idealist.'" She replied trying to imitate him. He replied by tickling her as she moved back to sitting on the desk.

"Oh by the way," as she tried to catch her breath, "I think you wanted this."

Twisting out of his reach she dodged for the other paper that looked almost identical from the chair that she left it; "that's how I figured when you did this. Just duplicate in case they lost your application? Her voice teased him as she held the

two pages up together where the signature lines were about in the same place.

He smiled taking the folder and putting it aside on a clear spot on the desk. "I guess this leads us to 'now what.'"

"I think we need to find out what your father thinks."

T.

Tributaries

Nonfiction

Featuring work by:

Joshua Lykins

Jenn Sroka

Tahna Moore

“The Family Mythos”

by Joshua Lykins

First Runner-Up, 2014 Prize for Creative Nonfiction

The family mythos is kept tucked away in a corner of my grandmother’s memory like a bolt of overlooked lace. It sits in a dusty junction, sometimes ignored but never forgotten.

On occasion, when a wave of remembrance and melancholy takes her, my grandmother will bring that lace to the light, to the forefront of her memory, shaking away a decade of accumulated dust and holding it out for inspection. You can admire its fine texture, and all those thin gossamer threads woven by countless hands over countless years. You can see its age-raddled edges, and the dark stains that bloom across its surface like unwholesome roses, covering secrets spoken of only in whispers. In the center of the bolt is a large rent, a rent someone has sown together again, twisting the delicate threads into a new pattern, disguising the truth that lies beneath.

If you are patient, if you listen intently, my grandmother’s stories will spill forth. The history behind those stitched together memories is complicated; tightly woven and impenetrable to all but a few. She sits quietly on the couch, untangling threads and place names, and family names, and confused bloodlines, with a strength that belies her delicate stature.

When she speaks, she brings to life that not so distant past. There are a hundred years in her voice, and a hundred relatives in her words. She is a southern Scheherazade, clutching a cup of coffee in one rheumatic hand and pleating her slacks with the other. Her voice grows softer, and her accent heavier, the nasal vowels and supplementary R’s of middle Kentucky adding texture to her tale. She paints her own picture, and the twisted hills and rock cliffs of Kentucky rise up before you, heavy with the decayed scent of leaf rot and moist earth. You can see the mist that hangs low in the shaded hollers, and the endless panorama of trees, their trunks enwrapped with twining vines.

* * *

Sometimes pictures accompany the stories, photographs pulled from musty trunks and cracked chifferobes.

“This is your father,” she says, “he was just a little bit younger than you are now.”

Stack after stack of photographs are gone through, all bearing that heavy yellow tint one associates with the 1970’s. There are bowl-cuts and bell-bottoms, a little boy in Lone Ranger garb perched atop a grey mare named star, and a pretty little girl standing in a dusty front yard, dressed in green beads and feathers, her long blond hair a strait fall to her knees.

The pictures change; the beige tints of the seventies giving way to the chromatic blues and creams of the 1950’s. There is my grandmother, freshly married and smiling in her youth. She looks ridiculously delicate, all wide blue eyes and dark curls, her almost nonexistent waist reduced to nothing by acres of voluminous

blue material that billow over lacy slips and starched petticoats

"I barely weighed a hundred pounds soaking wet," she says, admiring her younger self. "But people were smaller then."

* * *

Kentucky is a strange, not-all-together civilized place; there is something primordial in its maze of steep inclines and narrow valleys, a gothic dimness that lurks in its thickly forested hilltops. Wooden houses sit abandoned in forest clearings, their green shutters torn away by devouring kudzu. And listing graveyards rest beneath jagged outcroppings of rock, their inhabitants long rotted away. Along the roadsides sit trailer homes, white exteriors scarred and pitted with rust and buckshot. And dominating the entire state is a strange green darkness, heightened by fingers of long hill shadow, and the blue depths of sunless hollers and clay creek beds.

This is the place she came from, my petite grandmother with her dark curls and tiny waist. This strange slice of America that has harbored, not only her, but generations of her family, and of my grandfather's family. A net of kin stretches over that state, the connecting lines of cousins and forbears no longer strong, but still simmering with better-forgotten jealousies and lost love.

There are things that went down in those hills, things many men and women have suppressed, shoved from memory and carried to their graves. The old folks clutched those secrets to their chest and never let one word slip, and their children were left with a handful of pictures and a family bible full of nothing. Bitter enmity still lies rooted at the heart of a now disparate and nearly extinct family, but those with persistence can dig up something that resembles the truth.

* * *

My grandmother tells the truths, or half-truths, that were told to her by women who only knew half-truths, or only divulged slivers of truth. But perhaps truth isn't what matters in this particular situation, perhaps it's the color, the feel of lost eras, the legends left by those who came before you. And by this time the stories have become legends, dark and fundamental, like forbidding fairytales.

* * *

Kentucky keeps its secrets, and there have been many a murder or dark deed kept high in the dim regions, where sunlight will never shine.

"I shouldn't be telling you all this," my grandmother smiles, "but it doesn't really matter does it? They can't be hurt anymore. They are all dead."

* * *

There was that time she buried her ring in the garden, hoping a jeweled tree would grow in its stead; That time a strange creature roamed the hills above her home, screaming like a murdered woman. How all the dogs hid beneath the rotting porch boards, refusing to hunt.

That time rabies ran flush through the county. How the family cow went mad in the paddock, butting itself against the fence over and again. How her little white dog caught the disease and chased her down the long driveway one night, snapping at her heels.

There was her devotedly kind mother, who died of a brain aneurism at age forty.

There was her temperamental father, whose breath was cut short by the black hand of emphysema.

There were uncles who disappeared during the war.

There were spoiled aunts who wore their skirts too short, and smoked cigarettes in open defiance.

There was that family ailment, a penchant for cool-headed alcoholism that had warped so many she knew and loved.

There was happiness, and there was sadness, and she grew up, and married, and had children, and loved grandchildren. And that wide bolt of lace, stained and age-raddled, was rewoven by her own hands.

* * *

My grandmother worked her own pattern into the lace, and then she passed it down to us, to the lives she has had a hand in creating. She has given us a gift. Not a clichéd gift with swooping violins and a sentimental fade-out. She gave us a real gift, the gift of history. She passed down that ragged bolt of cloth, that familial lace, and now it is our turn to twist the threads to suit our taste. Twist them to show our lies and our loves, our bizarre fetishes, our narcissism, our tolerance and disappointments. We too shall weave our stories to fit the whole, just a lost vignette in a bolt of many lives.

“Anna”
by Jenn Sroka

He’s going to ship her.

It’s a Sunday morning, the last Sunday morning in October, and I am standing in the barn that has been home to my racehorses and weekend responsibilities for the past several months. The last horses ran the last race of the season here almost a week ago. My husband and I are breaking camp and packing up the excess water buckets, feed tubs and other items we do not need at the racetrack to care for our horses still stabled there. Home on the farm, the stalls in our backyard barn are empty and waiting for them. In just a few days, they will enjoy a long winter off to eat hay and play in the snow together, growing shaggy coats to protect them from the winds and resting their minds and bodies until the spring when training starts to slowly condition them back into peak athletic shape. For now, the three of them gleam with soft, tight coats over rippled muscles, each with perfectly trimmed manes and perfectly shod hooves. They stand in deeply bedded stalls, two freshly scrubbed water buckets and a large pile of sweet smelling hay in front of each, munching contentedly or watching the barn activity from their door.

Five stalls down, a rusty gate hangs in the doorway of a dark stall. Somewhere inside, Guyana Moon, a small mare with a reddish brown coat and a crooked white blaze down her nose, awaits her fate. One year ago, “Anna” was purchased as a joint venture between a trio of perpetually broke individuals; a sweet but naïve young woman, an older Irishman with a likeable personality, and a small, ancient Englishman with a soft accent. They had high hopes of making big money on this little girl’s racing. However, as the five year old mare failed to win race after race, the young lady and the Irishman left the partnership. They signed over their indebtedness to the English chap by way of giving their percentage of the mare’s ownership to him. The Englishman’s name was Albert, and old Al became the owner, trainer, and caretaker of Anna.

