



The Muse

Literary and Art Journal of Seminole State College

2015 edition

The Muse

Volume 8
2015 edition



Sponsored by SSC's Upsilon Alpha Chapter
of Sigma Kappa Delta

Faculty Editors:
Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate

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Cover Art "Watercolor" by Tina Chapman

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The Muse is sponsored by Seminole State College's Upsilon Alpha Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society for Two-year Colleges. Faculty Editors: Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate, Seminole State College, 2701 Boren Blvd., Seminole, OK 74868

Publication Statement for *The Muse* Volume 8 – 2015 edition:

Seminole State College's Upsilon Alpha Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society for Two-Year Colleges, annually publishes *The Muse* literary and art anthology under the direction of editors Rayshell Clapper and Yasmina Choate. The purpose of the anthology is to not only encourage expression in the literary and fine arts but to also encourage students, faculty, and staff to publish their works.

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A Secret that Kills

By Alyssa Waldron

Sarah had a picture perfect life. She was tall, blonde, and skinny. She was a three-sport athlete, student body president, and maintained no less than a 3.5 grade point average. She has had the same best friends since grade school: Elisa, Jessica, and Harper. Her parents trusted her when she went to parties...mainly because she always came home thirty minutes before curfew. Her boyfriend, of only a few weeks, was in college and played football at a big school. If any girl were going to be jealous of someone, they would be jealous of Sarah.

It is the day before Sarah's senior homecoming dance and her and her friends are going shopping for last-minute things and to pick up their dresses.

"So...have you and Frank like...done it...?" asked Elisa. "Doing it" always seemed to be the topic of discussion for them.

"God, no, you guys know I would never do that!" Sarah said a little bit embarrassed.

"Come on, Sarah...what is he gay?" Jessica joked. "Guys in college aren't in a relationship just to be in one, you know that."

Harper cut in, "Jess, it's not like everyone sleeps with a guy to keep him around...unlike *someone* we know..."

They all laughed because everyone at West High knows Jessica Morris will sleep with anyone.

Later that night Sarah was in her bed and writing in her journal, and she couldn't stop thinking about doing it. She felt left out in a sick sort of way; she hated feeling like that. Her friends knew what it felt like, hell her forty-year-old mom has sex.

Sarah wrote in her journal about everything. The first time she met Frank, the time Harper threw up all over the bathroom at her friend Jared's house, and now she wrote about having sex:

Is it really that big of a deal? Like we do other things...he should just be happy with what he's getting. I'm not the one who asked to date me right? Aren't you supposed to love someone when you have sex? I don't even know him that well IT'S ONLY BEEN THREE WEEKS. I just wish that people would have the respect as they did twenty years ago. God our parents had it so easy and they don't even know it.

She and Frank had been texting.

Hey babe just finished practice, are ur parents home? Frank always asked that.

How was practice? & ya, sorry, they always ruin our chances! she lied and tried to play it off.

Well we have tomorrow night ;)

Wut is that supposed to mean? Sarah sent back.

Its ur senior homecoming & weve been dating for almost 3 weeks now...I kinda figured u know...

U figured wrong...I'm not ready for that & u know that. We've had this conversation like a billion times.

I know babe I'm kidding, chill out.

I'm going to bed, goodnight babe, miss u & txt me when u wake up!

Sarah ended the conversation at that.

It's weird that he's being so pushy...he's never been like that with me...and I don't plan on giving anything up for him.

What Sarah wasn't aware of was that Frank's friends constantly joked with him,

"Bro, you're never going to get any with her," Ryan would say.

Frank hated hearing his friends say he couldn't get with a girl. He was Frank, football player, macho man, he gets with any girl he wants, when he wants and how he wants. Sarah was no girl that was going to change that.

"Just wait guys, I have a present for all of us," Frank said. He had this darkness about him when he said it. Even his friends were curious of what was going to happen.

