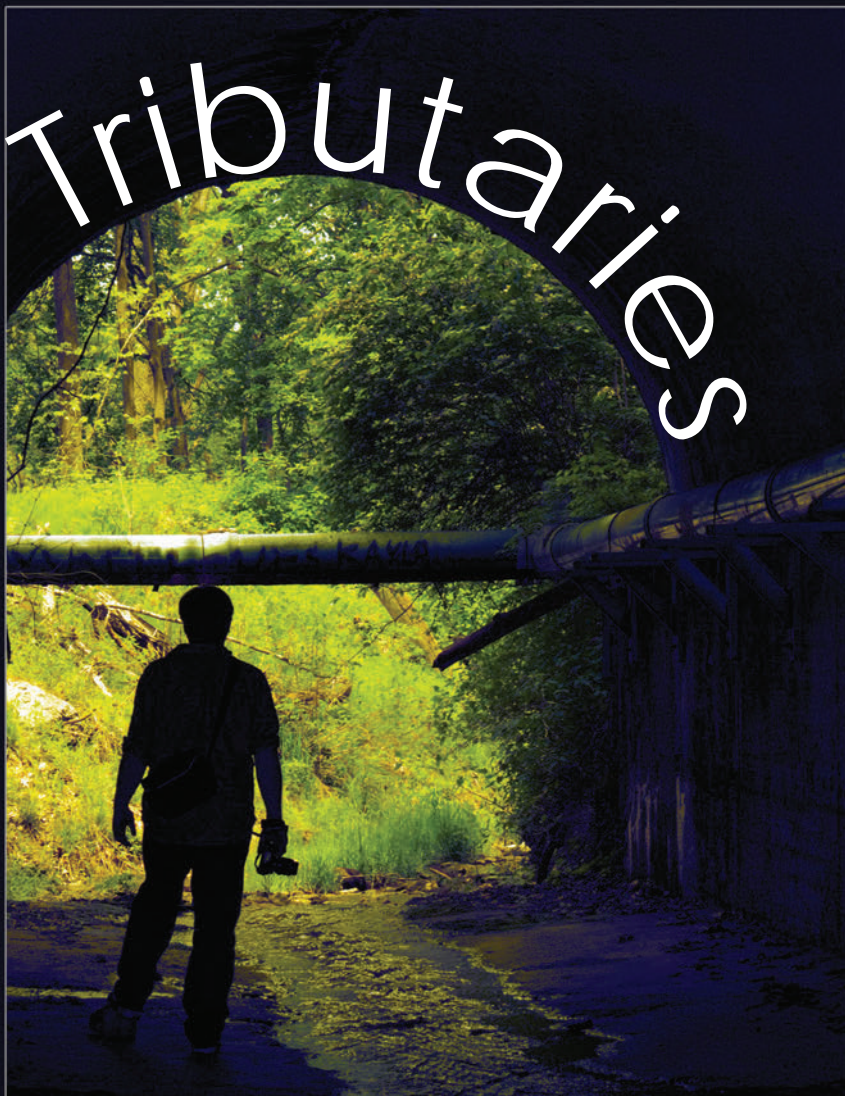


2011-2012



a journal of student writing

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### A Word from the Editors:

This year was a trying year for Tributaries' Selection Committee. For two long days our committee poured over the submissions. Choosing which would make it into Tributaries was hard for all involved due to the record breaking number of submissions. We were faced with the realization that we could accept less than half of the pieces submitted. As such, there was much deliberation bordering on anguish as to which pieces would make it and which would not. Yet, we believe the selected pieces represent the best that Indiana University East has to offer.

As mentioned, this year was a record year for *Tributaries*, not only in the number of submissions, but also in the quality of the submitted work. It's a record we hope to break year after year. But we can't do it without you. We are always in need of more contributors and editors! I would like to take this chance to encourage all of you to join the IU East Writer's Club and help us make the '11-'12 issue of *Tributaries* even better!

Without further ado, Indiana University and the IUE Writer's Club is proud to present the 2010 issue of Tributaries!

Z.A. Bishop  
IUE Writer's Club President  
Tributaries Chief Editor

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IUE Writer's Club Vice President  
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# Part 1: Creative Non-Fiction

"Write from the soul, not from some notion what you think the marketplace wants. The market is fickle; the soul is eternal."

- Jeffrey A. Carver

# The Yellow Jacket

Jessica Sorenson

I don't remember the exact day that it happened. Or the words my mother and I exchanged at the terminal as we said our good-byes, tears in her eyes, and I imagine a lost, glazed look in mine. It had been coming for awhile. My out of control life had finally taken a toll on my mother. She was sending me to Las Vegas to live with my Aunt so I could start over. The only thing I can remember specifically about that day was what I'd been wearing as I stepped onto the plane. Torn blue jeans, a white t-shirt, and a hooded banana yellow rain jacket, the red, white, and blue Tommy Hilfiger symbol stitched on the top corner, and a single pocket on the bottom.

I'd borrowed the jacket from a friend of mine who collected Tommy Hilfiger clothing like someone collects stamps or dolls. I wore the jacket frequently; when it rained, when it snowed, even when the sun was shining. It was big and baggy and in no way fit me at all. But still I wore it, all the time, using the front pocket as a hiding place, where I'd keep my secrets hidden.

After I'd borrowed the jacket, I started going on long walks. I'd stuff my cigarettes in the front pocket, the red stripe on the pack visible through the paper thin material. I'd have to put my hand inside and grasp a hold of it as I told my mother I was leaving. I'd head down the road, and when I hit the corner, I'd turn right, and weave up the dusty trails of the mountains, until I was far enough into the trees that none of the log cabins, old brick houses, or cars driving by could be seen. There was a large grey rock, that I liked to sit on, and I'd reach into the pocket of the

jacket, pull out the cigarettes and smoke and think about nothing in particular.

I'd been wearing the jacket the first time I cut class. It had been snowing as a group of my friends and I headed far back into the mountains. The roads were slick and icy, and the four-wheel drive in my Jeep wasn't working. I'd ended up sliding off of the road, hitting an abrupt stop right before ending up in the shallow, but swift river that curved along the side. The jacket had kept me warm as I trudged through the ankle deep snow back to town where I found someone with a truck to tow me out.

The first bonfire party I'd went to, I had the jacket on with the hood pulled up on the top of my head. The air had been chilly, and the ground frozen. But after the fire was lit and brightly blazing, I grew hot, and tied the jacket around my waist. And that's where it stayed the whole night, as I moved back and forth through the trail of smoke coming from the roaring flames. After it had ended, the smell of campfire lingered in the fabric for awhile, eventually fading when I washed it and then returning when I attended another bonfire.

I chose to wear the jacket to the airport that day because in a strange way it was comforting to me. I wasn't quite ready to get rid of my old life, but my mother had forced me to leave my friends, and my old life far behind in the Wyoming mountains. It was mid-February and the average temperature in Vegas stayed between sixty and seventy degrees. For someone who'd been raised in a place where zero below was common thing, the drastic change felt exceedingly

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hot—not jacket weather. But even after I arrived, and sweat trailed down my back as I dragged my suitcase behind me, I refused to take it off.

I continued to stubbornly wear it, despite the weather. Sometimes with the hood on, sometimes without, always roasting in the scorching heat. I would tell my Aunt I was taking a walk, but in the flat desert land there was nowhere to go and hide, and smoke and think. And when I'd slide my hand into the pocket, the emptiness felt like an enormous void.

With my friends gone, and the days of sweating, shaking, and anger finally passed by, my mind started to clear. My aunt enrolled me in school where I made new friends with a different view on life than my old friends. And, the more I was around them, the more my mind cleared. I found a new view on life. The need to take the walks dwindled. And the need wear the jacket decreased along with it. One day, I loaned it to one of my new friends, who wore it occasionally, never putting anything in the pocket but a tube of pink lipstick. It could be seen through the pocket, but didn't need a hand wrapped around it to keep it hidden.

A few months later, I was boxing up some things that had belonged to my old friends; clothes, CD's, a pair of sunglasses, nothing too important. I was sending them home, while I stayed behind in my new life. As I dug around through the dresser, I came across the banana yellow jacket, shoved in the far back corner, buried underneath a pile of clothes. It was balled up, and wrinkly, and when I pulled it out and shook it, I could've have sworn

it smelled like campfire. I held it for awhile, sitting on my bed, thinking about all the times I'd worn it throughout my old life that seemed like such a long time ago. I stuck my hand in the pocket, checking to make sure nothing was hidden inside, and realized that the emptiness no longer felt like a void, but just like an empty pocket.

I folded the jacket up, stuffed it into the box with the rest of the things, and secured the top of it with a strip of tape. I wrote the address of my old home across the top with a permanent marker. Then my Aunt drove me down to the post office, where I handed to the woman behind the counter, to send it away.



## What I Want to Be

Lori Stephens

Standing in the kitchen at home, I meticulously place the lasagna layers in the clear baking dish. Noodles first, then cheese mixture, more noodles, and then sauce, and finally, extra mozzarella on top. I open the oven and carefully set the dish on the rack. I set the timer to exactly one hour and head to my computer.

With my hands on the keyboard, I breeze through my IU East application. I easily glide through the personal information without a second look. Surprisingly, I am not asked for my mother's maiden name or blood type. The room is silent as I reach the armed forces question.

Staring at my 22 inch monitor without batting an eyelash I smile. I remember walking down the long hallway of my high school, ending at the counselor's office where the recruiter waited to talk to me. I sat at the end of the table in the hospital-white room with cinderblock walls, listening as this man—with a horrible buzz-cut—explained my future. Thoughts crept into my head of why he knew my future, yet I didn't. I thanked him and shook his hand, grabbed the doorknob and pushed my way out, never looking back. A month after graduating high school I met my future husband, Justin, at the local supermarket where we both worked. Had I joined the Peace Corps, who knows where I would've been the day we met.

Justin comes up behind me and wraps his arms around my shoulders. "Are you stuck? Do you need some help?"

"No," I smile, "I think I got it." I type N/A and gladly move on.

Sitting at my desk I type and tab though each question easily. This decision

to start my college career is an easy one. With bills piled high on the kitchen table, my husband and I realize that we need a change. It is time to make a decision and start a career. Being a stay at home Mom is definitely rewarding, but it doesn't make the money we need to support our family and build our future.

I have changed so much since high school. Just ten years ago my life revolved only around me. Now, I have a wonderful husband and two great kids—David, who is 8, and Peyton, who is 4. My life is now in an entirely different place than I expected it would be at 28 years old. Even at sixteen I expected my future to be a fancy apartment in New York, a single life filled with exciting hustle and bustle, and a glamorous design career. Who knew I would be married at 19 years-old and have a baby at 20 and then another at 24? Not me, that's for sure.

Over the past few years I have become increasingly aware of our family finances. There have been many nights of researching options of careers that are stable and that I could do. I have spent lots of lonely hours in our dark living room working by the light of a small lamp and the computer screen, jotting down notes, stats, options, and ideas of career choices that would support my family and survive the harsh economy. Justin has worked countless hours of overtime just to make ends meet so that I can stay home with our boys. He deserves better. When I finish school, he might be able to get his bachelor's degree and become a teacher.

As I click away at the keys I finally reach the question I have been dreading:



Intended major. I adjust myself uneasily in my black leather (well, faux leather actually) office chair. I skip the question for now.

No, I am not a felon, check. I have a few extracurricular activities that I list: National Honor Society, Senior Class Vice President, Art Club President, and Drama Club. Neither parent went to college, check. I squeeze the bridge of my nose underneath my wire-rimmed glasses...Intended major.

I stare blankly at the screen and watch the flashing text line—screaming at me to pick something, anything at all. I close my eyes and remember a simpler time in my life.

I sat in the middle of the shag-carpeted floor of our narrow, white trailer watching our big-box television set, which was tuned in to Commander Mark. Then and there I was sure that I was destined to become an artist. I grabbed a marker and drew my name artistically on our dingy couch. LoRi, I wrote proudly. I stood back, admiring my work. Mom was cooking beans in the kitchen. I could smell cornbread baking in the oven. She came into the living room to check on me and eyed my masterpiece. I blamed my sister, but Mom didn't believe me. At the time I wasn't sure why. This graffiti was the first of many, although I eventually worked my way up to walls, random important papers, and tables.

It is funny looking back because now I know how my Mom felt. I grin and look over at my four-year-old son, Peyton. He sits on the living room floor coloring with the same crayons he wrote his name

with on his bedroom wall. At the time, he blamed his brother David. Biting his bottom lip he sits, focused on his current work of art—which he is creating on paper where he now realizes it should be.

As I watch him I think of how much better my children's futures will be if I can make it through college. Graduating would set a good example for them, yes, but it would also give us the money to pay for their education and give them more opportunities that I didn't have.

David comes up and gives me a hug. He has to bend his head down to lay it on my shoulder now. It seems like just a few days ago I swaddled him in the striped blanket at the hospital and cuddled with him as he drank his bottle. At just 20 years old, it was frightening to be a mother. Eight years later, here I am, filling out my first college application. David smiles and shows the large gap in his front teeth. I give him a kiss on his freckled forehead and he sits on the floor with Peyton to color.

I stare at the blinking line on the computer screen. It is begging to be moved. I laugh thinking of all the careers that I have wanted over the years including writer, ballerina, archaeologist, architect, and astronaut. Yet, I haven't been able to bring myself to start college for any one career path—which means I haven't accomplished anything that I wanted to do.

I sigh, thinking of my inability to make decisions. The smell of the lasagna lingers in the air and my stomach begins

to growl. Grabbing a cookie from Mom's old mushroom cookie jar I think back again.

I was in the kitchen at home; the smell of our electric burner heating up filled the room. Obviously something had scorched on it within the last few nights. I was not a very neat cook. I had to warm the burner because I tried using a mixer to blend very cold sticks of butter with sugar. It had not worked very well and the butter chunks just sat unmixed atop the brown and white sugar in Mom's favorite yellow mixing bowl. I tried using our hand mixer to blend, without any luck. So I poured the contents of the bowl into an old, worn-out saucepan. It worked wonders. The cookies were fantastic.

I brought the cookies to school to share with friends and classmates. Everyone loved them and I had multiple visits to my locker #507 that day. The hallway smelled like a bakery. A few lockers down from me a boy named Corey Edwards talked to me for the first time. I gave him a few cookies. After just a few bites he said they were the best cookies he had ever tasted. I felt I had finally found my calling...pastry chef! I promised Corey that I would bring him more cookies.

A few days later, Corey died in a horrible car accident. I brought his favorite cookies the day our school held a memorial service for him. Although the sun was bright, it was definitely a solemn day. I wasn't sure at that point about becoming a pastry chef, but I was sure glad that I still had the opportunity to make that choice.

My hands are still positioned on the keyboard. I know that this is one of the

biggest decisions that I have ever had to make. I realize that typing it in and submitting doesn't set my choices in stone; however, it is definitely a stressful choice. If I choose the wrong major I could be setting myself back a year or two. I am already going for five years. We need the money now. In ten years, David will be starting college, hopefully.

The list of careers that I have wanted goes through my head like a spreadsheet.

I type my choice: Accounting. I click to submit my application. I feel good about my choice. It seems that my wants and needs have changed over the years. I am a completely different individual today than twenty, ten, even five years ago. My choices affect more than just my life now. Life has brought me more than I could have ever imagined—the love of my family.

I shut down my computer and flip the light switch. I'm scared and excited at the same time; thinking of all the possibilities and opportunities coming up. I exhale, knowing that I chose a solid major that will support my family. Will it work out? I'm not sure. Switching majors might throw me off track, but I will get back on. I grab an ice-cold Coke and plop down on the couch to join to watch SpongeBob with my boys. Just as I recline and settle in my seat, the oven timer goes off. I sigh.



## Part 2: Fiction

"You must stay drunk on writing  
so reality cannot destroy you."  
– Ray Bradbury



## Chapter 1: Love Song of the Buzzards

Z. A. Bishop

A black cloud hung above the city. Unlike normal clouds, this cloud wasn't comprised of water droplets and particulate. This black cloud was comprised of beating wings, black feathers, and sharp beaks. This cloud did not nourish the land but scoured it. The cloud hovered over the city, but it was never still. A giant squat cyclone, the immense kettle of innumerable vultures slowly rotated. Sunlight filtered through the wings and feathers like light filtered through water.