Al’s persona was that of a frail old man with a whispery voice and a gimp to his walk, but he spoke no kindness to his animals, and never did they feel a hand caress their nose or a carrot pass their lips. He bred them to whatever he could strike a free deal with, and as a result he had a few mouths to feed. Horses were simply a business for Al, and business was not going well. The horses moved from farm to farm, snuck out with bills owed or moved out by the barn owners just to get them out of their stables. Al was broke. This is when Anna’s true decline begins.

Anna came back to the racetrack the following year as a six year old mare who never won a race. Through friends I learned she had been turned out in large herds with aggressive horses, which accounted for the nasty cuts down her swollen legs. She moved into the same section of our barn at the racetrack as before, five stalls down from my fleshy horses that had spent their winter rolling snow angels with their backs and playing halter tag in the fields. Anna’s appearance was out of

place as she was walked around the shiny browns, blacks, reds and greys in the rest of the stable. Already an unusual color called "liver chestnut," Anna's reddish brown coat had been chewed by other horses, chunks pulled out by their teeth. She resembled a dull old penny, weather worn and overused. As a six year old horse, Anna should have been entering the prime of her life, but her crooked blaze down her face separated two haunted eyes, far too sad and tired for such a young mare.

Soon after his arrival, Al ran out of credit with the feed man, tack shop, hay farmers, farriers, veterinarians, and so on. He began borrowing off others regularly, carefully avoiding my husband and me. We had watched the same pattern the year before, and when our hay and our feed and our bedding bags would go missing overnight only to end up in his horses' stalls, my husband confronted Al and made it clear the thieving would stop immediately. This made the air between the three of us rather chilly; however, we were not going to turn a blind eye to theft. We would pass each other quietly in the barn, never speaking, going about our own business.

Anna entered several more races as the year went on. An average, healthy racehorse at our level of racing runs a race every 14 to 21 days. Al was sending Anna out to run every 7 to 10 days. She always ran with no improvement, gathering comments in the results like, "never in contention", "failed to fire", "weakened", "distanced", and "no factor". Worse than the results, we watched Anna return to the barn exhausted, the sweat gleaming from her heaving body, her head covered in the sandy loam that dozens of hooves flung back into her face as she trailed them. Al brought her back from each race, trickled a hose over her body while she was still too hot from exertion, skipped the half hour or so of walking a horse should do to properly cool them off, and stuck her back in her stall still overheated.

Anna wore blinkers, a hood with plastic cups that go around the eyes some horses need to keep distractions beside them from frightening them. Anna's blinkers channeled the gritty sand into her eyes quite often. Horsemen know to flip the eyelid and blow the wet sand out of the corner of the eye to prevent irritation and infection; Al never bothered. Anna's eyes were often painfully swollen and half-lidded a day or more following a race, sometimes leading to a weeping eye infection. Anna's permanent teeth grew in crooked, creating a jagged grinding surface usually treated with inexpensive equine dentistry; Al never noticed. Large amounts of the little feed Anna did receive would fall out of her mouth over the stall door, out of her reach. Anna's feet had always been tender, prone to infection or cracks if not cared for regularly. Her feet became delicate like eggshells, peeling and chipping as the urine from the dirty bedding she lived in seeped into their walls. She wore the same pairs of shoes for three or four races, sometimes losing them around the barn or on the track.

September gave way to October, the final month of racing at our track. Al seemed to finally back away from the idea of this horse ever making money, and Anna's name dropped out of the weekly list of race entries. I began to worry

about her future. I wracked my brain on ways to get Anna away from this man who knows I despised him. At first, I dropped hints to others in the barn still on good terms with Al that I would take her off his hands and find her a good home. Then I outright made the offer of finding her a home, even hinting I would give a little cash for her. Al never responded to my gestures. The days went by, and I continued to walk past her dark stall as I tended to my own horses. I watched as Al would take a couple of piles of her manure out, toss it into the aisle in front of her stall, and rake it into the dirt. He just did not waste time caring about her.

Then the nickering started.

The first time, it was a soft, inquiring nicker, just Anna asking each person who passed if they would be kind enough to bring her a meal. After a time or two, my husband and I mentioned to each other Anna's calling. She was calling to anyone who walked past the stall, and it was growing in urgency. We kept track of Al's coming and going. He came in later in the mornings, spending little time near Anna. After throwing her a flake of borrowed hay, he would leave for the day. There was no netting stuffed full of hay for her, like all the other horses in the barn had. There was no more borrowed grain. There was no bedding added to the stall, no cleaning of the manure. The stall started to stink. And we started to turn our heads and stare into the stall. Anna stood in the center of a bowl at least 6 inches lower than the rest of the barn floors. Al had been scraping the very dirt off the sides to create "bedding", and even that was long gone. She looked like a pony in the dark, her hunched little body increasing the impression of her insignificance. She needed help.

We pointed out Anna's neglect to racing officials, but as the live racing was over for the year we were told she would have to leave soon, and thus would be someone else's problem. As long as Al was throwing her something to eat now and then, he could claim she was being fed. However, a healthy horse needs ample amounts of food and water to stay alive. They generally eat 2% of their body weight, or around 20lbs, of hay a day. Anna's daily flake was about 5lbs. Her weight and health declined rapidly, the months of neglect catching up to her coupled by the lean diet she was given. We could not help during the day without being noticed around the barn, but the evenings come quicker in the fall. We would turn out the lights down the barn aisle, and under the cover of darkness one of us would bring hay and fresh water to Anna, the other keeping watch. Usually it was me bringing an armful of good grass hay and a juicy carrot to her. Her nickers of thanks were quiet, but grateful. She never told our secret, cleaning up every blade of grass before Al wandered into the barn in the mornings. I could do nothing about the bedding, but she would survive. The question now was, what fate was she surviving for? The stable area would close in two weeks.

I started making inquiries to friends who help thoroughbreds retiring from racing find good homes and new careers. One group was looking to help a racehorse in need, and Anna was absolutely in need. With a home secured, I hoped Al would finally let her go. I struggled with ways to free Anna from a man who knows I dislike him. I tried going through people he associated with, making out-

-right home offers and even suggesting there would be some cash for her. The last days at the barn I waited, hoping he would have some compassion and let the mare have a chance at a new life with the home I found her. But I knew where Al's discarded horses had always gone before. About half an hour down the road, a low end local livestock auction is the dumping ground for many poor horses. The auction is frequented by "kill buyers"; bidders who buy on contract to fill long trucks with horses for processing as pet food or overseas human consumption. Held the last Sunday of each month, many locals come out for the cheap equipment sold in the ring or to look over the animals brought in, but few horses ever leave there to go on to a real home.

It is the last Sunday of October, and I am setting up the hay and feed for the horse my husband is walking around the barn. Anna is still five stalls away, waiting for her owner. The sun has been up about an hour, and we can see the activity in other barns as the horsemen pack up the stable equipment for the year and ready their stall areas for the winter. My husband walks our horse into his stall, slips the halter off his head, and we turn to watch him beeline for the feed bucket. Then we busy ourselves with packing, moving quietly as a team while the radio plays some Beatles tunes. The peaceful morning is interrupted by the arrival of Al's bright yellow F-150 pickup. Behind it, a rusty, noisy, small and antiquated old horse trailer rattles along. A front window is missing, and the side panels are painted different colors of primer where the paint hasn't chipped off.

My husband and I move back into the shadow of an unused stall door and watch Al and a man I do not recognize swing the back doors of the trailer open. The significance of the trailer appearing on auction day is not lost on either of us. Turning to my husband, I half whisper, "He's going to ship her, isn't he?" He knows exactly what I mean, rests a hand on my tense shoulder, and nods. Al disappears with a rope into the stall with Anna, and leads her out. On the end of the lead rope is a length of chain. Al has run the length of it over Anna's gums behind her upper lip to give it a degree of pressure right against her sensitive tissues should she balk when he leads her. Al pulls this chain taut, alarming Anna. Her head jerks up and back in a rigid stance as he drags her step by reluctant step toward the trailer. I retreat to the back of our stall to make a phone call. I speak with my friend, the leader of the group who offered Anna a home, and tell her about the latest development. With my three horses coming home in days, I have no room at my farm to keep Anna. I am holding on to hope my friend still does, and she confirms the offer still stands. I thank her and return to the front of the stall.

Anna is being difficult with the loading. For one thing, as small as she is, she is still almost tall enough for her ears to brush the roof. For another, generally race-horses are never loaded on to trailers they must step up inside of. Instead, we use long, graduated ramps so the horse can step naturally into the enclosed space. Al's borrowed trailer frightens Anna terribly. She bucks and rears against going into the small box like a sunfish hooked on a line. I hope she will fight enough that the men give up, but instead they attach another long white rope to her halter. Feeding

it through the broken window at the front, the other man pulls on it while Al picks up a long whip. Al lashes into Anna's ankles, each snap of the whip angrier than the last. Anna tries to strike back with a leg, but her neglected condition leaves her thrust weak. Her strength is quickly leaving her, and Al is safely out of reach of her hooves. Then Anna seems to give up, lowers her head in defeat, and steps up into the box. Al quickly closes the doors together. Where a safety latch once held the doors securely in place, he now clips a small metal fastener like the ones found at a dollar store. The clip is all that keeps Anna from falling out the back of the trailer and onto the road. A board on the outside of the trailer has come loose during their loading attempts. Al takes a hammer and knocks it back into place with several taps. The taps sound like nailing Anna into a coffin. The men get into the cab, and the trailer rattles away.

I need to decide. This is my last chance to help Anna. I battle my inner voice as I finish my chores. I set up the rest of the horses with their clean bedding, ample feed, fresh buckets of water. Everything Anna deserves, too. I have a home secured for her. I know where the auction was. Anna trusts me. What was the point in feeding her and caring about her all this time if I turn my back and gave up now?

I turn to my husband, my eyes holding back tears.

"How much?" he asks.

"Two, two fifty, couldn't be more than three. She doesn't weigh enough to go for more than three hundred for meat." I reply.

He digs out the bills while my mind races. With a quick peck on the cheek, I grab my truck keys and head toward our farm. I make a quick stop to pick up a friend to help, then rush home and hook up our horse trailer. I take a large bale of hay and shove the whole thing into a hay net, then hang it in the trailer. I grab a syringe without a needle and load it with two units of a mild sedative, thinking Anna will need it after the ordeal she is about to go through. A quick check of the trailer lights and couplings, and we're off.

I have given the men a significant head start in hopes that I can pull around the large auction barn and park my trailer without their notice. But when we arrive I do not see the trailer at all, and fear that I am wrong, that Anna went somewhere else. We park, and I pull a winter hat low over the coat I grabbed before leaving the house. We enter the horse pen area, and the stench of urine and dirty animals hits me. This is the place unwanted horses go before they are shipped to slaughter. Already a few have been sorted into pens and their hips numbered like cattle. Looking toward the middle, relief floods me as I see a small reddish brown nose with a crooked white stripe poking out of a tiny pen. With a careful look around to reassure myself Al and his friend are not in the area, I slowly make my way toward Anna. Horses can be sold without going through the ring in a shady place like this, and I do not want my interest in her noticed. I whisper a quiet, "what's up, G?", using my nickname for her. Instead of the normal nicker I have come to know each morning, Anna's voice is a frightened whinny when she hears me.

I show interest in the horses around her, taking sideways glances of Anna's

hip number to record in my book, and scan over her to see if there are any new injuries. In the light of day, I realize just how very bad she looks up close. Her hair has grown long, as she has had no blanket at night to keep her warm. The shaggy coat is matted with the waste bedding would have absorbed, and has a fowl scent. Her ribs are clearly visible, with her abdomen drawn up under her. The flesh of her chest and hips has shrunk, creating hollows to match the ones around her eyes. She looks nothing like the shiny horses prancing with vigor people are used to seeing before a race. She wears a cheap nylon halter that may have been green or yellow but now is so covered in grime it is just drab like she is. I give her nose a good rub then leave the depressing pens to find a spot in the auction ring.

I spread out a fleece blanket on the cold bench and observe the arena from my high perch in a corner. Many of the faces are familiar, and some come from the racetrack. None of them are here for Anna. The local auction is more of a social event than a place for a serious horse buyer. The ring starts out full of new and used buckets, bridles, saddles, feed tubs, clothing, blankets, and assorted odds and ends for bidding and buying. These items are the real bread and butter of this small sale, not the horses. Being late fall, everyone there is going into winter, hay is expensive, and few people are interested in taking in another mouth to feed. I still do not see Al. I suspect he dropped the horse off, turned right around, and won't be back until it is time to pick up the check. He does not care what happens to Anna or the other horses in the past he has dropped off here. This is just the place he goes to squeeze the last dime out of a used up horse.

Bidding starts with the horse equipment, stretching out my anxiety for a few hours as the ring slowly empties of its merchandise. The bantering between auctioneer and audience goes slow as my feet go numb. I send my friend to check on Anna from time to time, wanting to show no connection to the horse too early and tip someone off that I am here for her. Finally the last of the equipment is sold. Some of the staff breaks down the tables and stores them behind the stage door, while another man opens a bag of bedding and sprinkles it on the concrete floor inside the small fenced ring. The ring itself is three sided chain link fencing about 8 feet high with a narrow door on one side. The door leads to a chute that cattle, pigs, or the occasional rogue horse will be shooed through. The ring is about 12 foot by 12 foot, the size of most horse stalls, yet people still tack up the occasional horse and "ride" it in a circle in there, their heads inches away from the padded beams of the roof.

Hip number 1 enters the ring, and the person leading it walks it around in circles. The auctioneer reads the description of the young bay colt, broke to lead, nothing more. The bidding starts at \$100, goes to \$125, \$150, \$200, and never advances. The only buyer is the auction house itself, which is the kill pen. The \$200 is a sort of upset bid at which the house will scoop up a full sized horse and send it for meat. I sit through another nine of these, one or two ridden into the ring and eliciting enough interest to buy him or her a new family to go home with. But most get the \$200 bid, and are led back to their pens to await their doom. Hip 11 is next, and I sit up a little straighter as Anna enters the ring.

I am seeing what the people around me are seeing. Not the five year old filly three people bought as an investment. Not the horse who ran races week after unsuccessful week, slowly wilting her mind, body and soul. Not the six year old mare, enduring a whole season of life at the track in a dark stall with a man who never showed her any compassion or consideration. I am seeing a shaggy reddish brown little horse lead in by the auction staff, frightened and truly alone with no one caring what happens to her next. But this isn't my first auction, and I know how showing an emotional attachment to a horse in the ring will make this dirty little horse suddenly "interesting" to the house auctioneer. Bids will come from the rafters or the floor, driving up her price since I'm a "live" bid.