Though the scavenging only ate dead flesh, Mason still hid from their eyes. Walking down what used to be a quaint street in a quiet neighborhood; he hid under awnings and clung to the walls of buildings. Buzzards had become accustomed to circling humans when they saw them. More often than not, straggling humans quickly became meals. Even the zombies had become accustomed to follow the flight of the birds. Though they hid from them in the day, through some undead instinct they learned buzzards sometimes meant food.

The hidden sun was descending upon St. Paul. Mason knew he needed to find a place to hole up for the night. When the buzzards roosted for the night, the dead came out. While resting under the shade of a ragged tree, Mason looked up to the cloud of carrion above him. He grew depressed. He trained himself to never look up. Not in town. The sight was too intimidating. Too biblical. Looking at the eaters of the dead, seeing their numbers swell and thrive on the death of his kind, he felt dead himself.

His gaze fell to the sidewalk. He

looked at his feet; feet that ached. Feet in tattered shoes. He was hungry. Tired. His spirits were low. He missed Mary. He left Mary four days ago to try to find food. Find water. Find something. Anything. Anything to give them hope. But all he found was a whole lot of nothing. Nothing he found would give them a reason to keep breathing. Nothing.

He heard something. A flutter of wings around the corner. His eyes darted up. From behind the building, a flock of pigeons took flight. He ducked into a nearby doorway. Craning his neck, he looked back. The grey lifeless form of a ghoul appeared, lumbering after the long gone birds. A depressed moan escaped its withered lips. The dead thing lumbered to a stop. Its arms fell to its sides as it watched its hope for warm flesh fly off into the dusk. Then the deadened senses of the zombie slowly became attune to the presence of another living creature. The undead creature turned its head towards Mason.

Shit, Mason thought as he snapped his head back. Gluing his back to the doorway of Twin City Luxury Living he steeled himself.

It was hard to hear over his heart beat, but Mason heard the living dead man hobbling toward him. He heard the plant one foot, then the long drag of the other. Plant. Drag... Mason saw the zombie's shadow bob on the sidewalk. It grew larger. Plant. Drag... Mason's hand fell to the machete hanging from his belt. Plant. Drag... He slid it out of the nylon sheath. Plant. Drag... Mason held his breath. He tensed his arm. Plant. Drag... He leapt



then swung. The undead creature crumbled to the ground.

Mason stood above the zombie clutching the machete with his white knuckled hand. The zombie's head was still attached by a chunk of skin and bone about an inch thick. Mason kicked the foot of the creature. Unresponsive. He had severed the spine. Good. He approached the snarling and snapping head. A sickening crunch echoed throughout the abandoned streets as he stomped the life out of it.

Shadows seeped and lengthened as he slid the blood coated blade of his machete into its sheath. Dragging his boot against the curb he scraped off the last clinging fragments of brain, hair, and skull from the sole of his shoe. He heard caws. Screeches grew larger as wings fluttered down toward him. Glancing up, Mason saw a kettle of vultures that had broken off from the main group. They had begun circling him and his kill. Vultures meant something had died. The undead occupants of St. Paul would take notice. He ran to the end of the block. Hiding behind the wall of the building, he looked back. Half a dozen vultures fell from the sky like demons. They began tearing apart the dead flesh with the veracity of sharks. He heard a rustle above him. Looking up he saw a buzzard perched atop the building. A second joined him. Then a third. He had to find shelter. Now!

As he ran, his gaze darted around his surroundings. A year ago, he would have known his exact location in the city out of simple instinct. These days were different. The city had changed. The vi-

brant life that filled the streets full of cafés, boutiques, and sundry shops were now replaced with the lifeless emptiness. Actually it was worse than empty. The eyes of death filled the vacuum life left behind.

Mason sprinted down the skeletal ruins of modern American life. Streets of dull smooth asphalt had become cobbled. Mechanical erosion and weeds found foot holds and flourished in neglect. Glass store fronts of thrift shops, bookstores, and the various novelties of a college town had become grime covered and barely transparent. The wares of long dead shop keepers had become sun bleached artifices of civilization.

In front of the darkened window of a Starbucks, Mason paused. The buzzards abandoned the chase. Looking back, he could see a small funnel cloud of carrion descend from the surging mass to the spot he had been moments before. He turned away.

With a gloved hand he whipped the grime off the glass of the Starbucks. His reflection startled him. He recoiled. He looked at a person in the dusty surface, seeing not himself but some distant relative. Perhaps a long estranged uncle that had fallen on hard times. Eighteen months had done more damage than the previous twenty years. Like weeds growing in the cracks on the sidewalk, worry thrived in the absence of security. His young face had been replaced with the weathered face of struggling survivor. Scraggly dirty blonde facial hair had sprouted sporadically across his face. Even his cold blue eyes seemed to have lost their youthful spark. Sighing, he squinted and look-

ing past his reflection, he examined the coffee shop's interior. It seemed like as good as a place as any, he thought as he walked to the door.

The brick he threw bounced off the glass. Really, he thought, I can't even break into a coffee shop?

He picked up the brick and threw it a second time. A complicated spider web of cracks radiated from the point of impact. He still hadn't broken through. He kicked the pain of broken glass. Though cracked, it was still solid.

What the fuck? Did they use bulletproof glass? He kicked it again. The door shook. The force caused it to bounce out a bit. Stupefied, he looked at the door handle. A sign that said "Pull" was next to the handle. He grabbed the handle and tentatively pulled. Sure enough, the door came open.

Dumbass, he chuckled to himself.

Chimes hanging from the top of the door tinkled as he entered. Their sound was magnified in the stuffy silence of the café. His entrance stirred dust that swirled in the diagonal dull streaks of light that fell through the windows. His eyes surveyed the café. Yellowing napkins, paper coffee cups of various sizes, bits of porcelain from smashed mugs, and over-turned chairs were scattered across the floor. He bent and drew a line in the dust that carpeted the black tile underneath. A still waxed black tile stood out in contrast to the dust. Noting the tile's color his eyes carefully examined the floor for similar disturbances as he walked around the cafe. His were the only foot prints. He sniffed the air. It smelled musty, but he didn't smell

the sickeningly pungent odor of decay. . He listened intently. Nothing. Nothing but silence. I should be safe here tonight, he thought.

He locked the front door behind him as he surveyed the street. The sun had fallen behind the buildings and rapidly the streets were becoming bathed in darkness. He saw the silhouettes of dozens of buzzards along the tops of the building. It filled him with a sense of foreboding. It was like they knew something that he didn't. Still, he was thankful his expedition had been rather uneventful this far. Less than two years ago, there had been 3.5 million citizens in St. Paul Minnesota, and today he had only seen eleven. None were alive. Four of which he dispatched with his trusty machete. He hadn't yet needed his 9mm Beretta.

Turning away from the door, he started scrounging behind the counter, looking for anything of use. Nothing but sugar packets, non-dairy creamers, and plastic cups and lids. Opening the small fridge underneath the espresso machine was a mistake. He was blasted in the face with the smell of long spoiled creams and rotten maraschino cherries. There were half a dozen steaming pitchers though. He took the largest pitcher and added it to the pathetic contents of his canvas backpack. After rummaging through various cabinets he stumbled upon a box of fruit and granola bars. The word's "Kelsey's: Don't Touch!" were scrawled in permanent marker across the box's flap underneath the layer of dust. He didn't think Kelsey would mind if he helped himself to one, he thought cynically as he

pulled a bar from the box. He unwrapped the stale granola bar. As he bit into its hard surface, he smiled as he thought about Mary's reaction when he returned with these. She would be ecstatic. He poured the rest into his bag, disregarding the empty box.

As he sat behind the counter he pulled out the gun tucked in the back of his jeans. He removed a scrap of cloth, a whetstone, and a bottle of rubbing alcohol from his bag. Unsheathing his machete, he sloshed some liberal amounts of the alcohol onto the blade and used the rag to clean its surface. The crusted and diseased blood was erased from the black coated steel. Once spotless, he examined its edge. His day's escapades had left a number of small nicks in its once keen edge. Using the whetstone he removed the imperfections. Once satisfied, he returned it to its sheath and laid it next to him. He removed his gloves, and in the slowly fading light he examined his 9mm Berretta. There wasn't much he could do with it, having left his gun cleaning kit back at the safehouse, but he still wanted to make sure it was in proper working order.

He removed the fully loaded clip holding nine rounds. He replaced it. He slid back the slide, removed the round from the chamber, and blew in the barrel to make sure it was obstruction free. A misfire or jam equated death. He replaced the round, checked the safety, and sat it on the ground next to him, easily within reach should he need it.

He then reached in his bag and pulled out a book. Mason looked up

at the streams of diminishing light, dust still silently dancing in the beams, he felt uneasy. He had made it through another day. Could he say that tomorrow? Would he make it home? Would he see Mary again? In the past such questions would have weighed heavy on him. These were different days. These days, he was content to have a few moments of well lit silence to read. He opened "The Great Gatsby".

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A can rattled. His eyes snapped open. He listened intently. He heard it again. Mason shot up and sat crouched in the dark, machete already unsheathed in hand. He heard it a third time. A can clattering in the back of the store. Still crouching, he slowly headed towards the source of the sound. He placed each foot in front of the other with extreme deliberation. He paused as he approached a door labeled "Employees Only". Cautiously he placed a hand on the door and pushed it open crack. He glanced in the room. Nothing. He saw nothing besides immobile shapes and shadows in the dark.

Suddenly a rat darted through the crack. His heart thundering in his chest Mason leapt back. When he registered what he saw, he chuckled. Taking a steadying breath, he lowered his guard. Immediately the door burst open. A zombie shambled out, chasing the rat with surprisingly quick yet plodding feet. To Mason it looked like a giant, rotting toddler chasing a ball as it stumbled after the rodent. It repeatedly stumbled and fell only to pull itself back up and chase after the rat.

As the rat scuttled past Mason a second time, it plunged back into the back room. He hid himself behind the counter. He hoped he remained unseen. He heard the rapid, uneven steps of the creature approach. He waited. When the monster reached the door, Mason leapt and swung his machete downward. The zombie stood motionless for a second, then fell into the door face down, taking Mason's machete with him. It was stuck in the zombie's cranium like a vice. With experienced paranoia, Mason again crouched behind the counter, grabbing his Berretta. Training it on the corpse he waited.

When the sun had drifted high enough in the sky to bathe the disheveled café in light, Mason broke his vigil. Cautiously he approached the recently re-deceased. Standing above the corpse, he kicked it, ready for it to spring up and attempt to eat his tasty organs. No un-life remained. He pulled on his gloves and rolled the body over. The twice dead creature was wearing a green apron with the café's insignia on it. Well groomed mutton chops and a soul patch adorned his grey face. A cleaved black beret lay nearby; cleaved like his head. Fucking hipster, he chuckled to himself. I'd been tempted to kill you even if you weren't already dead.

He patted the corpse's pockets, and emptied them. He pulled out a small bag of marijuana. The undead yuppie had done a decent enough job of wrapping the baggie tightly so that when he opened it, it still had retained its trademark pungent odor.

"Thanks for the smoke, buddy" Mason said aloud with a smirk. "You know, you're not so bad. I really should quit being so judgmental." He pocketed the baggie and with an odd feeling of normalcy. He smiled at the thought of sitting on the roof of his safe house smoking a joint with the woman he loved bathed in the sunlight. Things might actually be OK, he thought. Heartened and more than ready to get home, he quickly prepared to depart.

Dark clouds hung over St. Paul that morning. Not the clouds of scavengers. The real kind. The water kind. As he exited the café, the clouds gave up and poured their contents on the ground. First one. Then two. Then millions of drops fell. This, he thought, is not good.

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Mason hugged the wall as he approached the end of an alley. With steadying breaths he glanced around the corner. He saw one of them bent over a body. More were approaching. He heard bones crunch and wet slurping noises as the creature bent over the fresh kill. Intestines lay splayed out like grotesque streamers across an open present. Steam rose up. Mason watched a middle aged man being desecrated by the living corpse of a twenty something girl. Her pink floral sundress clung to her flesh in the downpour. He would have found her cute if it weren't for the sallow tint of her decaying flesh and a maggot infested nub of a left arm.

Mason felt a sense of loss. The zombie was eating one of the last survivors of the human race: an endangered



species. Never again would that person tell a story. Or smile at a sunrise. Or cry. Never again would he be a father nor a husband. All he was now was a meal, a pile of warm flesh to be hungrily devoured by the soulless ghosts of humanity. He had missed a chance to talk to another person. He hadn't talked to a new person in months. There were so few voices left in the world. Mason was sad.

"Guuuh!"

A startled Mason turned. A shambling corpse appeared behind him at the opposite end of the alley. It quickly shuffled past Mason without so much as a glance. Mason watched stunned as the new comer stumbled up to the waiting meal lying in a pool of blood. More corpses were pouring from the buildings and alleys. He quickly composed himself. The zombie saw me, Mason thought, it didn't give a shit, not when a middle aged buffet lay in the street. With one final glance he saw the old dead swarm the newly dead man.

Not wasting another moment, Mason sprinted across the street towards the next alley with a sad thankfulness in his heart. Though humanity lost another member, his sacrifice would allow him to see Mary again.

Mary was the only thing that made him smile these days. She made these expeditions worthwhile.

He sprinted down the alley to the next main street, his back pack delightfully heavy. It had been a good trip. His sun bleached canvas bag was stuffed with swag: three flashlights, an unopened 12 pack of AA batteries, a half a dozen off-

brand granola bars, a can of Green Giant sweet peas, a gallon of distilled water, a police baton, a box of condoms, and a roll of Cottenelle toilet paper. He prayed the toilet paper wouldn't be soaked by the rain.

Four more blocks, he thought. Four more blocks. Four blocks stood between him and the relative safety of The University of Minnesota's campus. Relative in that he had made an effort to memorize safe paths and rig traps to make travel somewhat safe.

As he approached the end of the alley, he hugged the wall and strafed to end. Water cascaded down the brown and red brick building. Peeking around the corner, his heart sank. Dozens of zombies mulled around the weed infested and desolate alley. While rain dulled their senses, the harsh winds made the buzzards take roost. Without the threat of beaks and talons, the zombies roamed the streets freely. He slowly backed into the alley. He started back the way he came. In the heavy rain he saw an unwelcome sight. Two slightly rotting zombies were loitering in at the opposite end. Fighting panic he looked up the walls of the alley. No fire escapes. No windows. No ledges. No way up. He had two choices. Forward or back. He didn't have long to make up his mind. He chose forward.

He looked back around of the corner of the alley, he saw a BMW parked in front. He grabbed a piece of brick. He aimed, cocked back his arm, swung, and released. The rock flew fast and hard. He prayed. It slammed into the back of a balding zombie's head. Fuck. In unison,

the horde of zombies turned their heads. They saw him. A collective moan of recognition followed. This isn't good, Mason thought. He fell to his hands and knees. Rock, I need a rock, fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

He found another. He shot to his feet. Frantically a second stone flew. It smashed into the car's windshield. Its alarm was set off. Mason's smiled. It wore off instantly. Though the car alarm attracted the attention of some of the zombies, those closest to him were undistracted.

Mason unsheathed his machete. Four more blocks. He dashed across the street, into the horde. He slashed, and the first zombie crumbled. He slashed again, and the top of another's head fell to the ground. He ran and slashed. An arm fell inert on the ground. He was halfway across the street. The horde closed in. He slashed again and again. The horde shed body parts. In a blood lust he hacked as the mass of dead mobile flesh contracted.

He burst through the last few. He made it to the alley. Drenched in the clot-  
ted crimson, he ran. The shambling corpses congregated like cattle into the narrow corridor. It acted as a bottle neck. He sprinted down the alley with burning legs, aching arms, and ragged breath. Three more blocks.