The bidding starts, asking \$100, \$100, do they hear \$100? And some floor-board no one is standing on gives them \$100. A window bids \$125, maybe the door bid the \$200, as no one has placed a real bid on her. Then the necessary banter comes as the auctioneer looks for \$250 to advance the bid. I cock my head to the side as if I'm really doubtful about throwing a bid in the ring. I've let flashier, bigger, groomed horses go past already, and this is just a small dirty mare with a silly looking crooked white blaze down her small head. I meet the eye of caller in the ring, and slash my hand through the air sideways as if I was swatting a fly. "\$225!" he calls out, taking my half bid. I'm bidding against the auctioneer himself, and his eye seeks mine in the crowd. I can see the question, his curiosity asking if I was a legitimate bid, or a connection trying to get more for the mare. I just return the stare as he seeks out \$250, \$250, \$250, from the crowd. I catch his eye again, fixing my gaze solidly on his dark eyes, and feel him yield. There is not enough flesh in the ring for him to waste his time on playing games. He's going to back off bidding on this horse. No one advances. "Hip 11, sold to bidder 945".

I slip out of my spot, folding my blanket to ignore the curious eyes of several people around the ring, and go back to the holding pens. I give Anna a pet as I slip the syringe with the sedative into her mouth, and leave my friend to watch over her while I go pay. The line is short, and I quickly peel the bills out into the cashier's hand, impatiently awaiting the bill of sale that makes Anna mine. As she hands me that goldenrod paper, I rush out of the office like I have Willy Wonka's golden ticket. I bounce down the stairs, out to the truck and grab my lead rope. I pause only long enough to put the ramp down for the trailer, and then go straight for the pen containing Hip 11. I give Anna another nose rub as I slip the lead on her halter, and then guide her out the door. She seems relieved to be out of that smelly barn, until she sees the trailer. She plants her feet for a moment, but my friend grabs a fistful of hay out of the hay net and hands it to me. The rustling of the grasses and the mouthful of hay is all it takes before Anna rushes me to get up the ramp into the trailer. She's properly smaller than the roof, with ample room in the well-lit interior. My friend lifts the ramp and latches our precious cargo in. One more rub on that little white lined nose between her mouthfuls of hay, and I leave her to her feast. I climb in the truck, turn the ignition, set the tow gears and pick up my phone.

"I got her." My voice breaks, thinking of the wonderful life that awaits Anna.

She is free. The first thing I will do is brush that bright orange painted prisoner number off her hip. She will be delivered from her dark cells and meager meals to a life of sunshine, freedom, green grass, unlimited hay, fresh water, and clean bedding. Knowing she will have kind words and loving hands caring for her every need, I feel the tension flowing out of my body.

“I’ve got Anna, and she is safe!”

“Bully”

by Jenn Sroka

2014 Prize for Creative Nonfiction

It was Thanksgiving, a “Canadian” Thanksgiving in Ontario, yet the young steer in the back of our small aluminum trailer had little to be thankful for at the present. He was born on our farm, raised the right way in the open air on a large pasture with grass and hay, no bulking of grain to painfully puff him up or growth hormones to sour his personality. Yet something was not quite right in his temperament. Some kink in his personality made me nervous around this one, and kept my guard up when I was around him. His father was a Highland, one of the gentlest of cattle, descended from Scottish breeding. His mother was a Black Angus, a breed known to be temperamental, yet she would lick grain from my hand. It was just this small, black, hairy steer that seemed to be a throwback to his mother’s unpredictable pedigree.

We made the appointment to drop him off at the packers, yet could find no one at the office or the house in front when we arrived. My husband knew how the doors operated, and found one on the side was open. He opened the one way door to the cement shoot inside the front of the building, and propped the door open with a garbage bin. Next, he backed the trailer into the unloading area, and hooked a metal gate to block access to the road. The gate was just a visual deterrent; it leaned on the side of the building and would push over easily should the steer go that direction. Beyond the gate was a major roadway with constant vehicular traffic on the snowy road and lots of open fields. If a cow went loose in that direction, the dangers were unthinkable.

We opened the back ramp of the trailer. Thinking the steer would be relieved to sniff freedom, we were surprised to find him glued to the nose of the small box. While we pondered what to do next, a heavy duty truck and long trailer pulled into the yard. I recognized the livestock man who climbed out of the cab, and graciously accepted his assistance in unloading our calf. My husband went into the side door that went to the smaller chute beyond the first concrete room, and we concentrated on getting the steer out of the trailer. The concrete room was about 8 feet long by 6 feet wide, completely cemented from ceiling to floor in shiny concrete. On our side was a solid metal door with the handle on the outside. At the end of the chute was another, smaller door that was open for the steer to go through. We managed to shoo the steer out of the trailer, and he even went into the concrete room without a hesitation. I went after him to shut the inner door once he was through it.

Something startled the steer, and he abruptly turned back the way he came toward the open outer metal door and his freedom. I was pushed to the side against a wall as he made a mad dash back toward the light. The man assisting us tried to fend off the steer without closing the door, but it was impossible. The door slammed shut, trapping me and the crazed steer together in a cement box with no light, no exit. I shared a dark cell with a dangerous horned and hooved animal,

and unlike him, I was unarmed.

It was cold against the wall. The smell of dried blood and old meat mixed with my own sweat and the steer's dirty coat of hair. He sniffed the door, taking long inhalations of where he knew freedom had disappeared. I moved to a rounded corner, and flattened my body into it. My husband, in another room and out of view, called to the steer in hopes of luring him into the next room. But the door to that was small, and the chute in there had no exit for me. I tried to be quiet, breathe quiet.

The steer's nose continued down from the door to the wall, and then pressed against me in the corner. He pushed his wet nose into my stomach, and I turned my body around to protect my soft stomach as best I could. The steer, his mouth smelling like soured milk, pushed into my back, against my ribs. And then he dropped his head.

He lowered his head, and the first horn raked down my right shoulder blade. I muffled my pain, but I wanted to scream. The steer felt I was something soft and pliable in his concrete tomb and pressed his horns into me harder. Each rake of the horn down my ribs was like a slow slide of a blade across a xylophone. I struggled to get as high up the wall as I could to stop the pain of the points against my back. Somewhere in the background my husband was making noise further in the chute, desperately trying to call the steer off, but it was another world away from the beast and me.

I shifted to where I was nearly between his horns, but had to sacrifice a side of my body. He lowered his attack, and pommelled my right butt cheek. Finding something softer there, he continued to pound, ripping my pants with the tip of one horn and molesting the bare flesh he uncovered even harder. I muffled screams, I felt the tears stream down my face, I tried to push my body off his horn with my hand. This bent my arm back, hurting worse than his pounding my posterior so I sacrificed the cheek to put my arm across my lower back and save my kidney. He was beating my body, lifting me right off my feet with each thrust, but I had to stay on my feet. If I slipped, if I went under 800 lbs of angry hooves and horns, I would be lucky to end up with just a battered body. This was potential death. My heart raced, my breathing fast and short, as I took punch after punch. Nothing crossed my mind but survival.

The metal door to the outside world cracked open, shedding a beam of light into the dark vault. A strong arm dived in, and the cattle man's quick hand grabbed my arm. He pulled me through the metal door, and slammed his weight against it to lock the raging steer away from me. I collapsed, falling to my knees to avoid landing on my rear. My husband raced around and out the side entrance, grabbing me up in his arms. I tried to put weight on my right leg, faltering at first, and then slowly the numbness left it as it returned to function. I half-hovered over the passenger seat the long hour ride home, tattooed by a massive purple hematoma under the triangular tear in my pants. I silently gave thanks for my life. So thankful. Thanks giving.

“Living On a Prayer”

by Tahna Moore

“You never truly understand the value of a moment until it becomes a memory.” I didn’t realize the level of truth in that quote, until it became a reality for me. Truer words were never spoken as I stood at my father’s bedside, surrounded by my family, hand-in-hand with Betty, my dad’s former wife. My eyes were fixated on dad’s chest, rising and falling, as I’ve done so many times before when I’ve visited him in the hospital. But this time was different. This time, I am interrupted by the welcoming of a Pastor, who has been called in. I don’t want to notice him. My mind begins to drift off, sinking into the depths of denial at the acknowledgement to the purpose of his presence. Instead, I search for contentment, reminiscing on memories from the past – a happier time that seems like yesterday.

“I can’t do it, dad. I don’t want to kill the worm. Here, you do it,” I said, as I handed dad my fishing pole. Dad laughs and pats me on the head.

“Well, you’re definitely all girl,” he says as he baits the hook, reminding me that I was his last chance at having a boy to carry on his namesake. He has two older daughters by his first wife. I came along 18 years later, another girl, by his second marriage. Truth is, I hated fishing, but I never told my dad that. I knew how much he wanted a boy to take fishing with him and do boy things with, so I went along with it. I just wanted to spend time with him, and if it meant fishing, then I was ok with it. I was just content to see him enjoying time with me and happy to see him sober for a change.

It was the summer of ’87, I was 9 years old. My mom and dad had been divorced for about two years. Shortly after, dad moved to Connersville, Indiana, about a half hour from Richmond. He had picked me up to spend his weekend with me and my step-mom Betty, at the Doc-O-Lake camp grounds in Connersville. Betty seemed to have a way with him, unlike my mom or his first wife. He bullied them. But not with Betty, she had a strong presence about her. It was clear that she wasn’t going to take any shit from him. I felt secure when I was with her and dad because she was the only one who would stand up to dad and he listened to her. He respected her. She brought out a side of dad I had never seen before, a nurturing side of him. She encouraged him and supported him. He wanted to be a better man when he was around her. It was nice seeing him that way—happy. He tried, but just like all his other relationships, she too, would end up, at best, second place to his drinking.

Dad was an alcoholic his entire life. When he was sober, he was the kindest, most thoughtful man one could ever meet. My sister told me that they once lived next door to a family and the man had recently lost his job. He had a wife and two small children to support. So every week when dad would go to the grocery store, he would buy extra groceries and leave them on the neighbor’s front porch until the neighbor found a job.

“I can’t stand the thought of little babies ov’r there going without food while I

am coming home to a hot meal every night,” he’d say.

“He did that for about 2 months. I don’t know if that man ever figured out that it was dad who was doing that or not,” my sister said. But when he was drunk, he was cruel, mean, even violent. I can’t tell you how many 2 a.m. phone calls my mom received from dad, calling from the jail or the hospital because he got into a bar fight over a card game. Dad had some wild hobbies when he was younger. In addition to fishing, he liked to drink, gamble, and fight.

He finally decided to quit smoking by the time he was about 40. He burned the tips of his fingers when he was lighting a Winston cigarette one day. He got mad and promised to never smoke another cigarette. I was there when it happened, but I didn’t believe him. I even laughed when he said it. But he was a stubborn man; he never did pick up another cigarette. My sisters and I held our breaths, waiting for him to make the same stubborn decision about drinking. Unfortunately, we would’ve turned blue in the face before that day ever came. Drinking had taken its toll on his life. I don’t think any of us realized just how strong that hold was, not even him.

Alcoholism was beginning to take its toll on dad. The physical signs had reared their ugly marks on dad’s health; his deteriorating condition was one thing he couldn’t deny. After marrying and divorcing his last wife, Betty, three times, she finally gave up on their marriage for good in 1999, when she asked dad to choose between drinking or her and dad reached for another bottle. But she always asked us about him and would occasionally call and check on him, bring food by for him, or show up at the hospital when she would hear about it.

“I love your daddy. But I just can’t live with him and watch him destroy himself with that drinking” She would say.

It’s the fall of 2005, the phone rings. It’s my sister, Eva, who also lives in Richmond. She tells me that dad has had a heart attack and is in ICU in Connersville Hospital. Her voice is rushed and worried. I could feel my heart rate go up. I start praying, out loud, in the car, while my sister holds my hand and rushes towards Connersville.

Eva and I walk into dad’s room in ICU where monitors, tubes, and wires are spiraling from dad’s body, leaving him looking like a spider of some sort. I walk up to dad and touch his shoulder, my sister and I pray for God’s strength to withstand dad’s condition. He wakes up shortly after, smiles, and says hello. I reply, trying to lighten the situation.

“Hey Spiderman, how are you feeling?”

“I’ve seen better days,” he smiles and continues, “I’m a tough man, but I have to admit, I was scared. I don’t ever want to have to go through that again. If I’m ever in a position where this ol’ heart of mine quits ticking, please don’t let me lay there and suffer. I don’t want to be put on life support or none of that, just let me go.”

“Don’t talk like that, dad. You still have a lot of years left yet. I don’t wanna hear you talking like that” I say.

The mood lightens; dad starts engaging in conversation with us, asking us how

the grandkids are doing. We fill him in on small updates of our lives and ask about his. He looks at me and smiles and says, “Honey, I want you to know that I am so proud of you for going to school and getting your education like you have done.”

“Thanks dad, that means a lot to hear you say that.” I replied, fighting back the tears because I sensed the animosity from my other sister, Bonnie, who was also there. Bonnie also lives in Connorsville, so she was there before me and my sister arrived. Minutes later, Bonnie chimes in, “Oh here we go, Tahna’s the smart one, Tahna has her education, blah – blah – blah!”

“Do you hear Peacock over there? My goodness, she’s something else,” he replies with his southern Kentucky accent. Dad had a way of keeping us in line by coming up with these clever nicknames to describe our bad behavior.

Dad ended up having to have open-heart surgery that time, the doctors told us because of his age and the other factoring conditions of his health, he may not make it. The doctors had previously put a stent in, by running it up his leg, prior to this surgery. In addition to his heart problems he also had cirrhosis, emphysema, and arthritis. We prayed for dad to make a full recovery. The doctors were surprised at the way he was sitting up in the bed, laughing and joking with us after surgery. But the doctors didn’t know dad the way we do. He’s a fighter, he pulled through. I think the entire decade of dad’s 60’s and my 20’s were spent on one hospital stay after another. I am not pleased to admit, that I know the Fayette memorial emergency waiting room area and ICU unit like the back of my hand. I went to visit dad a couple weeks later at his house. We started talking about country music. He asks me and my sisters if we’ve heard his favorite country singer, George Jones’ newest song called “Choices.”

“That’s my favorite song by him. I want you girls to hear it,” he said. Dad played the song and we listen to the lyrics:

“I’ve had choice...Since the day that I was born.
There were voices that told me right from wrong
If I had listened, No, I wouldn’t be here today,
Living and dying with the choices I made
I was tempted, by an early age I found I liked drinkin’
Oh, and I never turned it down.
There were loved ones, but I turned them all away
Now I’m living and dying with the choices I made
I guess I’m payin’...For the things that I have done
If I could go back...Oh, Lord knows I’d run
But I’m still losin’...This game of life I play
Living and dying...With the choices I made”

“Hey now pops, quit crying before you make me cry too” I tell him.

He smiles and reaches for his handkerchief, tucking into the back pocket of his blue jeans. Clearing his throat, he begins to speak.

“I want you three girls to know that I love all three of you girls so much.

I would lay down my life for each of you. You girls mean the world to me. I'm getting older now and we ain't promised tomorrow, so I want you to know these things while I'm able to tell you. I am sorry for all the bad things I've done when you girls were young. I made a lot of mistakes in my life that I'm not proud of. Sometimes I was mean to you girls and your mothers'. My dad was mean and I had it rough growing up, so I didn't know any different then; I just did the best I could. I know that's no excuse. But I know better now, and I want to apologize for the things I did wrong, from the bottom of my heart, I am truly sorry."

Each of us get up, walk over and hug dad around his neck.

"We forgive you and we love you," we all say.

The next five years would consist of dad falling or passing out and being escorted to the emergency room, due to what we believe was a series of mini-strokes. Dementia began to set in, but dad refused to give up his independence. On August of 2012, the phone rings. It's dad.