He burst through the opening of the alley. Sprinting without a shred of stealth he plunged into the next alley. Between breaths, he sighed with relief. The street behind was nearly deserted. The sound of the car alarm in the distance was diminishing as were the hungry moans of the dead behind him. Heedless, he dashed across another street into the

next alley. Two more, he thought. As he emerged onto yet another street, he took a minute to survey his surroundings.

Wait, he thought. He didn't recognize the street. Had he gone the wrong way? Fuck. His tired mind reeled. In a daze he spun around, looking for something – anything – to tell him which way to go. Aha! A bar he recognized - The Beaver Depot - stood at the end of the block. Mentally he plotted his way. He needed to follow this street and then turn left at the intersection to get to the campus. He set off towards the bar. Suddenly, a pang in his chest tore at his side. Taking a minute to catch his breath, he leaned against a concrete building. Panting, with his hands on his knees he spat. The rain began to let up.

Almost there, he thought. Two more blocks. Almost there. Almost there. Almost there. His mind panted in time with his lungs. He looked up. The building across from him he recognized as the bank Mary used to work at. How different it seemed. Neglect and looting had ravaged it. Bills of various denominations fluttered down the street. Having caught his breath somewhat, he began jogging down the street. He had to follow it to the north for a block, then turn right at the next light and he would be out of the maze of buildings and he would be almost his home. The rain had stop, he realized as he ran by the bank. Then he suddenly slowed his pace. Plastered all over the otherwise smooth, marble façade were dozens of posters.

In the first few days weeks and months after the outbreak, posters were common. Missing person posters, religious

propaganda, declarations of the end of times, and evacuation notices covered every square inch of buildings. After the first few months, survivors began dwindling to almost nothing. Government became invisible, all of society crumbled, and so too did the presence of the posters. The elements wiped the walls clean of such things. However, as Mason's pace slowed to a trot, he realized these were different. These were almost sterling white. The ink was just beginning to run. They had been put up since the last rain, over a month ago. Mason came to a complete stop. His machete fell to the ground as his mind was wrapped around what he was seeing.

"Impromptu Invites You! Shelter. Food. Protection. Salvation. All await at Twin City Fair grounds. Printed 10/23/10"

Staring transfixed, he read and reread the words on the poster. What's the date? Could it be October already? It could be... Could this be real?

A loud moan jerked him back to reality. Rotting hands grabbed his jacket. Startled he spun around. Withered lips drew back across teeth. A jaw spread wide, ready to strike. In a panic Mason drew his 9mm. A shot rang out unimaginably loud. Clotted blood splattered from a wound in its torso. Undeterred, the zombie pulled Mason closer. He shoved it. It fell to the ground. With shaking hands he aimed. He squeezed off another round. A left ear was blown off the undead creature as it climbed to his feet. Steady now, he thought. Composing himself, he shot a third round. The small hole appeared in the forehead of the zombie. The back of its head sprayed all over the street. It fell

to the ground motionless. He looked up. Dread filled him.

The sound of gun fire drew them out. Masses of zombies poured from every building, alley, and busted window. Dozens. Hundreds. Low guttural moans filled the air. They sensed a potential meal. More came. The number of undead swelled. They quickly enclosed him. All exits were cut off. He crammed the poster into this pocket. With a sore back, he bent. Picking up his machete, Mason's eyes drifted towards the sky. Above him three black shapes soared in an ominous circle superimposed on a gray sky. From the air, they watched as a lone figure was enveloped by countless others.

Two more blocks.

The boy sat atop the mountain and watched. He watched the grey world around him. He watched the grey people in the town. He watched them go about their grey business in their grey clothes on their grey streets. When he got bored he looked up at the grey sky and watched the grey birds playing in their grey clouds. He breathed in the grey air. He smiled a grey smile. His days were grey and ambivalent. After a time, the boy retreated to his cave. He took little notice of his sparse possessions. His bed, his table, his chair, his shelf... They, like him, never changed no matter how much time he spent atop the mountain surveying the grey horizon or the grey town below. The huge marble of black crystal sitting on his table was the only thing that mattered to him.

As he entered his cave, he picked up the crystal and took it to the mouth of the cave to examine it. Its typically polished and flawless surface had cracked since he had been outside. Upon closer examination he could see a shimmer of blue buried deep inside his crystal. Quickly, he sealed the cracks with black mortar he made out of lies. I am happy. Black grime filled his hand. He smeared some of the black tar on the obsidian stone to seal the cracks. He then rubbed the remainder over its surface. Once more he held it up to the light. The blue glimmer had been muted by the fresh layer of muck that quickly hardened. Once again his giant egg of a crystal was black and opaque. A grey smile spread across his face as he stared at his reflection in its mirrored surface.

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His stomach gurgled.



Retreating to his cave he found that his cupboards of grey food were empty. He was filled with a quiet dread. He would have to go back to town. He grabbed his bag, stuffed the orb inside and headed to town.

\*\*\*

He spent most of the morning hiding in an alley waiting for the market to thin out. He sold small figurines he carved out of his lies to a sundries merchant in town. He didn't make much money off of his carvings, but it didn't matter to him. He didn't need much to live. Part of the arrangement was come late in the afternoon. It was less likely the grey people would notice his presence. It was better for business that way, so the shop owner said. And he waited in the shadows of the alley across from the sundries shop.

Then he saw her...

Out of the sundries shop walked a young girl with yellow hair. Her hair was like a sunflower growing out of grey gravel. He thought she was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. He was so distracted by her beauty he almost didn't hear the sound of cracking crystal coming from his bag. Minutes, hours, days, the entire life cycle of the cosmos could have passed before he noticed the black putrid ooze seeping from the corner of his bag.

He pulled out the orb. This is bad. He desperately tried to concentrate. I am happy. Very little black grime filled his hand. Barely a pinch. Its easier to be alone. The usual lies resulted in less than nothing. He looked at the huge wound in his orb and the black ooze bleeding out of its cracked surface. A red light could be

seen shining in the orb's center. The boy despaired. The putrid ooze seeped out of the crack with increasing vigor. He had to control himself. He had to quit feeling. She could never love me. Bucket loads of black grimy lies poured from his hands. He smeared great handfuls of lies across the gash in his orb. His hollow smile returned as did his control. As he smoothed out the tarry black clay, the world around him seemed greyer and his smile seemed hollowed. Warily he placed the orb back in his bag and stealthily snuck his way back to his cave.

The next day he sat atop the mountain and watched the town below. Ever since he had seen the girl, it was as if his vision became attuned only to her. As high as he was, he swore he could see her yellow hair glimmering in the sun. He tried to ignore the yellow ray of beauty. He couldn't risk it. He spent his days looking at the grey ground.

Grey days, grey weeks, grey months, an eternity in grey purgatory passed before he heard footsteps coming up the path to his cave. Apparently some townspeople had decided to pay him a visit. As he wiped the black grime off his grey hands with a grey cloth, he looked up and saw a glimmer of yellow growing brighter with the sound of each foot fall. The twinge in his heart resulted in a crack to be patched. Hurriedly he grabbed the orb and smoothed out the black grime which quickly solidified into a flawless surface mirror like finish. He kept his back to the entrance to the cave as he heard the sundries shopkeeper address him in his grey voice.

"Hello dear Boy! So glad to see you! Such a fine day, is it not? It has been quiet some time since you've stopped by. This young lady here, Veronica, is an avid collector of your work. When she learned that I hadn't seen you and that I was out of your works, she just insisted we come pay you a visit."

"Nice to meet you," the girl sweetly cooed. The boy didn't answer or look up. His eyes were fixed to the orb in his hands. "What is that?" the girl inquired. "Another sculpture?"

"No," said the boy.

"Can I see?" asked the yellow girl.

"No," said the boy

"Please?"

Without looking up, he offered her the orb.

"It's more than beautiful," she cooed in a beautiful voice like crystal refracting light. The boy looked up. Their eyes met. Green. The girl had green eyes. Not grey like the rest. Green. With a crack like thunder, a large fracture appeared in the orb, nearly splitting it in half. Startled, the girl dropped the orb. "I'm... I'm sorry..." she stammered as the orb rolled toward the boy.

"Leave. Now!" The boy screamed in a black voice as he snatched up the orb. He finally looked up to see the yellow light diminishing as the shopkeeper and the girl ran off.

How could something so beautiful ever love something so ugly! She was making fun of me! His mind screamed lies. More black dull grimy lies spewed forth than ever had before. The boy's hands slung the black dull grime like the hands

of an impassioned sculptor. He slathered the tar over the surface of the orb. When he was finished, the orb was bigger than it ever had been before, the size of a small boulder. He had a grim smile on his face. It'll never crack nor will that accursed light be seen again.

\*\*\*

Grey days past. Grey days became grey years as the boy sat atop his mountain. His black orb had grown into a black obelisk. The continual application of lies was necessary ever since he seen those green eyes. Grey clouds rolled through the grey sky. Though perfectly reflected, everything seemed darker when reflected by his lies. Especially the yellow glimmer from town. Ever since the day that he had seen those green eyes, he noticed the yellow glimmer slowly fading in town. He tried to lie to himself, to say he was glad, but that was one lie of which he could not convince himself.

As the grey years past, the yellow girl fell in grey love with a grey man. From afar, the boy watched the grey wedding. As the grey ceremony progressed, the orb began to crack. I don't care, he lied in an attempt to make the black dull grime to fix his boulder of lies. Nothing. I'm happy, he lied again. Nothing, not even a pinch of black.

He stood at the base of the black tower. He watched as the black wall slowly lost its luster. He watched as the black obsidian mound became rough, cracked, and porous. The boy was too tired to care, too tired to lie, too weak to fix the wall, and too old to believe in silly lies any more.

In the distance, grey bells announced the grey wedding's climax.

At the base of the black wall, the grey boy became a grey man as he let go of his lies. I loved her. The man said confidently, as the wall cracked, crumbled. I love. In an instant the dam turned to dust and dissolved into the unfathomable tidal wave of emotion.

The man prepared for the black ooze he valiantly held back for so long. He waited to be washed away in the black tar of regrets that he had dedicated his life to holding back. As the wall was torn asunder, the black lies withered and dissolved into the expanding waters of emotions. The wall of black charged him. He closed his eyes, held up his arms and waited to be engulfed by the inevitable. The entirety of his body of work, the very meaning of his life crashed down on him.

The wave hit the man, not with the force of a tidal wave, but rather with a burst of liquid wind. His eyes snapped open as he felt washed in the warm breath of color. He was baptized in fluid light. His opened eyes saw all the colors of the spectrum. All the colors of existence. His opened soul felt everything he was scared to feel. He realized the only black shadows were those of the lies and regrets by which he tried to keep all the color at bay. His eyes cried happy blue tears as he was washed away.

The yellow bride, the grey husband, and the grey townspeople heard the roar like that of a breaking dam. Their faces all turned towards the mountain and watched in horror as its black cloud rushed towards them. In stunned terror they watched the black engulf the town.

Their hearts stood stunned and silent, but their terror was soon replaced by delight as they too were soon washed in color. Like long lost lovers reunited, they stood staring blankly, wondering if the parade of pigments that swirled around them could possibly be real. As the tide of color receded, the grey people looked around at their world.

The sky was blue. Clouds were white. Lips were red. Cheeks were pink. Eyes were green and blue and brown and black and hazel. Hair was yellow, red, black, and brown. Skin was red, yellow, black, brown, white, peach, sunburned red, tan-lined two-tone. Everyone stood in wonder. Everyone looked at each other as if for the first time because it was the first time.

The yellow girl looked at her new red husband and smiled. Then she started to cry. As his red arms embraced her, he asked what was wrong. She never said.

\*\*\*

The colorful years passed. Green springs followed by red autumns and white winters. The yellow woman and the red man had orange children. The various hues of townspeople went about new polychromatic lives in their new colorful world. All were happy. Yet none seemed to remember the boy and his dam. No one had seen the boy since her wedding day. They were happy with their new world of color. No one cared. No one except a yellow girl. A yellow girl remembered a boy and a dam. Often she went to the grey mountain where the black dam's stain could still be seen. There, on grey days, smiling green eyes shed blue tears on a black grave.

## Little Red Ball

K.E. Crose

The engine of the wood chipper was deafening. It sounded so smooth and calm when it was idling. I have sent many bits of different trees through this wood chipper, a neat pile of saw dust always coming out of the other side. As the tree branches pass through, they make an intense grinding sound. I could always tell the type of tree going through. The softer woods made a less harsh grinding sound than the harder woods.

I turned off the wood chipper, in the garage, and went inside to make lunch. As I was pulling the bread out of the bag I heard my chain link fence rattle and my dog, Lucy, started to bark while she stood in the dining room. Out my back window I saw the neighbor boy, who was six, in my yard. I stormed out my back door and began to yell.

"How many times do I have to tell you to stay out of my yard? If you want your ball back, I've told you before, to knock on my front door. Lucy doesn't like strangers in her back yard and I don't want her to be punished for biting a stupid boy who can't stay out of my yard."

The boy quickly replied, "I heard the wood chipper, so I thought you weren't around."

"How does that make it okay to come into my yard?"

"I don't know and I DON'T care. I just wanted my ball back."

"Next time wait," I said sternly. "I'll give you back your ball when I'm not busy," I said as I threw the ball back over the chain link fence.

As I went back inside I kissed Lucy's head and shook it. "Go play outside girl.

It's a nice day out." I continued to make my sandwich and went back out to the wood chipper while I ate. I turned it on and listened to the peaceful hum of the engine. As I was finishing up the last bite of my sandwich, I heard Lucy start to bark. When I looked in the backyard I saw the boy kicking the fence at Lucy and he began to yell.

"Stupid dog! All you do is bark and growl and I wish you would die."

I swung the side gate of the fence open and started to march towards the boy while I yelled. "What is wrong with you? Lucy never did anything to you. You're the one who is always throwing your ball into her yard."

"But she was chewing on it this time," the boy screamed back. "Look it's still in her mouth."

Sure enough as I looked over at Lucy, she was chomping on the small red ball. I took the ball out of Lucy's slobbery mouth and tossed it at the boy. He moved out of the way of the ball and just looked at it as it lay in the grass next to him. He looked at me and looked back at the ball disappointed and disgusted, then walked away toward his house.

I patted Lucy on the head and told her it's ok and it's not her fault. She ran off sniffing around the yard. I'm sure she caught the scent of a squirrel or a rabbit. I started to feel tired so I went back into the house and laid down on the couch to watch TV.

After some time Lucy was scratching at the back door, so I got up to let her in. When I let her in I looked around the yard to see if the boy was around. I didn't

see him. I just saw open spaces until the houses in the distance appeared. The boy's house was the closest within 100 yards.

A little while later I decided to take Lucy for a walk. As soon as I got her lead she was jumping in excitement. She's always loved going for walks. I guess it's because she gets to see new things. I found her on the side of the road when she was a pup. She was such a cute German Sheppard pup. For the past eight years we've went on walks almost daily. I've never been able to let her off her lead, she likes to wander, but she always leaves plenty of slack in the lead when we walk.

Walks with Lucy were always peaceful. Normally the only sound I hear are her nails on the tar and chip road. Occasionally a car will pass or we'll hear other dogs barking in the distance. The country is peaceful like that. Lots of trees and scenery, but few people.

When we got back to the house I saw the boy jumping over the fence. This was the last straw. I had told him many times not to go into the yard. I opened the side gate and let Lucy off her lead. The boy was bent over in the middle of yard and I expected her to run and bark. She ran and barked, but that wasn't all.

As she was running and started to bark the boy jolted upright and looked at her, then he began to run, little red ball in hand. Lucy had quickly caught up to him and lunged. Her paws hit the back of his shoulders and he was on the ground. Lucy grabbed the boy by the neck and began to shake him violently. As quickly as the boy started to scream he was silenced by

Lucy's grip on his neck. After the first few shakes the boy went limp. After the boy was limp for a few moments Lucy relinquished her grip on his neck. The boy fell limp and motionless in front of her.

I walked over to boy and he still wasn't moving. I hoped he was playing possum, but it didn't seem that was the case. I checked the boys pulse and couldn't find one. I tried to sit him up and his head rolled downward completely limp. Lucy must have broken his neck and severed his spinal cord. I dropped him back to the ground.