"Hey dad, how are you?" I ask.

"I'm not doing too well honey, I've decided I'm going to sell my house and move in with Mandy." Mandy is my niece—Bonnie's daughter, who also lives in Connersville. "This ol' body of mine is breakin' down on me, honey. I don't have much longer... I can feel it. And to be quite honest, since Bob died, I don't wanna live any more anyway." he tells me casually. I feel the lump building in my throat. He's never been so forward about this before.

Before, he'd just smile and say, "Guess it just wasn't my time to go." I try to disguise the emotion in my voice but it's no use. My voice shakes as I speak, "Don't say that Dad! Quit talking like that! You have a lot of years left yet dad. You're a fighter, you're tough! You always taught me to fight. Don't talk like this, dad." I say with frustration.

"I'm 75 years old, honey, and I'm in constant pain. No one lives forever."

"Well dad, I worried about you all the time when you were living alone. I'm glad you are going to move in with family members that can take care of you but you know me and Mandy and Bonnie haven't been getting along these past few years. I'm not welcome at her house so I probably won't get to see you much, but I want you to know..." My voice starts to shake, tears fill my eyes, I regain control of myself and continue, "I want you to know that I love you dad and I'm praying for you all the time. I'm going to miss not seeing you as much but it isn't because I don't want to..."

"Listen, I don't like you girls fighting, you're sisters—blood. Me and my brother Bob damn near killed each other several times, but we always worked things out. My brother was my best friends, and now he's gone. I don't want to die knowing that two of my daughters ain't speaking to each other. It would break my heart." He says to me.

"Well dad, I do love her...from afar," I reply. We say our goodbyes and hang up the phone. The next few months dad is in and out of the hospital every other month and I rush to see him every time I get word that he is in the hospital, know-

-ing that those are the only visits I will have with him now.

On Thursday, February 21, 2013, my sister Eva calls me and tells me that dad is in ICU at the hospital again and that it's serious. The following Saturday I make my way to Connersville to see dad. I enter the room. He is sleeping. He looks pale, fragile and weak. I grab his hand and pray for him while he is sleeping, asking God to remove this sickness, to restore his health, and strengthen his body. He struggles to open his eyes and say "hi". His mouth is dry; his voice is too weak to speak.

He whispers: "Well...that's my baby girl, Tahna."

"Yes dad. It's me." I smile at him. He points to some sponges, his way of asking me to wet his mouth with the sponges.

"Thank you, honey." I smile back at him.

"No problem dad." Then he nods his head, asking me to remove the restraints on his arms. I pull the covers back and notice the restraints. It was tough seeing him this way. Compassion and sympathy overwhelmed me. I fought back the tears and responded, "I know that has to be uncomfortable, dad, but you can't take them off yet because you have to keep the feeding tube in. But the nurse told us that if you're feeling better tomorrow and able to eat on your own. They'll be able to take the feeding tube out and take the restraints off. So you just hang in there and get some rest, so you'll feel better tomorrow, okay?"

Disappointment runs across his face, but he knows he is too weak to fight with me, he nods in agreement. I rub his forehead while he falls asleep. I kiss him on the forehead and whisper. "Love you dad" in his ear before leaving, hoping not to disturb him. He awakens as I am leaving and I hear him strain to whisper.

"I—love—you."

I turn around and smile. "I know you do dad. Just get some rest, okay?" He nods and drifts off back to sleep.

On March 13, 2013, 9:29 a.m., the phone rings. It's Eva. She tells me that dad stopped breathing and that his heart stopped. She says he is being rushed to the hospital by ambulance. Eva and I rush into the Fayette Memorial emergency waiting room. Eva greets Bonnie and Mandy while I rush up to hug Betty. I ask Betty about dad's condition. She tells his heart has stopped 5 times and that they're trying to stabilize him now. She sinks her face into my shoulder and starts to cry. I start crying too.

"No. No. No. He's gonna pull through! These doctors, they don't know..." I tell her. The doctor comes out from the emergency room and tells us that they have stabilized him, but they believe he suffered a major stroke and that it is unlikely that he will survive. The doctor claims that if he were to pull through, he would likely be fully-paralyzed or brain dead. Because dad's wishes were not to be revived, the doctor urges us to visit him and say our goodbyes now.

We rush back to see him, I am the first one to go in the room.

"Oh dad, dad..." I cover my mouth, shocked at the frail, weak body laying before me, with a machine hooked to him, breathing for him. I rub his hand. It is stiff and cold.

"Hi dad, we're all here and we love you," I say. Mandy's husband tickles his foot, a game we have always played with him when he's in the hospital to ensure he responds. But this time, he doesn't. I begin sobbing. I rubbed the top of his bald head, kissed his forehead.

"I love you, dad." He doesn't move. I can't stand seeing him this way. His eyes are half open, but he doesn't blink.

"We're all here for you dad, and we're going to stay right here with you," Eva says.

The nurse interrupts us, "Well, I can tell you one thing; since all of you have been in here talking to him, his heart rate has gone up and is more stable than it has been since he's been here."

We sit there quietly, until the doctor enters and asks to speak to me and my two sisters. This can't be good, I think to myself. He takes us into a vacant room and asks us whether or not we want to keep him on life support. The doctor tells us he can either leave him on there until his heart stops again, in which case they would not try to resuscitate him, or we can take the breathing machine off now and let him go naturally.

"I can't handle this. I just can't! What if he's just paralyzed and he can hear everything around him but he just can't respond to us. I can't handle this. It's too much! It's just too much!" I run outside to smoke a cigarette and try to compose myself. This can't be real. This can't really be happening, I think to myself. Bonnie discusses dad's condition with us and asks us how we feel about taking him off of the life support, since it is what dad said he wanted. Eva and Bonnie discuss taking him off the machine while I sit there numb and silent. I don't want to be a part of the decision. "Who am I to play God?" I think to myself.

Bonnie looks at me.

"Tahna, we're going to honor dad's wishes and take him off the ventilator."

"It's your decision. I'm not making that decision. I don't want to live with the blood on my hands." I mumble, as I walk away. The doctor lets us say goodbye, then he enters the room.

"Everybody ready?" he asks us.

"No. I can't do this! I can't be in here! Excuse me." I blurt out, as I make my way through the crowded room to the hallway. I couldn't be in there, witnessing it. I felt like it symbolized us giving up on him.

My sister, Eva, joins me as I stand outside the room. We hug each other and I can't stop crying. It's that deep sobbing, feel like you're going to throw up kind of crying. I can't seem to bring myself to face the dreaded reality that is occurring on the other side of that curtain.

The doctor exits. "12:15p.m." he solemnly tells the nurses at the desk. To him, dad is just another day at the job, another patient, but to us he is our father!

"Why did he just say that? What does he mean by that? What does he mean, Eva?!" She won't answer me. Instead, she just hugs me and we cry and cry, trying to conjure up enough strength to reenter the room.

“I’m scared, Eva. I know that I have to do this. I have to go back in there, but I don’t know if I can! “What if he struggles when he goes? We’ll remember that for the rest of our lives.”

“C’mon, we got to do this. We have to be strong for dad and let him know we’re going to be here for him. We have to see this through.” She says.

We go back in and gather around his bed. His breaths are deep and long. Our eyes are fixated on his chest, knowing it could be any minute now. The pastor enters and asks for us to gather hands and say a prayer. Betty grabs my hand. The pastor begins to pray.

I don’t remember much, but I do know that the pastor asked God to allow us to turn these tough decisions over to Him and asked God to call dad when it is his time to come home and asked the Lord to welcome him and allow dad to leave without fear or guilt but to leave feeling comfort and peace. We all begin to say “Ame—” when we are interrupted by a long beep from the machine.

“What was that? What was it?” I ask Betty as I look up, I see dad’s chest fall. I wait, but it doesn’t rise again.