My mind was racing. What should I do? I had many times before told him not to be in the yard. Lucy is a good dog; she didn't deserve to be put down because the boy wouldn't listen. I looked around and I didn't see anyone.

I picked up the boy and headed for the garage with Lucy right on my heels. She's a good dog. She didn't mean to hurt him. She just overreacted. I really didn't think she would attack him. I just wanted her to scare him. It's my fault he's dead; I let Lucy loose on him. I laid the boy on the concrete garage floor and wondered what to do with him. I couldn't say anything to anyone for Lucy's sake, but also couldn't keep the body of a dead child in my garage. Lucy laid down next to the boy on the garage floor. I kept thinking God Lucy, what did you do? What did I let you do?

I began to pace around the garage and got nowhere. I walked out back to get some fresh air. Then I saw the little red ball lying where Lucy had caught up with the boy. I picked up the ball as I still



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wondered what to do. Eventually, I went back to the garage.

Lucy was pacing, just as nervously as I had. I watched her for a few minutes and laid the ball next to the boy. As I stood up that's when out of the corner of my eye I saw it, the wood chipper. I thought I couldn't. That would be horrible, but what other choice did I have? I looked at Lucy questioningly and she just stared back at me with deep eyes.

I turned on the wood chipper, put a plastic barrel under the shoot and grabbed a shovel, leaning it against the wood chipper. I went over and knelt beside the boy and looked into his open eyes. They were empty. There was no longer any part of him left inside that body. I shoved the little red ball in his pocket, closed his eyes and picked him up.

"Please forgive me. Please forgive me." I repeated over and over again as I walked to the wood chipper. The humming was deafening and I was lost in the moment. I slowly pushed the boy into the wood chipper feet first. I hear the grinding, just like hard woods. I took the shovel and gently pushed on the boys head; helping feed him into the wood chipper and making sure the head went in. When it got to his head there was a sound unlike any I had ever heard. There was massive crunching and the machine began to slip. In a few moments it went back to its peaceful idle.

# The Man Who Wanted to Eat the Earth

(A Micro Novel)

Michael Gibbs, Chapter 1: Earth

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Jim decided to eat the earth. He walked outside his house with a spoon and plate. He crouched down and scooped up the lawn, piling a mound onto the plate. He walked back inside, set the plate on the kitchen table, sat down, and shoved a spoon full of the dirt and grass into his mouth. A tiny earthworm slithered out between his lips, tumbled down the front of his shirt, and landed on the white tiled floor. The worm thought, "That was a close call."

Jim stood up, unintentionally stepped on the worm, and retrieved a cold can of beer from the refrigerator. While shaking the beer, he reached inside a drawer and pulled out a screwdriver. He stabbed a hole inside the beer can, threw the screwdriver on the counter, and began to chug.

As Jim chugged, a blue van crashed into his living room. Frightened, Jim dropped his beer. The can hit the floor and pissed on his shoes. He peeked around the corner into the living room.

## Chapter 2: Dragon

The front end of the van was marked with yellow paint and dents. On the side of the van was a mural of a purple dragon. Smoke billowed out when the passenger door opened. A grey bearded man, wearing a Led Zeppelin t-shirt, stepped out of the van holding a glass bong. He looked around the living room. The television had a hubcap inside it.

"Far out, man," said the bearded man, smiling.

"You think this is funny? Look at

what you did to my living room." Jim walked over to the television and pulled out the hubcap. "My goddamn TV is ruined."

"I'm sorry, man. They call me Dragon. Here. Take a hit?" Dragon held out the bong.

Jim angrily snatched the bong and held it to his mouth. Like the van, it too had the purple dragon symbol on it. The bearded man took his lighter and set the green buds on fire. Jim sucked. The bong filled up with smoke. Dragon pulled out the stem. The smoke disappeared into Jim's lungs.

"Hold it in, man...like you're holding in a fart on a date." Dragon giggled, took back the bong, and hit it.

Jim started coughing. Small puffs of yellowish-white smoke chimneyed out with each cough.

Dragon blew out a cloud that formed into the shape of a dragon. "The dragon whips his tail."

"That's some strong shit," said Jim. His eyes were devil red.

"I've got the munchies, man."

"You want some earth?"

"Sounds groovy." Dragon followed Jim into the kitchen.

## Chapter 3: Burritos

Jim set a second plate of earth on the table and handed Dragon a spoon. They both sat at each end of the table eating the earth.

"This ain't bad, man. But it's missing something." Dragon stood up and walked into the living room.

Jim heard Dragon pop open the hood of his van, use a wrench on something, and then slam it shut. He walked back into the kitchen with a hand full of tortillas.

"Burritos. Great idea." Jim retrieved a bottle of Hemorrhoid Helper Hot Sauce from the refrigerator "We need some spice."

They piled a mound of dirt onto tortillas and flooded the tops in hot sauce, causing them to look like little volcanoes. Then they rolled them up into burritos and stuffed the large ends into their mouths. They nodded at each other with red squinty eyes.

"This burritos are pretty far out, man." said Dragon.

"I know. I need to think of more recipes. I'm going to eat the earth." Jim smiled, dirt stuck between his teeth.

#### Chapter 4: Dead

Jim finished three burritos and began to roll another. Dragon was working on his third burrito when a rock, close to the size of a golf ball, lodged itself in his throat. He dropped the burrito onto his plate. His eyes bulged out like he suddenly caught a case of Graves' disease.

"You okay?" Jim mumbled, taking a bite out of burrito number four.

Dragon pointed at his neck.

"Too much fire for you? I thought you were..." Jim made quote signs with his fingers, "...the Dragon."

Dragon stood up. He took three steps and fell face down onto the floor. The last thing he saw before dying was a

dead smashed earthworm.

Jim set down his burrito. He walked over to Dragon's body, placed a foot on his back, and gave a nudge. No response. He knelt down and checked his pulse. Nothing.

"Well fuck, Dragon. Why'd you have to go and die on me? We just met."

Jim stood back up and looked around. Then he knelt back down and searched Dragon's pockets.

"Bingo!" He pulled out a bag of weed.

After smoking some more, he packed a suitcase full of clothes, plates, spoons, beer, and Dragon's bong, and then grabbed what was left of burrito number four and stuffed it into his pocket. Jim left the kitchen, tossed the suitcase into the back of the van, and slid the door shut. He jumped in to the driver's seat. Inserting the key into the ignition, he turned it. "People are Strange" by The Doors blasted through the speakers as the purple dragon roared to life. He backed out of his living room onto the street, put the van in drive, and then headed down the road. Jim pulled the burrito out of his pocket, still determined to eat the earth.

## Change for the Worst

Mark Howell

Both men remained silent for a moment. The clock could be heard ticking as it hung from the wall. Eli sat back in his chair and returned his hands to his lap. His dad coughed a couple of times and turned his head toward the clock.

"It's been a long time." Eli turned toward his father's voice. "What made you come see me?"

"I got a call at work. Some woman at a nursing home said you are having a long bout with tuberculosis and was admitted to the hospital." Eli paused. "When the hell you go to a nursing home?"

"First off, it's a retirement home," his dad began indignantly. "Second, the state made me go. They said I couldn't wipe my own ass, so they're paying people to do it for me." He strained a smile as he spoke, but his eyes displayed disappointment and humiliation. It was a huge blow to his ego to be unable to care for himself. "That's why you came, isn't it?"

Eli was puzzled. "What?"

"To see your old man at his worst?"

"No, I -"

"You haven't made a single effort to even speak to me for twenty years."

Eli's reply was quick and sharp.

"Neither did you."

Silence.

"So you came to criticize me?"

"I was concerned, alright?" Eli said with slight exasperation.

The clock made the only sounds for a moment. The father looked up as if to speak, but returned his gaze to himself. The hospital bed was uncomfortable, but it was better than his bed at the home. Eli watched as his dad used what little

strength was left in his frail arms to sit up a little higher in the bed. The man wheezed a little from the effort.

Dad thought for a moment. "Twenty years. That'd make you forty years old now?"

Eli gave him a blank stare. "I'm forty-three," he said flatly.

"Oh."

Eli shifted uncomfortably. "Where's Mom? I haven't talked to her for about a month."

His father sat for a moment. He started to speak, but his words were replaced by a cough. It began lightly, but worsened after a few seconds. Its sound was deep and scratchy. Eli uneasily eyed the rest of the room. He noticed a sink and paper cups across the room. He rose and quickly returned with a cup of water. His dad's coughing had nearly subsided. Eli sat and offered the cup with an outstretched arm. The man ungraciously took the cup and drank from it. Eli looked down at the floor.

His dad reached over and placed the empty cup on the bedside table. He noticed a gold band on his son's finger. "How long you been married now?" he asked.

"Seventeen years."

"When do I get to meet her?"

"I sent an invitation," Eli said cautiously.

"It was addressed to just your mother. Any reason I wasn't invited to the wedding?" Dad slowly asked.

"No reason," said Eli with mock innocence.

"Oh, really?" said his father,

matching his inflection.

"Nothing was ever good enough for you!" Eli exclaimed. "It didn't matter what I did, you were always disappointed."

"That's not true," said Dad, his voice rising as much as his weak body could handle.

"Is it, Dad?" No longer able to contain himself to his seat, Eli stood. He looked his father directly in the eyes. "Do you remember that big box of cigars I got you for your birthday?" The ticking clock filled the silence. Dad lowered his gaze into his lap. "What about them?"

"I know they weren't the ones you usually smoked, but they were so expensive. I bought what I could afford, but evidently they weren't good enough for you. Mom told me you never smoked them. You just threw them out! I was furious when Mom told me what you had done, and then you lied to me when I asked you about it!"

Eli let out a sigh. He turned and walked over to sink, rubbing his face with his hands. He lingered there for a minute.

"Does it really surprise you," Eli said quietly with his back still turned, "that I just didn't want to see to you anymore? You've done a lot of things I couldn't agree with, but that was it. Either you were too proud to apologize, or you just didn't care."

"Hey," said Dad, but this time his voice was soft. He spoke slowly, struggling to find the words he wanted to say. "You're out of line if you think I didn't care." He waited. Eli still faced the sink. "You know I demanded the best, not just

out of materials things, but out of you."

He took a deep breath and opened his mouth, but the words filled his mouth like cotton balls. "I appreciated what you did, but it was wrong of me to throw them out and try to hide it. I..." He slowly exhaled and tried again. "I.... I'm sorry."

Eli turned around. His eyes were damp. "You've never apologized to me before."

"Well, I just did."

Eli smiled. "Yes, you did." He sat down in the chair next to his dad.

"Now tell me why Mom isn't here yet."

Dad looked at Eli. His face again became sullen, and his prideful demeanor melted away. He turned away and looked across the room.

The smile disappeared from Eli's face.

"Where is she?" he asked with a little more urgency.

Slowly, quietly, and painfully he said, "She's dead."

There was a long silence between them. Neither man looked at the other. Eli's face contorted with grief. The clock signified the passing of several moments. Eli fought tears for a moment, but finally let them loose. He choked back an angry sob. "When?"

Dad quietly spoke. "A few weeks ago." Eli stood so quickly his chair fell over behind him. "Why didn't you tell me?!"

"You just got here-"

"I mean then, Dad!" Eli sputtered. He was beginning to control his tears, but his voice rose angrily.

"Because part of me didn't want to!" Dad exclaimed in defense. "You've



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kept me out of your life for two decades! You always called and visited your mom through the years." His voice filled with disdain. "You've gone out of your way to avoid seeing me. Do you know how that feels?"

"Is that any reason not to tell me about Mom?" Eli said with an outburst of sorrow and anger. "I didn't even get to say goodbye." His voice trailed off. He took a step forward, and his gaze moved directly to the old man. With a piercing look he said, "This is so like you. Too self-absorbed to think of someone other than yourself."

Dad shifted nervously in his bed. "I meant to tell you."

"When, Dad?" He leaned over the bed and shook the old man by his shoulders. "Tell me when?!"

"Today!" Dad struggled to say.

Eli stopped roughhousing the man, but didn't let go. Eli stared at his dad, dumbfounded, but then his face clouded over with disdain. "That's why you had the nurse call me, isn't it?"

No answer.

"You wanted to clear your conscience while you're still alive." Eli scowled. "I hope you feel better!"

Dad fought to get Eli to release his hold. "Let go!" he shouted. He tried to shout a second time, but began coughing again. Eli let go by pushing him back down onto the bed. The man began coughing more violently. Eli slowly walked to the sink and filled another cup of water. The clock made countless ticks before Eli made it back to the side of the bed. Still coughing, Dad reached slightly upwards

for the cup. Eli held it just out of his reach, then raised it to his lips and slowly drank the water. With one last look of disgust, he crumpled the empty cup and tossed it onto the hospital bed.

Auden looked up at the dark blue sky, admiring the forever twinkling stars of the heavens. The cool grass below his feet brushed against him as the autumn wind swept across the wooded hollow. Even having on a heavy wool sweater, he shivered and his stare was broken. He shifted in the over-sized garment and rubbed his gloved hands together. Too damn cold.

This was the coldest fall Endlewood had ever endured on record. It was at a steady thirty-two degrees. Auden gritted his teeth. He hated the cold. All it brought was bad weather, illness, and dry skin. He would've been sitting next to the fireplace in his nice warm cabin, sipping on hot cocoa if he didn't have to be there in the woods, waiting for his contact. Auden hoped he would get there soon. He was beginning to have urges of heading back home.

He closed his eyes and listened to the wind's song as it played through the trees and the tall grass. It was harmony at its best, yet there was a sudden tension, a realization within him. He felt a presence behind him. He opened his eyes and turned around. No one was there. He sighed in relief. Perhaps he was just jumpy, anxious. His eyes started to wander up into the trees. Maybe it's just a raccoon or an opossum, he thought. Just above the lowest branch, which wasn't really low at all, a pair of glowing orbs, congruent to each other, peeked down at him. They were motionless, never blinking away. Strange. A twig snapped thirty feet ahead of him, and he jumped. Was it Colten, his brother, playing a trick on him? No. He

finally realized he hadn't seen Colt since his mother died. That was about five years ago. He must be drowsy. He stretched and yawned. How long was he going to have to wait? Suddenly he could hear footsteps approaching, only one set he was sure.

A loud squawk came from the branch with the circles of light. The footsteps coming toward Auden grew louder and heavier. Someone was coming. He finally saw a figure heading his way. It was quite large, so he assumed it was a man. What else could it be? A werewolf? No, they only existed in myths and legends. What a silly notion to have popped in his head! When this man was five feet from him, he stopped. There was a creek of metal and the sliding of it. The man lit a match and then held it to the candle that was in the metal lantern he was carrying. Auden eased as the man blew out the match and flung it to the side.

As the growing light got brighter, Auden could now see the man more clearly. He was clean-cut, wore a brown suit with a silk vest and suede shoes, and over that he wore a dark brown duster. His long white hair was pulled back in a tail, though his side bangs hung loosely. The most striking feature about him was his tattoo on his left eye. Three designs of dark blue symbols curved down and over his eyelid and onto his cheek. Perhaps it was just body art or maybe it labeled him. Auden never seen such a thing like it. His cousin, Devilin, had a tattoo on his arm of a biker logo that belonged to a local club he was a member of, but it could never compare to this. Auden couldn't help but stare at it.

The man watched him then whistled, piercing the silence around them. The orbs in the tree flashed then made a sudden swoop. The animal that had those bright eyes cried again and landed on the man's shoulder. It was a hawk with a brown body and white feathered wings. The man gave the creature some meat he had hidden in his pocket, then addressed Auden. "You are the one they sent?"

Auden nodded. His friend, Michael, and his old man had asked him to wait for someone to meet him here in Dead Pass Woods, so that he could get some answers to the questions that drove him mad—life's answers he needed to know, answers about his childhood and how he came to be. He never knew his father and was curious as to why. Everything before the age of ten was a blank. He tried asking his mother when he was thirteen years old, but she would just simply say, "Just like the other children in the world." This, he knew, was a lie. He didn't know why he knew, he just did. It couldn't be that simple or he would have remembered. The idea of the loss of memory must have meant that something big must have happened. He asked Colten, who was four years older, but all he did was shrug and found something else to do.

Auden took a step closer to the well-dressed man. "My name is Auden—"

"I know who you are," the man said. "I know why you're here, and I know where you will find your answers. What I don't understand is why you want to know."

Auden tilted his head, not understanding his concern. "Why wouldn't I?"

The man was taken aback. "Those were dark times. No one should want to relive those days."

Auden was still confused, and the man saw it. He sighed and stuck out a hand. "I'm Terrence, hired hand to Chaos."

"Chaos, sir?"

Terrence put an arm around Auden. "All in good time, dear boy, all in good time." The hawk chirped. "Ah, and this is Horus, a dear friend of mine and pet to the Royal Realm."

Auden smiled at the large bird in awe. He always wanted to own a pet, not a bird, but something small like a hamster or rat, but his mother didn't allow it. Now that he was grown, almost twenty, he never found time to own one or if he did, he would never have time to take care of it. This creature seemed well taken care of. Terrence lifted the lamp slightly in his right hand and turned around, starting to leave. Auden ran up to him and followed along side. Terrence smirked. "So are you ready to go on this journey, my dear Auden?"

Auden nodded, struggling to keep up with the tall man. "What is our destination? Where exactly are we going?"

"Our destination is knowledge. Where we are going is a place that holds it."

"And where is that?"

Terrence chuckled. "West, kid, we're heading west!"

## Betwixt the Fog and the Sea

Terry Mays

I gazed out from the end of the fishing pier at the choppy waves coming into the bay. My eyes drank in the sea, not really caring what form or greenish tinge the waves took. Just experiencing the ocean deep inside was enough for this drifter. I wandered a great deal, but I always ended up back here at the sea. I guess if I had a home, it would be here.

"She'll kill you. You know that don't you?" came the slightly raspy, woman's voice to my left.

"What?" I responded, a little irritated at having my meditation broken and surprised that I hadn't noticed someone walking up next to me.

"The sea, boy, one way or another, she's a cold mistress that one, and she'll kill you in the end."

I glanced over at this woman and saw a weather beaten form that could have been pretty were it not for looking like a few miles of bad road. I wasn't particularly in the mood to talk either; "Yeah, whatever."

"Don't patronize me and don't look at me like that either. I may not look the greatest but you live most of your life on that sea and we'll see how you look."

I shook my head, "How do you know she's going to kill me?"

"Now, you're finally talking some sense. I can see that look in your eye, boy. Tell me deep down that you don't already love her."

I had to pause for a little while thinking.

"You can't tell me, can you?"

Well, try this. Look inside way down in your guts and tell me what it's like when you leave her."

I closed my eyes, and surprisingly, did what she said. I felt a hunger, no, a pain, like... I opened my eyes, "I'm going to feel like a part of me is always going to be here, standing right here looking out at the sea."

"Damn, too late. I was hoping, I would save you at least. She has you. Just like she did me, so many years ago, right here. Same as you, Captain found me right here just like this, and gave me a job on the sea that I love."

I felt a chill that had nothing to do with the breeze as if something passed between me and this strange woman beside me.

"Well, nothing for it, boy, I might as well tell you what is going to happen. You will either end up like me, working your life on the sea, maybe you'll live to a ripe old age. Maybe she'll kill you in a storm or an accident. You might just go home, wherever that is gonna be, but you'll always have that heartache of leavin' her behind. You'll spend the rest of your life getting back here to her and if you can't you'll die of heartbreak, that's the final way she'll get ya. It's a place in your heart no one will ever be able to touch. No lover but the sea will ever be able to satisfy you now."

I shook my head a little, not completely believing this woman. She might be half-crazy, but she was making some

sense. I could feel it way down inside me already. I looked over at her and she looked at me and I saw how old she was in her sad, lonely eyes and that chill came back. "What's your name?"

"Matter much?"

"Yes, actually it does to me. Mine's Jeremy, Jeremy Thatcher."

"Collete Peterson, my shipmates call me Cole though."

I nodded, "So what do I do now?"

Cole looked back out over the sea for a moment, "You, know, boy, I was a drifter like you."

"How do you know I am a drifter?"

She looked down at my bag and said, "That bag has seen some hard days, didn't figure that came from being drug around a college."

Looking at my tattered and worn bag with fresh eyes, "Yeah, I guess."

"Anyways, Captain pretty much told me what I told you. I was just like you back then. He took me in as a crew member, taught me everything he could. I'm gonna miss him. He was like a father to me. Now, boy, we never told anyone where he found me, until now."

"Thanks..."

She shrugged, "Well, I guess I might be able to help you a little. Seems like you're on same path I was. Got a pen and paper?"

I dug a pen and my notebook out of my bag, and started to hand it to her. She took them from me, "This note is for the captain of the Shining Star vessel. They do the odd job, fishing on occasion, tug

work, what have you. Captain's name is Williams. That's it, just Williams. Just say this is from Cole but remember my full name." Then she wrote the letter. It was a letter of recommendation for me to take her place on the ship as a member of the crew and it had some personal things to the various crew members. I found it odd, but maybe she was just retiring. Anyway, she had a lot of nice things to say about me, surprisingly enough. She finished it wishing everyone a farewell and fair seas.

"Well, I guess that 'bout does it for me. Nice, to meet you, Jeremy."

"Can't stay any longer?"

"Fog's rolling in, boy. Can't you smell it in the air?"

I took a deep breath in and could smell the heaviness in the air as the air began to get denser. "Yeah, I guess so. Thank you, for everything."

"Don't thank me yet, she's still gonna kill you. I am just giving you a choice as to how you want her to do it."

"Guess so. Will I meet you again?"

"Probably. Hopefully not too soon, though."

I started to ask what that meant but the words just seemed to fall into the silence and heaviness of the fog. I turned, looking back to my companion and watched her as she seemed to melt into the fog along the pier. One second she was there, the next she just wasn't. After a while, I left myself, going back to the cheap hotel room to crash until the next day.

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After waking and cleaning up, I made my way down to the docks. I checked with the harbor master as to the location of the Shining Star. He gave me the directions to the slip she was in and I walked down to where she was berthed. I looked at the ship thinking, Well, it isn't a pretty ship but it is definitely one that sees a lot of work. I was judging this by the fact that a lot of the other ships around looked shiny and practically unused. The "Shining Star" needed painting and countless other little bits here and there fixed and polished. The whole boat just seemed to snub its nose at its neighbors because they didn't get what a real worker did. The harbor master told me she had just arrived early from a long stretch. I hailed one of the crew members, a stout looking middle-aged man. He looked a bit worn from what I could see. I inquired after Captain Williams and he went to get the captain who showed up a few minutes later.

"What can I do you for?"

"Well, Captain Williams, it's sort of unusual. I have a message to deliver to you and I understand you might have an opening for a crew member."

Honestly, it looked like I shot both of them. The Captain and the other man looked at each other sideways. Finally after some silent message seemed to pass between the two of them, Captain Williams said, "Come on up. I think the whole crew may want to hear this. We will wait to hear everything when we are all assembled."

"She told me to give it to you."

The Captain squinted, "You said,

she told you? Who is this person?"

I shrugged, "Said you guys called her Cole, her name's Collette..." I watched as the Captain's face turned white as a sheet.

He nearly barked, "When did she give you this message?"

"Last night, she wrote a letter for you while we were talking on the fishing pier."

He turned away, "Come up, now and not another word."

The other man was rooted in place and just stared at me as I climbed up the ladder onto the ship.

The Captain woodenly said, "Welcome to the Shining Star."

"Thank you, sir."

"Follow me. Both of you. Francis unglue yourself from that deck."

We followed the captain through the main hatch up to the bridge. He grabbed the intercom mic and called all the crew members to assemble in the bridge. I watched as a motley assortment of men and one other woman, not Colette, assembled in the bridge. The captain looked at me with intensity in his eyes and said, "Wait a minute," and he searched in a drawer pulling out a paper, setting it on some navigational charts. I recognized Colette's unique handwriting style. He looked back at me, "Now give me that letter."

I dug it out of my bag and handed it to him; he put it right beside the other one reading it. It appeared he read it at least a couple of times before speaking. His voice was hoarse when he did. "I want

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everyone to read this. It's from Cole. Apparently she wrote it last night. This young man talked with her out on the fishing pier. She decided he should replace her as a member of this crew." There were a lot of sideways glances and mumbling as one after another each person read the letter. It seemed as if there was something in it for each one of them. They each had to turn away after reading some particular section. I finally couldn't take anymore saying, "Captain, what's going on here? Everyone is acting like Colette is..."

"Dead." The Captain interrupted.

"Yes."

"She is. She was washed overboard not a week and a half ago. That is why we are in port early. Her body is lying at the bottom of the ocean, but you seem to have had a heart to heart conversation with her last night."

It all made sense to me in that one instant. I let out a long breath feeling those chills go straight through my soul. "She told me the sea would kill me one way or another. I would always leave a part of me in the spot where I first fell in love with the sea. She still felt she had a duty to you, Captain and the only tie left she had was that place where she first fell in love with the sea. She told me you found her there and invited her to be a part of the crew. God help me, I understand it."

The Captain turned away from all of us in that moment. "We never told anyone where I found her. I knew you weren't lying when you mentioned that pier. Welcome to the crew, Jeremy. Cole would have wanted you to have her bunk, I

would imagine." He fell silent but I could see in the reflection of the window the tears streaming down the wrinkles etched like canyons in the old captain's face.

## Desdemona and the Donkey

Jessica Marshall

She exhaled the smoke in a perfect stream. It was raining, but she kept her windows all the way down; she didn't want the cigarette smoke to cloud her vision through the windshield. She had never so intently studied a workplace before. But it fascinated her: the white paint had faded and chipped into decay gray, the balcony above the porch slouched in disrepair, the porch itself a haven for broken bicycles, appliances, dressers.

No place had ever looked more like her childhood home.

She would do it. This was her last seven minutes of heaven before she walked up those peeled-paint stairs. And then another seven when you walk out, she reminded herself.

Dezzy had killed many people in imaginative and boring ways for the most simple and the most complex reasons. Never bothered her. Even her employers would note her callous viciousness. Her response for over a decade? "Tear in a bucket-motherfuck it, sugar." Too much of her had been ripped apart for her to attempt to put it all back together—you were torn apart in a home like the one you're looking—Shut up. Focus. Why not make easy money when there's nothing else to life? She'd never had any qualms.

Dezzy killed kids. Not often, mostly, they had been collateral damage, but every now and then there would be a direct order to take out an entire family. She could understand. Kids can remember. Kids can talk. Kids are witnesses. But this, this was way fucking different.

There's no one else to take the job, she inhaled Camel smoke. If you don't do

this you shatter your reputation as heartless, she shot the smoke out the right side of her mouth. You'll never get another commission like this. You could even retire-she cut her own thought off. Retire to fucking what, Dezzy? The South god-damned Seas? She tossed the butt out of the window. She imagined she heard the fizzle in the damp.

She opened her purse and reached for the Ruger Mark III Hunter. Didn't need a large caliber for this one. And it had the integral suppressor. Dezzy went through her checklist one more time: sidearm in a garter holster, obnoxious peacock eye-shadow, ugly brown skirt-suit with uglier brown shoes, clipboard, wig on straight—Dezzy knew that costume was key.

She stepped out of the nondescript sedan (one of many props) and walked to the dilapidated house. She marched up the steps, as a good soldier-Mercenary-she corrected and knocked briskly on the rotted door.

"Hello?" a small white face of at least eighty appeared behind the chain. Why secure the chain on a door that looks like it would fall down with a gentle nudge? Poor people never make any sense.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Stevens. I'm Tina Whey from Social Services—we have an appointment this afternoon."

"Oh? I was thinking that was tomorrow," Mrs. Stevens' watery blue eyes looked up curiously, blue through yellow cataracts.

Dezzy checked the clipboard, paused. "No, I'm sorry Mrs. Stevens; it is

scheduled for today. By the law you are required to let me in."

"Alright then. Come on in. You're just not the one they usually send..." Mrs. Stevens shut the door and then opened it wide once free of the superfluous chain. Dezzy couldn't help but thank the fear of stringent laws, and she stepped in.

Dezzy could smell Hamburger Helper and hear The Price is Right coming from the kitchen. She found the combination nauseating. She thought of her mother pretending to be a mother—Only she wore only a silk robe, open, and track marks. Dezzy snapped herself back into the now. After all, the scene was very normal for an American family's rainy afternoon.

"It sure is coming down out there. You want some coffee or something?" Mrs. Stevens cut the ends off of her words like cigars, in that kindly, Southern accent only old women can properly obtain.

"No thank you, Mrs. Stevens. I would like to check on the infant first."

"Oh, her name's Janie—don't you have it there?" Mrs. Stevens tried to peek at the clipboard, her curlers brushing Dezzy's slim shoulder. Dezzy instantly stepped back, "I assure you Mrs. Stevens, I have all the necessary information. I apologize if I'm being too direct, but this is actually my first house call, as it were." Dezzy tried to look down in an embarrassed way, shying, smiling.

"Well, I gotta grab lunch off the stove. Janie's sleeping right in there," and she pointed to the open room to her left. Instead of curtains, sheets hung over the windows. It was no nursery, but a living

room with a crib shoved in the corner. As Dezzy crossed what she imagined someone once called a foyer, she noted Mrs. Stevens had not put back the chain on the door.

"Thank you so much, Mrs. Stevens."

Mrs. Stevens shuffled off in her house shoes to the stove. Dezzy walked deliberately toward the bars of the crib.

She looked down on the sleeping baby—dark curls spun around her head, one fist up by her face in defiance, the shallow movements of breathing. Janie looked as sweet as a babe. As sweet as two million dollars. Do you know if you had a nursery? Surely not. Did you have a crib?

Dezzy removed the Ruger from her purse and pressed the gun, heart to shoulder, against her chest. She took a deep breath, grabbed a ratty and obviously well-loved Eeyore that occupied the cradle and put it between the muzzle of her gun and the child's cranium.

Remember what Daddy taught you for the tough shots. Inhale. Let half the air out. Hold it.

No. Hold it. Last chance to jump off this train, babe. Dezzy cradled the gun once again against her chest, fought the desire to set Eeyore down and stroke the child's head. She inhaled the steely scent of the barrel.

It's a job. They're all nasty; they're all work.

But this little girl is dying to prove a point. Not for revenge, not to protect a throne—just to show how vicious one man can be, how far and black his reach is.

And it reminds you of you.

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It's just a house. It's just game show  
theme music.

But this little girl could be you! With  
a family that—

Just shut up. You're not ruining  
your reputation by backing out last min-  
ute.

This is going to bother you at night.

But two million dollars won't bother  
me a bit.

Blood money.

It's all blood money.

Dezzy blocked out her misgivings.  
She put the muzzle of the gun against  
Eeyore's seam of a spine. Inhale. Let half  
the air out. Now squeeeeeze the trigger—  
and it was over. She dropped the stuffed  
donkey onto what she knew was under-  
neath, slid the gun back into the bulky  
purse. She was certain she was going to  
vomit, but swallowed it back, Focus.

Dezzy moved fast, silently to the  
door and slipped out as Drew Carrey,  
strange that I miss Bob Barker, waited  
patiently as a desperate woman named  
Deborah tried to interpret her husband's  
hand signals in the audience. Mrs. Stevens  
stared at the noise and the lights as she  
scooped Hamburger Helper onto plates  
for the children upstairs.

Dezzy was out the door, down the  
steps and around the block getting into  
another nondescript sedan in one minute  
15 seconds. She turned the key in the igni-  
tion, lit a Camel cigarette, and put on her  
signal.



"I can handle it."

"I can do it."

"I said I can handle it."