“He’s gone, honey.” Betty replies, crying into my shoulder. I grab her tight and sob. The room is replaced with the sounds of weeping and bawling at the response of the loss of dad’s presence. I feel the loss immediately. I wait for everyone to leave. I approach the body that was once so full of laughter and strength, now vacant. I kiss dad’s forehead and run my hand down his eyelids.

“Rest in Heaven dad. I love you” I leave the room in a daze. And the loss settles in, carving a hole deep within my soul. I feel orphaned.

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Poetry

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Kathryn Yohey
Stephanie Beckner
John Mahaffey
Christopher Knox
Christopher Rodgers
Tahna Moore
Shore Crawford
Hannah Clark
S. Kierstan Barbre
Jerome Lamb

“Big Brother”
by Kathryn Yohey

The crimson first movement
Of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony
On a choking piano, pounds in my mind.
A rancid eye focuses itself on me.

The braided red veins unveil focus.
Its sticky iris clings to my sight.
Screaming, the pupil warns,
“Blinking prohibited.”

My desert eyes blink in quench for thirst.

Expecting tabasco sirens,
The salty eye looks away.
The itchy music fades
And all is but a transparent whisper.

The eye looks back at me in a teary flash.
In the crashing cascade of a waterfall,
I see a green reflection:
A boy teaching his little sister to ride her bike.

The squatting eye notices my deceiving smile
And breaks its own commandment.
Its scorching blink storms into my whole body.

Its oatmeal eyelid rises
As I notice a laughing crow
Land, leave an imprint, and then fly away.
The eye's pinched glance now sees right through me.

The eroding iris takes one final reflection of aromatic light.
Its brown beauty and echoing charm
Make me beg it not to leave me.

Hastily, she closes her eyelid,
Vanishes,
And leaves me in the bitter,
White abyss.

“Lullaby Lost”
by Stephanie Beckner

No one has been closer to my heart than you
Nine months inside my belly
A lifetime inside my heart, my soul
My fight to bring you into life
Blood, sweat, tears and joy
No greater accomplishment
Soon the patter of little one's feet
A lullaby to a momma's soul
Love every morning and night
Time passes too quickly
How you have changed and grown
Moving farther away from heart and home
Many years later gone in a blink
My baby, now gone away and grown
Where did time go?
The music of your footsteps gone
Empty arms long to rock your warmth
My soul's lullaby lost.

"Seasons"

by John Mahaffey

Cheerful bells in the air, the sound of laughter.
 With light step and wide smile, dances a boy.
 "This is life, to love and laugh and learn," whispers an unnoticed voice.
 Bright sun and soft grass, his face caressed by wind.
 Happiness in motion, in his heart a childish song.
 Dangling by a strand, but held secure to the branch, he is a leaf.

Stepping out, standing up, a sheltered life he leaves.
 Faces come, smiling toothy smiles, the air is filled with laughter.
 With joy he explores, and learns the tune of this world's song.
 Wide eyed he meets the world, much beguiles the boy.
 Comes the weather, come hard times, the leaf dancing in the wind.
 Much escapes his understanding, cruelty in their voices.

Jeering. Taunting. Mocking. A new tone in the voices.
 Scratching. Clawing. Pulling. Their heat withers the leaf.
 Clinging to the branch. Enduring the eroding wind.
 Tears not of joy. Now, to hide the pain he laughs.
 "Stay strong, hold tight, there is more to life than this, boy."
 The wind is harsh, the voices cruel. Minor notes fill the song.
 He leaves the voices. A solo now, alone he sings.
 Faces pass him by, he turns from them, finding solace in his own voice.
 He is changed. Less than a man, more than a boy.
 Green flees, reds and yellows color the leaf.
 Tighter he clings, louder he sings, he can't drown out the laughter.
 His strength fails, plucked from the branch by their wind.
 Spinning, twirling, no longer dancing. Screaming against the wind.
 He has nothing, no place to call home. Terror fills his song.
 Fallen to the ground. No longer moving. Tears drowning laughter.
 "This is not the end, there is more to life," whispers a voice.
 He clings to the voice, and follows it as it tells him this place to leave.
 The old path abandoned, something new is born, dead is the boy.

He walks a new path. Now a man, searching for the boy.
 Standing in his own strength, he smiles into the once harsh wind.
 The end of the path. His own to forge, known ground he leaves.
 The faces he meets, the voices he greets, he joins in their song.

“This is life, to love and laugh and learn,” whispers a well-known voice.
“There is much to do, there is much to see,” the man laughs.

Boys are still leafs, to the branches they still cling.
The man is now the voice, his song is on the wind.
“Love and laugh and learn, that is the meaning of life.”

“Procrastinator’s Lament”
by Christopher Knox

Finally it’s Friday, long awaited.
To the side, responsibilities fall.
Stress of the week’s burdens are abated.
And there’s not a care is given at all.

Saturday’s time is spent with a good friend
And a small adventure is to be had
But as all other good things, it will end
Our joyous friendship is left a bit sad.

As if summoned by church on Sunday morn,
These put-off demons rear their ugly head,
Within my chest, a strong panic is born
The weight of my burdens leave me near dead.

Mania fades to tired, weary pain
Lesson not learned and will be felt again

“Sleeping in Sleeping Bags”

by Christopher Rodgers

Tie: 2014 Prize for Poetry

I've lit more campfires than I can count.

(I've never lit one with you)

I've climbed trees; dead, rotting trees.

Skipping rocks and laying out creek

soaked socks to dry, but I've never waded in

the water with (you) my hands in the air,

hooting and hollering at the stars.

I wish each day had been ours.

(as well)

(light candles and stare at the flames)

Black dots blot out your face.

“Liar”

by Tahna Moore

First Runner-Up, 2014 Prize for Poetry

How do you form your mouth to speak,
Such fabricated words so effortlessly?
Through the cracks, the illusions leak
Like the cheap cologne you spray so freely

Self-serving of your own desires, you are
Put on that smile of dark deceit
Meet up with her at the local bar
Embrace her with your charming greet

She hangs on your every word
Carefully crafted, in your eyes
She won't notice the truth's been blurred
False phrases hide behind your disguise

The truth burns, like the flame in a fire
Such a phony little liar

"Love Affair with Rain"
by Shore Crawford

Drops fall
They fall

Fall

Fall

Fall

Down the window as I
Trace their routes with my small finger
The cold surface sends chills down
My body as I stand there
Half naked in front of my window
Wishing someone would see
Could stumble upon me in this
state and tear me from here
And to somewhere special,

The bedroom
Pick me up, and take me there

Choose where to go

I walk outside to feel
your embrace
Your cold hands wrap
Around me
And it soothes me
To calm, I can only feel
With you, my dear

Dear, don't leave me
For another place
Another with more calling
To leave me until another comes
Comes, and then leaves again
Stay for a while my dear,
For I'm calm and in need

“Fade”

by Hannah Clark

The shirt is tangled around the pillow
My nose buried deep in the fabric
It still smells like him
The scent of his cologne
Woven into the threads
My mind casts back
To the cocky tilt of his head
The laughter in his eyes
As he teased
“That all you got?”
But he was comfort
Strong arms that wrapped around me like steel
Holding me and embracing me
Comforting and calming
He was strength and mystery
He was pride and envy
And then there is blood
Everywhere, blood
A body lying on the cement
Broken like a child’s toy
There are screams
The wail of an ambulance
The searing pain of loss
And I burrow into his scent
Take it in and memorize it
Terrified to lose it
Even though I know
Just like this precious, precious memory
The smell of him will slowly fade away

“Wrought by Red”
by S. Kierstan Barbre
Tie: 2014 Prize for Poetry

When summer winds go sweeping down these plains,
curled clay cries for rain.
The earth is whittled down
in this forgotten sunset of Dis.