James lit a cigarette and leaned back in the cheap plastic chair. A nickel-plated .357 lay on the card table in front of him. Everything in the kitchen was yellow from the floor to the flickering lights. The sound of crickets came through the broken window behind him, but nothing else. Yet. The slow, rhythmic pounding on the bathroom door down the hall began again. The thin wood couldn't keep the smell of death at bay. Rebecca stood on the other side of the table. She stared at the gun. He stared at her and exhaled.

"You don't have to do this."

"Don't I?"

"Killing family is hard."

"I know."

"No you don't. Not yet."

"And you do?" She glared at him.

He held her gaze and took another long drag. He exhaled.

"Yes."

Her eyes searched his face for a moment and fell back to the gun. "He's my brother. I can't just leave him. I can do this. I have to do this." She whispered, but he heard her.

"I'm waiting."

"Shut up."

"We don't have much time."

"I know. Shut up."

"If he doesn't break down the door before I finish my cigarette I'll take care of it."

"Shut up!"

He exhaled, flicked the ash from

his cigarette, and looked at the gun. She followed his gaze. She picked it up as if it were a dead animal. The full size frame was heavy, but the metal wasn't cold.

The crickets stopped.

She turned toward the hallway. He leaned forward and crushed out his cigarette.

"Do you want my help?"

She paused, but did not face him. She turned the corner and entered the hallway. He could no longer see her.

The pounding stopped. The door opened. A moan. A shot.

James rose and walked into the hallway. She was leaning against the doorframe, staring at what she had done. He put a hand on her shoulder. With his other hand he gently retrieved the gun. He didn't look at the mess on the bathroom floor. She didn't look at anything else.

"I'm sorry."

"Are you?"

"We have to leave."

"That's why you're sorry?"

"Yes."

"Not for..."

"I said I could handle it."

"You did."

Click. Another round. Click. Another. Click. Another. Full. Ten mags. Thirty rounds each. 7.62. Rifle oiled. Check action. Snap! Scope already zeroed.

Check pistol. Loaded. One in chamber. Seven rounds. Four extra mags.

Slide all mags into pouches on vest. Feel weight. Heavy.

Duffel bag. Gas mask. Two claymores. Two frags. Silencer for rifle. Attach later. Rifle in bag. 1911 in holster. Bag in back seat of car. Trunk full of semtex. Handicapped sticker on mirror. Can't get towed. Ruin plan.

Driving. Keep it under the speed limit. Don't get pulled over. More than a few city cops out today. Nice weather. Trying out their new motorcycles. See them later.

Parked by front door. Perfect. Duffel bag gets a few odd looks. Nobody notices vest. Still hoodie weather.

Elevator to top floor. Roof access. Stash duffel bag. Back down to top floor. Push fire alarm. Make way through crowded hallway, going against flow. Roof access. Claymore set.

Rifle out. People flooding into parking lot. Silencer attached. Magazine rammed home. Slide racked. Detonator retrieved. Click.

Car explodes. Semtex propels ball bearings into crowd of people. Messy. Screaming. Confusion.

Pop! Pop! Pop! Three go down. Gunshots muffled. People take cover.

Sirens. Fire truck. Squad cars. A few rounds into lead car. No hits. Message sent. Cops tumble out. Scramble

for cover. Tagged one. Firemen. Shoot oxygen tanks. Civilians make break for it. Easy targets. Lead. Three torso shots.

Cops firing back. Bullets splinter brick. Blind return fire. Empty mag. Eject. Slam another home. Wait for reload. Carrying Glocks. Ten rounds or eighteen? Ten. Reloading. My turn.

Two behind car. Civilians too. First grenade. Hits top of car, bounces once, explodes. Cars not going up like in movies. Disappointing.

Police truck. SWAT team. Tactical gear. SMGs. Gas masks. Snipers in place? Unknown. No other vantage points. Tallest building on campus. Lob grenade from this distance? Doubtful. Assault shields. Bullet proof. Should have brought more explosives.

SWAT running towards building. Other cops keeping people down. Leave cover. Get shot. Not going to use all of these bullets. News helicopter. Too far to hit. Fire anyway. Leaves in a hurry.

Claymore blows. How many casualties? Toss grenade. Explosion. How many?

Behind heating unit. Trained on entrance. Flash bang! Down! Boom!

Can't hear. Still see. Back up. Two targets. Fire. Hit one. Other sees me. Opens fire. Down! Thin metal doesn't stop 9 mm rounds. Punches to torso. Hurts. Vest holds. Need another grenade. Don't have one. Pop around left side. Shoot legs. More targets. Firing back. Down! Toss rifle over. Set claymore. Draw pistol. Want to see hands. No. Gas over top. Pull mask on. One comes left. Claymore

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blows. Shouts. Right side. Fire pistol.  
Returns fire. Arms hit. Chest too. Can't  
move. Passing out. Pain. Blood loss.  
Neck warm. See spurt. Carotid severed.  
Game over. High score?

The shopkeeper leaned his chair back against the wall, propped his feet up on the counter next to the old fashioned register, and opened his copy of the Laredo Morning Times to the sports section. He whistled tunelessly as he read, completely oblivious to the noise he made. He couldn't read at home, because the whistling annoyed his wife. Everything seemed to annoy his wife, most of all him.

"The poor, miserable old cow," thought the shopkeeper, "she resents me for tying her down, and she resents life for making her old. Poor thing probably resents the food she eats for making her fat." The shopkeeper wasn't quite sure why his wife was even married to him—she certainly didn't seem to like him very much, which, in turn, made it difficult for him to like her. Because of his wife, the shopkeeper was grateful for his shop.

The bell overhanging the door rang as a customer walked in, and startled the shopkeeper out of his reverie. "Well hey, Fred," said the man wearing blue jeans and a dirty Carhart jacket, "whatcha readin'?"

"Howdy, Jim. Just the paper. Dallas lost again. How're you doin'?"

"Not bad, not bad. Listen, Fred, I need to get a case o' coke off you—my kids got into my secret stash and it's my turn to bring coke to work. I'll pay you back Friday."

"Now Jim, you know I can't let you have anything without paying for it first. I'm tryin' to run a business here. I mean, what would happen if you just worked on people's houses for free?"

"Shit, Fred, I do work on houses for

free for friends and family. And shit, we's friends and family, ain't we? Shit, Fred, I knowed you since we was six years old, and you can't even let me borrow a case of coke? I mean, I could understand if it was something expensive, but coke is what—three, four dollars?"

The shopkeeper sighed. "Alright Jim, you can have a case of coke. Just make sure you're in here Friday to pay me back. I have to keep track of all that stuff, you know."

"No problem, Fred. Hey, you're a good friend, man." Jim sauntered to the back of the store and listened for the shopkeeper to begin whistling while he pretended to look over the coke. As soon as he heard whistling, he grabbed four quarts of motor oil off the shelf and stuffed them into his Carhart jacket. After securing the oil, he grabbed a case of Mountain Dew and held it in front of the bulge in his jacket as he exited the store. "Hey, thanks, Fred. I'll be back to pay you for this on Friday."

The shopkeeper waved, but didn't look up as Jim exited the store. He sighed again and thought, "You simply cannot do business with people you know. Everybody wants some sort of discount or handout." The shopkeeper had been in business for three months, and every day it seemed someone vilified him for trying to turn a profit—for trying to keep his store alive. People talked about him behind his back and gave him evil looks because he wouldn't give them a discount on coke, or he made their kid pay for a candy bar.

He had established his shop in an old, old building right in the middle of the

small town of Aspirations, Texas. The ceiling sagged and the ugly floor tiles were cracked and chipped. The shop smelled moldy and looked dirty, despite the shopkeeper's best efforts to keep it neat and tidy. It seemed that no matter how many mousetraps or boxes of poison he set out, the number of mice never diminished. The building had been a pool hall twenty years ago, and he and his friends liked to watch the old men play pool while they ate ice cream.

The shopkeeper, along with everyone else in town, had grown up in Aspirations. Nobody new ever came to small towns like this, and so everyone knew everyone else. The town was centered on the intersection of Haybailer Road and Texas State Highway 132. They had six streets, one stop sign, a few dozen houses, and five churches. The preachers all had it in for one another.

The bell rang again as another customer came in. "Well, hey Danny, how you doin'?" asked the shopkeeper with a friendly smile.

"Oh... I'm alright, I guess. Lawnmower's broken."

"Well, that's too bad. Did you see that lawnmower I've got out in front of the shop? It's in real nice shape—I got it offa old Percy Stevenson and you know how he takes care of things. Only eighty dollars and she's yours."

"Yeah, I wanted to ask you about that, Fred. See, I've got about ten houses to finish up today, and then I'll be done for a few days. I was wonderin' if you'd just let me borrow that lawnmower for today, and I can fix mine up tomorrow when I've

got time.

"I can't let you borrow that, Danny, it's store property. How am I supposed to sell it if people are always borrowing it?"

"Oh, come on, Fred. It'll only be for today—I'll have it back before you know it's gone."

"How many stores do you go to, Danny, that just let you borrow stuff?"

"Shit, Autozone lets me borrow tools. I mean, it's a pretty sad day when one of your best friends won't even let you borrow his lawnmower. I mean, come on man, it's me—ain't I always been there for you? Shit, I even let you fuck my little sister at my 21st birthday party, and she was only fifteen. Come the fuck on, Fred."

"God damn it, I didn't fuck your sister. I passed out, and when I woke up she was sleeping next to me."

"She didn't have no clothes on, did she?"

"She was in her underwear. Clothes or not, I didn't fuck her, God damn it."

"Ok, fine, whatever you say, Fred. But come on, man, let me borrow that lawnmower."

The shopkeeper sighed. "Fine, but you better take real fuckin' good care of it, Danny. And I want you here waitin' for me tomorrow morning when I open shop, awright?"

"Hey, that's what I was plannin' on doin' anyway. You're a good friend, Fred." The shopkeeper handed Danny the lawnmower key, and Danny drove it away to another part of town. "You simply cannot do business with people you know," thought the shopkeeper.

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He had first had the idea to reopen the old pool hall out of nostalgia. The shopkeeper, before he was a shopkeeper, had wanted to grab onto that piece of his childhood again—innocence and ice cream and old men showing boys trick shots on a worn out pool table. The more he thought about it, the more opening a shop in Aspirations



Having just moved to a new house—which isn't really a new house—in the country, Jake doesn't know any kids nearby. All of his friends that he left behind at Eden Elementary are probably having summer adventures at Pebble Beach or going to Starplex Cinema to watch the new Harry Potter movie, while he just sits alone on the long wooden porch of his old new house surrounded by trees. At least his parents waited until after school was out to move. He is thankful for that.

Still, being just an eight-year-old boy, Jake worries about making friends and having someone to play with. There were all kinds of boys living close by before they moved. So far he hasn't seen any boys—or girls for that matter. Girls are no fun anyway, all they ever do is play with dolls and put on makeup, Jake thought to himself. He doesn't have any brothers or sisters. His parents decided a long time ago that they didn't want more children. Jake knew that his birth was difficult on his parents. After all, he had been born two months early and had all kinds of problems. His mom wouldn't tell him everything, but she calls him her "Little Miracle."

Jake watches his mom as she pulls weeds around their front porch. They didn't have a front porch at their old house, but it was brick, new, and right next door to his best friend Gabe. The only new thing on this house is the door that his parents installed last week. It is shiny and hunter green to match the shutters they haven't put up. The new door just makes the peeling, white paint on the house look even worse. There isn't a whole lot Jake

actually likes about this house. The worst thing of all is the creepy third floor. Jake refuses to go up the rickety stairs to see what is up there. He swears he has heard footsteps creaking across his ceiling at night.

Jake's mom is very protective of him—probably due to the fact that he was premature. Even though he is strong and healthy now, she constantly reminds him to be careful no matter what the situation. Yesterday she told him to be careful while taking out the trash. He has done it a billion times before it seems like, so it is rather annoying to him for her to keep repeating it over and over. She has stayed at home with him as long as he can remember. She used to work before he was born, but decided to stay home to keep him safe when he was just a baby.

Jake's dad is cutting the overgrown bushes covering parts of the porch. "The house hasn't been lived in for quite a long time. The realtor said it has been vacant for around fifteen years" his dad said. That is obvious to Jake as he stares at the moss covered chimney and dead vines curling around the porch spindles. He figures that must've been why the house smelled like an old coat closet when they first moved in too.

His dad is the opposite of his mom. Jake calls him "the fun one" to his friends. He lets Jake do things that his mom wouldn't in a million years! Last year he promised Jake that he would take him on his first hunting trip next season. His dad made him swear not to tell his mom though. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it," his dad had said as he

cleaned the barrel of his rifle. Jake didn't dare tell her. She wouldn't understand. Hunting is man stuff, he thought. His dad used to work as a foreman for an automotive factory, but his job was cut—which is why they moved. They sold their expensive brick house to get something they call "homier."

Sitting on the wide, splintered porch steps, Jake stares blankly into the woods surrounding their house. He absentmindedly twirls the denim fringe lining the large hole in the knee of his blue jeans.

"Why don't you go get a book to read out here on the porch, Jake?" His mom asks as she pushes her glasses up with the back of her wrist—avoiding her glove-covered hands.

"It's summer. I don't have to read in the summer!"

His mom shrugs and looks at him as if to say, "I don't know what to tell you," and continues to pull weeds.

For the next few weeks Jake moped around the house, dragging his feet heavily, leaving scuff marks from his black sneakers. He missed his friends. He missed his old room because it was right across from Gabe's room. They used to signal each other with flashlights and use Walkie Talkies. It's so boring here...the only things out my window here is trees, lots and lots of trees.

During the few weeks while he was sulking, his parents were busy fixing everything that was wrong with their new house. His dad fixed the doorbell, added shutters, and refinished all of the floors, while his mom painted the shutters, planted flowers, and painted Jake's bedroom. He

pretends not to like it around his mom, but really he loves it. One wall she completely covered in old maps. Some of them look like treasure maps and others just plain. She even painted a treasure chest on another wall overflowing with gold and jewels.

Lying on his bed, watching the ceiling fan blades turn, he heard a loud ring of the doorbell. Who is visiting us? His bedroom was at the very top of the stairs, so he peeked out his door to see who it was. His mother had opened the door and standing there holding a silver tin with a big yellow bow was a woman and a young girl—about his age. She was rather odd looking. She had curly brown hair, but half of it was twisted in a ponytail at the top of her head. Her clothes didn't match and neither did her shoes. Oh great...I hope Mom doesn't expect me to be her friend, he thought. Jake stepped a little closer to get a better look and the floor creaked beneath him, which startled his mother and their guests.

"Jake, come say hello to our neighbors."

He groaned, and then slowly trudged down the stairs to meet the new neighbors as his milky-white cheeks grew red. The mother apologized for not coming over sooner, but they just got back from vacation. They introduced themselves as Emily and Anna. His mother invited Anna and her daughter in for tea and Anna accepted and offered the tin of butter cookies.

"Jake, why don't you show Emily the walls I painted in your room? I'm sure she would like that." Jake's mother smiled

and sent them up the stairs. Jake rolled his eyes and reluctantly took Emily to his room. When he got into his room he immediately plopped down on the bed.

"So here is my room. Congratulations you've seen it, I don't have any dolls for you to play with though" he said sarcastically.

"Actually, I don't play with dolls. You don't like me much, do you?"

"Where do you even live? There aren't any houses around us." Jake asked, ignoring the question.

"We live back in the woods. You can't see it from here." She walked to the open window and pointed out, "Over there. We live that way. It's just a short walk. It's dangerous though. You probably wouldn't like it," she stated, looking out at the overgrown wood. "It is really tough to get to. First, you have to cross a field of giant bumblebees, only to find your way to a moat filled with blood-thirsty crocs and enormous, man-eating snakes. If the bees, crocs, and snakes don't catch you I'm sure the cougars guarding the house will."

At this point Jake was sitting at the edge of his bed listening closely. He was curious now. This girl must be insane. Then he narrowed his eyes, smirked and said, "Show me."

They raced downstairs to ask permission to see where Emily lived. Sitting at the small kitchen table with piping hot cups of tea and an unopened tin of cookies, their mothers were laughing and carrying on and both just waved them on. Jake was surprised that his mother let him go at all. He thought she must be having a good time. He figured that later, when she

realizes where he went, he would surely be in trouble.