Curled clay cries for rain
as terra cotta goes wild.
In this forgotten sunset of Dis,
the land is wrought by red.

As terra cotta goes wild,
the red silt leaves its signature.
The land is wrought by red;
nothing is left untouched.

The red silt leaves its signature;
the earth is whittled down.
Nothing is left untouched
when summer winds go sweeping down these plains.

“The Garden”
by Jerome Lamb

How does the garden grow
The garden shows how beauty can be
We do not want our garden be overgrow
So that they can see all the beauty that it would be

If the garden flows where does it go
It takes that water the Mother Nature gives it
To make it grow the garden will forgo
The stands of time it will define the habit

So we must let it do its own thing
That way we will have the thing that we like to each
Then not a thing will go to waste and anything
Things like that are not easy to reach

For you see that is the way that it can end
So with this can it can be the way this descends

T.

Tributaries

Art

Featuring work by:

Kaly Reichter
Jody Kinnerman
Jami Dingess
Candy Hocter



Lauren. Kaly Reichter, 2013. Digital Photography.



Untitled. Jody Kinnerman, 2013. Ceramic sculpture. 2014 Prize for Art.

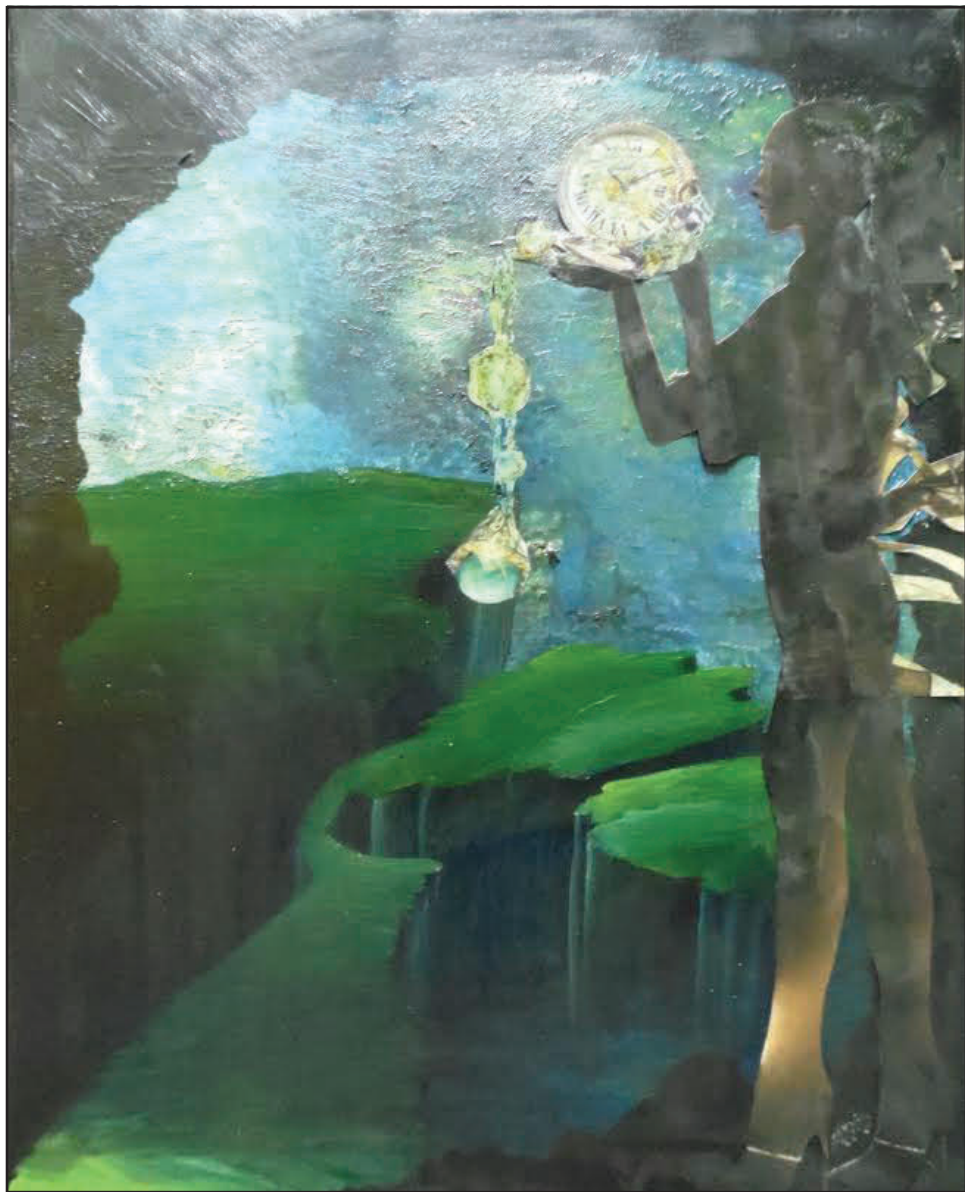


Figure 2: *As Time Passes*. Jami Dingess, 2013. Collage and oil on canvas.



Self Portrait, Horned. Candy Hocter, 2013. Clay, acrylic spray paint, and lace.

T.

Tributaries

Prize Winner Biographies

2014 Prize Winner Biographies

Fiction

First Place: “Salty” by Richard Goss.

Richard Goss is a native of Richmond, Indiana and a 1984 graduate of Richmond Senior High School. Rick is nontraditional student majoring in English and minoring in Philosophy. He came to IU East after a stint in the US Navy and a career in Information Technology. Rick lives with his wife and best friend of 27 years, Diane. They enjoy their dogs, astronomy, reading, and playing with their grandchildren. Rick enjoys the writing of Ernest Hemingway for its simple elegance and ability to say so much in so few words, John Steinbeck for his characters, and Kurt Vonnegut for his soul.

Creative Nonfiction

First Place: “Bully” by Jenn Sroka

Jenn Sroka is a Senior completing a BA in Professional and Technical Writing virtually at IU East. She has recently returned to her home state of Florida after 14 years of living in Canada. Her contributions come from time spent in her husband's Thoroughbred racing stable and their small farm in Ontario. Jenn is a full-time Database Administrator and Technical Trainer. Jenn and her husband share 5 acres with 4 dogs, 3 horses, and a territorial property cat that graciously allows them all to live there. She loves reading, trail riding, and adventures with friends and family. She supports responsible racehorse retirement, and in her free time, Jenn enjoys assisting the non-profit organization, Second Start Thoroughbreds, with their racehorse listing and placement efforts.

Poetry

Tied for First Place: “Wrought by Red” by S. Kierstan Barbre
and “Sleeping in Sleeping Bags” by Chris Rodgers

S. Kierstan Barbre was born and raised in the central plains of Oklahoma.

A graduate of Oklahoma State University, she has served in a variety of administrative and service roles. A transplant to Richmond, Indiana, she currently works with a non-profit organization advocating for students within the public school system. In addition to work and devotion to family, she enjoys playing music, cooking, working with stained glass, and refurbishing antiques. Kierstan has an abiding love and appreciation for native Oklahoma, its people and history. A fondness for Oklahoma’s characteristically ruddy red soil, with its unique relationship to the state’s history, was the inspiration for this poem. This is her first published work.

Chris Rodgers is a student at Indiana University East.

Art

First Place: “Untitled” by Jody Kinnerman

Jody Kinnerman was a Fine Arts Major at Buffalo State University in the mid 90’s but joined the military after the second year. After leaving the military in 2006, Jody embarked on a B.S. in Biology program, but just before completing it, enrolled in a sculpting class. This was what Jody had been searching for. Jody won first place in the 2013 Student Showcase, then went on to win a Top Ten Award in the 2013 White Water Valley Annual Art Competition. Jody has recently been accepted the M.F.A. program at Herron School of Art and Design.



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