The children hurried outside and trampled through the dense, green grass. They reached the edge of the wood when Emily suddenly stopped.

"Okay Jake, we need to get some supplies along the way. If you see anything useful, pick it up. Trust me; there are lots of useful supplies hiding in the woods."

Jake jokingly grabbed a branch from the ground. It wasn't a large branch. It was barely a branch at all—more like a twig really. "What about this? Can you use this puny thing?"

"Perfect! You have found a club! We can use that on the crocs if we need to. You can never be too careful around crocs." Emily went on telling a story of how her Dad fought the largest croc in the moat. Supposedly, that same croc had taken a large bite out of their house. Her Dad was furious because that was his favorite part of the house! So, he clubbed the croc until it passed out. Then he took it home and tamed it. Now it was their family pet.

Jake cocked his head and gave her a funny look of disbelief.

"I'm serious!" Emily said with stern, gray eyes. "We named him Fluffy. He is the best pet we've ever had. He almost never eats my homework."

Jake put the twig in the back pocket of his raggedy blue jeans and they started walking—branches crackling under their feet. As they walked, Emily asked questions about Jake and his family and told him about her parents and friends at school. He answered her questions reluc-

tantly—not quite sure he wanted a girl to know so much about him. She occasionally stopped and looked around combing the woods for any animals that may have been on their scent.

Along the way, Emily and Jake picked up random garbage for supplies. Emily found an old Maxwell House coffee can and put it on top of her curly brown hair as a tiara. She took the can off when she realized how rusty it was and said that her mother would kill her if she came home with garbage in her hair again. Jake wondered what the first garbage in her hair was, but he didn't ask. He just imagined a stinky banana peel and some two-day-old spaghetti littering her curls. He chuckled, but kept going.

"Stop," Emily whispered suddenly. "Do you hear the giant bumblebees?"

He focused as hard as he could, but didn't hear anything but the wind rustling the leaves in the trees. "Be very still. You stay here and I'll take care of the bees," Emily ordered.

Jake watched as she ran into a small clearing which was covered in a blanket of lilac-colored flowers. A small gust of wind swept through and Jake lifted his head high to smell the fragrant blossoms. Emily frantically waved some large leaves she had found around in the air. She swatted, yelling like a maniac, at what seemed to be nothing. "She is insane," Jake said under his breath as he leaned against a tall tree watching Emily. He couldn't help but think about what he would be doing with Gabe if he hadn't moved. We'd probably be doing something a lot more fun than swatting

imaginary bees.

He squinted his hazel-colored eyes and leaned forward as he held onto a tall maple tree; he realized that there were swarms of bugs around Emily. "Gnats," he said rolling his eyes. He grabbed the closest and largest leaf and helped her. If nothing else we can get to her house sooner and go home. Thinking he felt some of the gnats on his neck and in his ears, Jake dropped the leaf and began to smack at them with his hands—messing up his already ruffled, sandy hair. When the bugs had gone he looked at Emily and asked, "Did you really think those were giant bumblebees?"

Emily looked at Jake with narrowed eyes and replied, "Did you really think they weren't?"

They continued walking and Emily told Jake more stories. One in particular involved her friend Kate lassoing a giant bumblebee. "Kate loves honey. So she caught herself the biggest giant bumblebee she could. Now she gets as much as she wants, whenever she wants...too much really. Her mom sent us some honey bread, honey loaf, and honey cake last summer. Funny though, she never sent us any honey at all..." Emily continued the story and explained that Kate treats her bumblebee real nice. She always takes it out to let it fly and gives it a variety of flowers.

Jake stumbled on a small log because he was listening so well to Emily's stories that he wasn't paying attention to where he was walking. She didn't see and kept on walking, spouting another wild tale. He got up quickly and brushed the

dirt from his white tee shirt and blue jeans. The log was light, so he grabbed it and hurried to meet Emily who hadn't stopped to take a breath. I hope I didn't miss anything.

"What's that thing for?"

"We will need a bridge to cross the moat, right?" Jake explained as he chuckled.

"Good thinking Jake!"

Jake stuck out his slender chest and continued walking through the tall, thick trees. They were deeper in the woods now and the sun found it difficult to reach the ground. The dense woods absorbed the heat of the sun. The only gleam of light was shining directly into a shallow creek.

"There's the moat! Be careful Jake, there are snakes and crocs in those waters...see?" She pointed to a small, green lizard across the creek and a worm wriggling at their feet.

Jake jumped back at the sight of the worm flopping around. "It's okay! Let's build a bridge." They gathered sticks and logs to build a small bridge across the water. When a suitable bridge was built, Emily crossed, one foot in front of the other, until she reached safety. Jake followed, but lost his balance and almost tumbled into the stream. He caught himself. Emily grabbed his hand—which wasn't as bad as he imagined—and pulled him to safety.

They sat on the damp ground to catch their breath. "That was close." Jake said with wide eyes and a heaving chest.

"Close? You were inches away from becoming a croc dinner!"

"Thanks for saving me. Mom would have killed me if I came home with wet

clothes again. You aren't so bad for a girl, I guess." Emily couldn't help but ask what kind of adventures Jake had with his old friends where he always came home in wet clothes. Jake then told her a story about him and Gabe. They frequently visited a small pond to go fishing and rock skipping, and there was a large tree right next to it. Gabe dared Jake to climb the tree and swing on the large branch that extended over the edge of the pond. "It didn't work out too well. I sat on the tree branch and slipped off--into the water—when I tried to swing on it!"

They laughed hysterically and got up to continue their adventure. Jake could smell the delicious scent of freshly baked cookies lingering in the breeze. They saw a small log cabin about 30 yards away and Emily stopped him.

"Okay, here is my house. Watch out for the cougars though. There is a family of them close by." Jake grinned. He grabbed a bit of old netting that he had found on the trip and then the twig from his pocket that he didn't use on the crocs to make a net.

"I'm ready. I have a net to catch one."

They lunged forward and as they did about five calico kittens came running from the porch.

"Cougars!" Emily yelled.

They ran forward and let the kittens chase them. They laughed and screamed happily as the kittens playfully pawed at their feet. After a few minutes Jake realized that the sun was starting to set. Emily picked up a kitten and handed it to him. "Here, you caught a cougar." She smiled.

---

"Are you ready to go back home?"

Jake looked quickly around and saw a round, rusted tin lying on the ground. He picked it up and looked at Emily, "I thought I saw a grizzly bear earlier. We might need this old bear trap."

Emily smiled, "Don't even get me started on bears. Once, a friend of mine..." her voice trailed off as they headed back to Jake's house.

That night he told his parents of all the happenings of the day. He explained how Emily isn't really a girl like he knew at Eden Elementary. He said she was cool enough to be a boy and that Gabe would probably agree, so he didn't think it would be fair to ignore her.

Jake and Emily have plans for lots more adventures. Jake can't think of a single boring day since he met her. His old new house even seems more interesting. Maybe someday they will explore that creepy third floor.





## Part 2: Poetry

Writing is a socially acceptable  
form of schizophrenia.

- E.L. Doctorow

## Atheistic Arts and Crafts

Z.A. Bishop

---

For his faith he sat making a crucifix not to  
crucify but to testify.

He sat filing the metal away like wind and water  
eroded great expanses of stone into little more  
than pebbles.

He would begin to believe when he was done and  
he believed he would be done when he  
believed it to be perfect.

All the things he knew he ain't.

Simply filing away the substance of what it was sup-  
posed to signify.

Filing the brass away he sat and sat as the unkempt  
grass outside swayed and swayed...

So he sat filing away.

**An Attempt at Writing Terrible Poetry**  
Z.A. Bishop

---

Damn! Your boobies rock!  
Let me touch them with my face  
Motorboat baby!

My mom burst in the room...

**"What the fuck is this?"**

... she said thrusting a paper at me.

**"Don't you think I have enough to deal with?"**

I knew that tone...

**"I do your laundry!"**

...it wasn't a change in volume but rather possession.

**"I cook your food!"**

Whenever school wrote home to mom...

**"I work to put clothes on your back!"**

"I'm sorry momma!"

... to say her son was failing...

**"I go to school to give you a future!"**

"I'm sorry momma!"

...or her son had "unacceptable penmanship"...

**"And you repay me with this?"**

"I'm sorry, please, momma."

... or her son was "untidy in work and appearance"...

**"You will do your homework!"**

"I'm sorry momma, the other kids,  
they make fun of me."

... or her son didn't turn in work on time...

**"You will get good grades!"**

"No momma, stop!"

... or her son possibly had learning disabilities...

**"My son is not an idiot!"**

"I'm sorry (gasps)... momma..."

Her son felt her shame.

"Momma, you're... you're choking me..."

[Fade to black]

Here we are  
At last  
We have waited so long

Love has been between us for years  
But never acknowledged  
Here we are

You were my best friend  
And now my true love  
We have waited so long

Your eyes  
Your touch  
Here we are

I sat quiet for years  
Not making these feelings known  
We have waited so long

Now you are mine  
At last  
Here we are  
We have waited so long

They were hanging from the streetlights,  
Limbs rigid  
From the bitter night,  
It was frigid.  
They dangled from the ropes  
As the breeze made them sway.  
They'd lost all of their hopes,  
The cold taking them away.  
There was no afterlife  
For them in the end,  
No better life  
For them to mend.  
Feeble sighs  
Followed their goodbyes.



## Sticky Buttons

K.E. Crose

---

Whoosh  
Going up  
Ding  
Doors open  
A woman walks in  
Short black skirt  
Tall stiletto heels

Whoosh  
Going up  
Ding  
Doors open  
A man walks in  
Button up dress shirt with a green tie  
Black dress pants

Whoosh  
Going up  
Ding  
Doors open  
No one gets in, no one leaves  
Her eyebrows raise  
He grins

Whoosh  
Going up  
A large hand slams the emergency stop  
Floor jerks  
Tie pulled  
Lips together  
Tongues exploring

Belt unbuckles  
Pants unzip  
Hard penis peeks out of boxers  
Skirt up  
Panty hose and panties down  
Facing the same direction  
Front to back

Palms braced against the wall  
Hands quickly spreading ass cheeks  
Penis slowly forced in  
Gasping  
Faster

let me stop  
all these things unleashed  
take back these feelings,  
I want my own returned,  
I want the emptiness  
of before.

I've harmed too many  
unlocked.  
Let no one hear my voice  
again-  
the twisted lure

let me kneel down  
on a bed of the  
darkest flower.

Lady Death, take me into  
your arms. It is  
you who I've always wanted.  
Let me lay my head upon your  
chest as I fall asleep;  
my lips pressed against yours;  
your toxic kiss  
drifting me off  
as you hold my hand  
and take me into the  
the void.

I Once compared  
Myself to a pear. I  
Said someone had  
Taken a chance, come  
Out of their reclusive shell,  
And taken a bite out of said Pear.  
Then again, I am forced to ask myself:  
How many others like this said person  
Has taken a bite of said Pear? One...two...a  
Few actually by my count, I must say. And  
The question then that must be answered  
Is: how many more bites can be taken  
From this said Pear, before this  
Said pear is completely  
Eaten away?

## Good Morning, Salvador Dali

Michael Gibbs

---

A man woke up on a pomegranate,  
hopped out of his refrigerator, and into the  
sink for a shower. He undressed. Then he  
went to bed and made breakfast, French  
toast smothered in pillow feathers. After  
eating, he chain-sawed his teeth, combed  
his pubic hair with a fork, and flossed his  
armpits with a jump rope.

"Hygiene is good exercise in the morning,"  
he thought.

He opened the drawer in his stomach  
and pulled out a golden clock. It melted  
through his fingers and plopped on the  
floor. Fluffy, his pet tiger, licked up the pud-  
dle of time, then died from old age and  
was instantly reborn as a rug.

Before leaving, he tossed a Doc Martin on  
his head, fitted baseball caps on his feet,  
and wiped the Red Sox on the fluffy new  
rug. Then he opened the front window  
and stepped on to a dark storm cloud,  
the shape of a handlebar mustache, and  
rode it to the middle of the sea. There she  
was, naked, floating on her head, waiting  
for him to rain upon her.

counterfeit heroes  
sneak through the simulated city  
solving fabricated crimes  
on the theatrical stage  
of the American dreamscape  
make-believe beings  
walk the man-made streets  
crash test dummies  
slamming into Reality TV episodes  
plastic words fall from plastic lips  
synthetic sounds scream  
while the artificial infidels  
shake their pseudo-cellulite  
for the green Gold Almighty  
mock love  
and a false sense of fulfillment

## Bourbon Street

Elsie Klute

---

A dark-eyed Cajun man,  
whose honey voice  
spins webs,  
wraps me  
in brown-sugar arms,  
whispers flying songs,  
as he shows me  
Bourbon Street  
in the wee hours.

In daybreak's heavy fog,  
to mournful bleat  
of steamship horns,  
he waves  
long-jointed fingers  
I know to taste  
from his departing car.  
In the hotel window  
I watch  
until all that remains  
is the reflection  
of my eyes  
on the windowpane.



They are ripe fruit,  
these women  
dressed in satins and silks,  
some wearing hats with veils,  
all with blood-red lips  
and painted nails.

They gather at the bar  
and outlying tables,  
soak loin musk  
into leather seats,  
gold flocked upholstery.

As night unfolds  
cigarette smoke and perfume  
intertwine, grow husky;  
the room warms, foreheads glisten  
and tendrils of hair  
curl wildly.

The bare-chested waiter  
weaves among them,  
ferries drinks and appetizers.  
Mascara lashed eyes summon him;  
a slightly tipsy beauty leans  
to his ear, whispers her order,  
pressing a breast  
into his arm enough to raise  
the manhood in his jeans.  
The rising noted  
crinkles a smile  
at the outer corners  
of her kohl lined, feline eyes  
and tongue moistened  
lips.

## In the Everyday

Elsie Klute

---

I miss you  
in the everyday  
when the furnace kicks on  
and the snow falls

in the everyday  
I sit in the living room  
as the snow falls  
beyond the picture window

I sit in the living room  
watch the gray sky roil  
beyond the picture window  
where out past stretches

a blue sky roils  
on sunny days  
our past stretches  
afternoon shadows spill

on sunny days  
down the icy front yard hill  
afternoon shadows spill  
into the street

down the icy front yard hill  
like our kids when they were young  
sledding into the street  
in the year's first snow

like our kids, only different  
I miss you  
in the everyday  
when the snow falls

## The Wild Sea

Elsie Klute

---

The wild sea talks sweet to me.  
Beating sun seeps into body's knots.  
As far as eyes can see,

satin waves undulate, as we  
meander along our usual route,  
the wild sea talking sweet to me.

She tumbles in, beats cold upon our feet,  
hisses over pebbles, slurps and swishes out.  
As far as eyes can see:

rolling waves, confetti froth, and the  
reeves,skittering helter-skelter in little clots,  
while the wild sea talks sweet to me.

That is to say, the talk was sweet  
when you were here and we were one,  
butas far as eyes can see,

these days the sea flows quietly,  
except in our favorite spot  
where that wild sea still talks sweet to me,  
as far as I can see.

## The House

Miranda Knight

---

I never liked the place.  
This weird brown & black tile  
like shingles as siding.  
The living room spacious though cold.  
Everything was cold.

My room a closet  
close to the backdoor,  
a door that led to the  
backyard filled with cherry, pear and  
apple trees.

The trees were cut down  
flowers mowed over  
roses pruned too far  
leaving a lone stump in the middle that  
was unmovable.

## Movie Time News

Joshua C. Lykins

---

Fur and sequins, cigars and brandy  
All the old classics are still quite dandy.

Here comes Crawford, metal hanger in hand.  
The boss told Mae West, your movie's been banned.

Marlena Dietrich croons La Vienna Rose,  
As Lana Turner strikes her famous pose.

Marilyn whispers, "Diamonds are a girl's best friend."  
While James Dean speeds to his final end.

Elizabeth Taylor's violet eyes spin a spell.  
As she promises him, she'll never tell.

Katherine Hepburn is Bringing up Baby.  
And Audrey danced all night in My Fair Lady.

Jimmy Stewart sees a murder through his window.  
Just as Grace Kelly reaches an emotional crescendo.

Judy Garland sings Come On Get Happy.  
And Doris Day always gets slightly sappy.

After Vivian tragically plummets down the stairs.  
Clark Gable tells her, he no longer cares.

Bette Davis, full of hurt pride,  
Waves her cigarette and replies..."Fasten your seatbelts;  
it's going to be a bumpy ride."

## Shanghai Lilly

Kevin Lykins

---

Long ago I met the Shanghai Lilly dancing in the sun.  
Her dress was made of feathers, gleaming gold, green, and bronze.  
Her beauty was beyond parallel, her skin like an oriental pearl.  
Her hair seemed kissed by fames radiant glow.  
The lips, a blood red heart shaped seduction.  
But the eyes, yes the eyes, were like blue fire, dancing in marble  
spheres.

For all her beauty so pure and fine  
The Shanghai Lilly could not hide.  
Her heart was like a beating stone incased in a gorgeous coffin.  
While the lily spun her web of lies, greed, and deceit  
The public adored her, groveling at her pretty feet.  
Men she played like a harps dancing to her love sick tune.  
Then casting them away she laughed at their bewilderment.  
The perfect wife she seemed to be, yet her husband was not fooled.  
He saw the evil lurking underneath his Lily's lovely façade.  
Unfortunate was the woman who crossed the famous beauty's path  
For her mind was lost.  
The Shanghai Lilly often destroyed the ones she held so close.  
One day the Lilly met her match; it came in a bottle of scotch.  
Whiskey destroyed her, as she destroyed others, slowly and without  
shame.  
She was strong, it's true, but her blunder caused her to come undone.  
Today I saw the famous Lilly, her beauty and glamour lost  
Her face was sagging, her mind was foggy, and her eyes were milky  
with age.  
Long ago I met the Shanghai Lilly dancing in the sun.

She is somebody's daughter  
Cesspool eyes and spider-stilt legs  
Filthy shorts and a tank top, three sizes too big  
Left unattended at the shelter  
Tracks of a failed experiment  
Crawling under her skin  
She stares out the window of the train I take  
to go bargain hunting  
It makes me sick to watch the flash—flash—  
flash of the dim underground lights  
Whizzing by at 40 miles an hour  
So I watch her.

She doesn't notice.

I watch her because she doesn't notice.

She is busy working at a scab  
In the crook of an arm that ends at the elbow  
Spindly fingers and dirty nails  
That haven't been polished in a long, long  
time.  
The train screeches to a stop at Park Street  
And she stands up mechanically  
Still staring out the window at nothing.  
As I watch her stumble off the train  
I wonder what she must have done with the  
rest of her arm.



## The Sound of Springs (Green Awakening)

Jessica Marshall

---

Loud.

And now.

Loud.

And now.

And take my breath away in an old cliché  
take it and don't you say that you don't  
want it need it crave it.

No.

And no.

And yes.

Oh, yes.

How I feel myself fall away in the old cli-  
ché I'm sent,  
Away to crooked beds and bunched  
sheets no sheets and fuck shit and yes yes  
yes.

So this is what Riesling can do to a poet  
That sits alone wanting, and wishing, and  
staying faithful  
For a night  
For one lover.

I wish a rain would come down I wish a  
levee would show me how to break now  
and rebuild myself but I can't play any-  
more I can't stand with a leg in ocean  
and a foot onshore

But I will build myself great enough to be the  
Colossus.

I will stand by the clichés that  
Boys send me to  
That men leer me in  
That women imagine in silken  
Summer straights that have gone crooked  
Again.

We were loud in that snow breaking  
Loud in the clichéd love making  
Loud for spring

And its green awakening.

## Mother Teresa

Lacey Rose Mosey

---

My mother was vanilla musk hugs.  
Brick red lipstick on lips that mine  
were photocopied from.  
Painting her face a delicate ritual  
made more sacred by the time it took,  
while court TV droned in the background.  
Diet Caffeine-free Mountain Dew from  
the gas station.  
Perfect white teeth with dark fillings  
in her molars.  
Skin the color of honey ripened  
by tanning bed visits.  
One southern word for every  
fifty non-southern words.  
Her anger was hours,  
her happiness my minutes.  
Cream lace and black velvet necklaces.  
Driving the car at high speeds  
singing Tammy Wynette at the top  
of her lungs.  
My mother was a dream-catcher  
that gave me the way  
in buttered toast  
on Monday mornings.

People who talk in libraries bother me.  
People who talk on cell phones in libraries should  
be stoned to death.

People who drive below the speed limit make me  
want to attach a battering ram to the front of  
my car.

People who drive below the speed limit when it is  
only 25 MPH are clearly lost, and should pull over  
already for fuck's sake.

People who drive slower than me are idiots.  
People who drive faster than me are crazy.

People who don't use their turn signal, but come to  
a complete stop before turning right are  
usually the same people who should have  
pulled over ten minutes ago.

People who swing their cars out to the right before  
turning left making it harder to drive around  
them should drive smaller cars. If they  
already drive a small car they should ride a  
scooter.

So I can run over them with my battering ram.

People who make lists of all the petty things that  
annoy them should get over themselves.

## Siblings

Jason Padgett

---

You are the family dog,  
I am the family cat.  
Generally we get along,  
But your exuberance tries my patience.

You fill up all the space,  
Lap up the attention,  
Make all the commotion,  
More excited to be in the world, to be in the  
family, to be.

Sitting on the windowsill, watching birds,  
I ignore the noise from the other room.

## Mariposa

Jacquelynn Steele

---

I lay on the grass beneath the sun  
in my own front yard

a neighbor mows his lawn

children laugh nearby

clouds dance around the sky  
and a cool breeze tickles my nose

crisp colors  
scents, strong enough to taste

my mind  
elsewhere

a beach  
sand black as coal

mountains  
steep and muddy

fruit  
sweet, tart, intense

water cool to the touch  
burning deep

jellyfish  
sting through the flesh  
leaving a mark  
not physically seen

rainbows tease  
the waterfall stands strong  
crashing through the unknown

beneath the stars  
in the distance

a butterfly

circles a lighthouse  
visits a cruise ship

lands on my stomach

I open my eyes

the butterfly soars  
over my house  
where I lay in my own  
front yard

and I smile  
thankful for the visit

## Stop light

Lori Stephens

---

City traffic  
red light, brake.  
Patience dwindling.

She applies thick mascara  
ready to impress the one  
who might be waiting.

He talks into his Bluetooth,  
selling himself to no one.  
He needs to close the deal.

They fight, in the backseat  
of a caravan  
while Mother screams shhh!!

You are reading, dreaming  
and in your own little world,  
or at least the world of Harry Potter.

I watch everyone around.  
Look at the differences.  
Amazing.

We live, unaware  
of our surroundings.  
Oblivious, preoccupied.

City traffic  
green light, drive.  
Life passes us by, and by, and...

# Ode to the Lint in My Belly Button

Riley Tuggle

---

Oh lint in my bellybutton,  
Whence comest thou?  
Surely you,  
Who keeps my navel warm at night,  
Are the manifestation of love  
And warmth,  
And all things good,  
Which cradle in the center  
Of my being.

Lint, though you are gray,  
Do not despair!  
Those who wash you out  
Are empty inside,  
Where I am full.

Oh lint in my bellybutton,  
How I miss thee so,  
When I search,  
And find naught,  
In the center of my being.  
Lint, you Omphalic dust  
Collecting in the center of life,  
I mourn for the outties  
Who do not know you.

Lint you gay gathering  
Of dust and of hair,  
May you ever return to my navel,  
May we ever be paired.



# Get on Down the Road

Riley Tuggle

---

I've travelled for many miles this bleak,  
blacktop road,  
And the yellow lines and signs blend together  
After some time.  
The frantic passing of miles, this journey mine--  
Long and arduous--  
Began with a sister, an unfaithful man,  
And a woman betrayed.

A wretched, spiteful, straight-razor totin' woman--  
She came at me and she snarled like there was a  
Fire in the air.  
She snarled and hollered and straight razor's  
Hand did dare  
To fall upon my face. All gashed and bloody I,  
I weren't stayin' there.

I ran off into the night like a jack-rabbit who fears the  
Hounds at his rear.  
I fell under an awning, the concrete rusted with a  
Brown water stain.  
A billowing beard and a drunken, shuffled step a  
Haggard old man appeared.  
He looked down at me from his scraggly hair and he  
Looked around and said:

They's a scary little woman back there,  
Comin' up the road.  
They's a razor in her hand,  
And they's fury in her bones;  
I don't know what you did,  
And I sure don't wanna know,  
But if you plan on livin',  
Better get on down the road.

So I stumbled up and fought and gained my feet,  
And I bumbled and ran down those  
Dark, blind streets.  
I ran into a burly, rough, rugged gang of  
Teenagers five.  
Five young men with hands outstretched;  
With bats and bars and chains to make their pay--  
They encircled I.

The rough, gruesome, angry young men smiled smiles  
Of wickedness and gin.  
Wickedly they thought and laughed of  
Doing me in.  
A straight-razor's hand did flash through the night and,  
The chain-man did fall;  
Another dropped his bat and died and I fled on,  
On foot again,

---

And I yelled for my life as I stumbled and ran.  
The others they followed and screamed at the night:

That crazy little woman, man, she sliced  
Up all my pals.  
There was fury in her eyes and,  
Some murder in her bones;  
I don't know what you did,  
And I sure don't wanna know,  
But if you plan on livin'  
Better get on down the road.

Now it's been fifteen years I been runnin' from my  
Straight razor totin' woman,  
And I been runnin' down every highway in this God-forsaken land  
Of beauty and wonder;  
Wonder and splendor and plenty this land.  
And I seen so many things that beauty can't be--  
Can't be beauty when no one will see.  
And I can't stop movin' for that  
Wretched, spiteful, straight-razor totin' woman.  
They's a spiteful little woman back there  
Comin up the road.  
Her hands a-razor totin',  
And they's murder in her eye.  
Caught me sleepin' with her sister  
In our hot and heavy home;  
She cut her sister's throat  
So now I'm gettin' down the road.

## I Want

Holly Walls

---

I want, I want  
I want you  
to leave a cigar burning.  
I want you  
to run your fingers  
down the length of my  
neck, to  
taste my red wine  
with your full lips, and  
run your tongue  
along the sweep of my  
collar bone – while I  
knead the curve of your  
lower back,  
tug at the tail of your  
pressed white shirt  
and watch my breath  
ripple and bend your  
long thick  
eyelashes.

## When I Go

### Holly Walls

---

May the sun  
dance upon wisps  
of silky gauze.

Blades of celery-green grass  
turn to emerald; let  
daffodils and irises  
genuflect to joyful shastas,  
majestic poppies  
and big, caterpillar-eaten leaves  
thick on the trees.

May the scars from  
Winter's cruelty have faded,  
healed by  
Summer's hot breath on  
carefree toes  
and blushing sunburned shoulders  
teased and tickled by  
breeze-blown hair.

Celebrate me with  
sidewalk chalk,  
squirt guns, and  
sprinklers.

I will sing to you  
through fat bamboo  
wind chimes

# Bios

**Z. A. BISHOP** would like to graduate one day. Should that day come, he will pursue a M.F.A. in Creative Writing. Either that, or become a rodeo clown. Hobbies include: self-deprecation, reading, and cracking wise in regards to the promiscuity of other people's mothers.

**MEGAN BREHM** is a student at IU East majoring in English.

**K. E. CROSE** takes residence in a state of disrepair. The efforts for upkeep have been long ceased. She hopes that one day her fiction can be like Palahniuk and her poetry can be like Bukowski. As for creative nonfiction, that's the cause of disrepair and she rather not talk about it.

**JEREMY EDDY** is a musician, lyricist, and a student at IU East. In addition to composing his own music, he is a seeker of knowledge of all sorts. Jeremy graduated from Full Sail University in 2001 where he studied game design.

**KAYLYN FLORA** is a Fine Arts major at IUE. She enjoys writing, drawing, and art. She has recently moved to Richmond from New Paris, and speaks fluently in sarcasm. After she graduates from IU East, she hopes to become an art instructor and to eventually move to Europe.

**MICHAEL GIBBS** lives in Phoney Times where he eats Earth Burritos covered in Savador Dali paintings. He is an IU East Honors student currently pursuing his Bachelors in English with a minor in Creative Writing. His work has been published in previous issues of *Tributar-*

*ies*, *The Magazine of Bizarro Fiction*, *the Bradley Sands is a Dick E-anthology*, and *Wamack: A Journal of the Arts webzine*.

**MARK HOWELL** is a student at IU East.

**ELSIE KLUTE** came to Richmond in 1970. In December 1972 she went to work for and fell in love with Byron. She was married to Byron until he died from leukemia three years ago. Elsie is still in Richmond, writing and figuring out who she is in this new life.

**MIRANDA KNIGHT** will be graduating on May 13, 2011 with a BA in English with a Creative Writing Minor. May 13 will also be a day of mourning at IU East, since Miranda will no longer grace this fine establishment with her wisdom, brilliance, and overall awesomeness. She is currently the President of Humanities Club, Vice President of Student Government Association, Vice President of Students Today Alumni Tomorrow, and student worker for the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

**KRISANN JOHNSON** is a fun, goofy person who loves to write fiction and some poetry. The genre she offers her the most difficulty is non-fiction due to the fact that it has to have about 96% of truth in it. Krisann would rather make things up and start a new world of incredible things from her imagination that can be anything she wants it to be. It has to be unique, though, because that's just her.

**JOSHUA C. LYKINS** is a student at IU East.

**KEVIN LYKINS** is a student at IU East.

**MIA MARCUM** wrangles cats, dogs and the occasional cow on a farm in Connersville. Though she has been in college for almost 12 years, she is new to this English major stuff and can be a little slow on the uptake, so go easy on her.

**JESSICA MARSHALL** graduated IU East in May '10 much to the dismay and disapproval of Z.A. Bishop.

**TERRY MAYS** is a student at IU East.

**LACEY ROSE MOSEY** is a senior English major that will FINALLY graduate in May of 2011. She enjoys patent leather heels, offensively bright red lipstick, spending time with her over weight chihuahuas, and making cupcakes with sprinkles on top for the most beautiful man alive (whom she happens to be married to.) Mostly, Lacey enjoys being recognized for her excellence, in all aspects of life, as often as possible.

**JASON PADGETT** has been at IU East longer than many of the professors, but when he was told students could not be given tenure he decided to finish his degree. His post graduation plans are hazy at best. He had contemplated grad school on the advice of several professors, but decided that sounded too much like work, and is currently leaning toward running away to New Zealand to be a bartender and raise some sheep.

**JESSICA SORENSEN** is a student at IU East and takes all of her classes online. She lives with her family up in the snowy mountains of Wyoming. She spends her free time reading any book she can get her hands on, writing, and riding four-wheelers.

**LORI STEPHENS** graduated Knightstown High School in 1999. She has now been married for 10 years to my wonderful husband, Justin. They have two amazing little boys, David age 9 and Peyton age 5. At the moment she is a stay-at-home mom; however, she's a double major in English and psychology at IU East. Lori plans to use her degrees to become a mental health counselor and author of children's books.

**RILEY TUGGLE** is a student at IU East.

**HOLLY WALLS** is and probably always will be an undergrad at IU East, accumulating a mountain of credits but never actually receiving a degree. She is married with three children, ages 10, 12 and 13. Perhaps she will finally obtain a bachelor's by the time they have finished their masters'. She remains unsure about what she really wants to be if ever she grows up. She vaguely remembers enjoying cooking, photography and gardening in her free time. Sometimes, late at night when the house is quiet, she still finds time to write poetry and creative non-fiction essays in an attempt to recover her sanity.

# One last thing...

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Let us know!

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Want to see your name in print?  
We would too!

Want to be a part of a fun and productive club?  
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Send comments and submissions to Faculty Advisor, Beth Slattery:  
eslatter@iue.edu

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