It was the Saturday of Sarah's senior homecoming dance, and she couldn't stop thinking about how romantic the night was going to be. Frank had reservations at some restaurant she had the perfect dress, and fingers crossed, but she was pretty sure she would get crowned queen. All of her friends rented a party bus.

"Sarah, you have to come with us!" Pleaded Jessica.

"Frank's picking me up and we're going to dinner! Don't worry, we'll see each other at the dance."

"Where are you guys eating? That fancy restaurant on Main St.?" Harper asked.

"I don't know, but he says it's like thirty minutes away and I am "in for a treat" whatever that means..." She giggled in reply.

"Ooooooh, a "treat," Jessica said seductively.

"No, no, I told him I'm not doing that because I'm not ready for that kind of commitment. He totally understands," Sarah said with complete confidence.

It's 7:10 and Frank was supposed to be at Sarah's for pictures at 7:00. Her mom didn't like the idea of her dating older guys as it was, and now he didn't even show up on time. Plus, her mom was waiting for her to leave so her and Sarah's dad could go on a date.

Her mom kept saying, "He's just a guy who is trying to get with you, Sarah."

"MOM, he isn't like that. You don't know him like I do. He's probably just worried about the way his tux looks," Sarah defended Frank.

Frank pulled into her driveway right before the clock struck 7:20 and didn't even get out of the car. Instead he stayed in his seat and honked the horn four or five times telling her to hurry up like she was the one running late.

She better fuckin' hurry, I don't have time for this shit, Frank thought to himself. He's never really been the pushy type, but he had something to prove to his friends and knew he couldn't flip a one eighty on his plan now.

“Well, I guess that’s my cue. Love you, mom,” Sarah ran out the door.

“Text me when you get to the dance, love you, too!” Her mom yelled back.

Sarah got into the car she was furious with him. She could feel how hot her head was. She could literally feel the steam coming out of her ears.

“You’re twenty minutes late and then you don’t even go into the house to introduce yourself to my parents?” Sarah said in her most disgusted voice.

“Babe, chill out, I got stuck with the boys at my room and lost track of time. I’m sorry I’m late,” he said with his half grin that just melted her and his hazel eyes that could get away with anything, “close your eyes and don’t peek and I promise the rest of the night will go as planned” he kept his half grin, “you look stunning, by the way.”

She didn’t close her eyes all the way; she actually peeked the whole way and knew that they weren’t going where Frank said they were going.

Thirty minutes into the drive she started to worry that she’d be late for the dance and started thinking about how embarrassing it’ll be if she’s not there when the queen is announced.

After many left turns and stops they finally arrived to their destination. She knew that they weren’t far out of town because she saw the signs and everything on the way there.

Maybe he has a picnic ready, but it better be fast, I don’t have time these romantics, Sarah thought to herself.

“God, you drive like my grandma. Where the hell is this place anyway?” Sarah asked.

“It’s the best place around,” Frank said, “you won’t be disappointed, babe.” Frank hopped out of the car and opened the door for her, “Keep your eyes closed, babe, this is going to be great!” he said rushing her.

Sarah noticed that were walking on gravel. She was nervous and excited all at the same time.

“Frank, where are we?”

“Open your eyes and you’ll see,” he replied.

Frank stepped back quietly, and waited for her to open her eyes. Sarah opened her eyes and before her stood Frank and his friends. She had heard of things like this happening before, but had never contemplated it happening to her. She had hoped she was wrong.

“What are you guys doing here?” She said nervously, “Where is the restaurant?” She didn’t know why, but her teeth were chattering.

It’s not even cold, she kept thinking.

“Once I realized I wasn’t going to get any voluntarily from you,” he said with his half grin, but this time it didn’t impress her. In fact, it made her stomach twist and turn. Frank continued, “I figured why not get some and share, so I invited my boys along, too.”

She felt her esophagus closing in on her, her palms were sweating, and her vision started to blur. She knew she couldn’t out run them, one: she knew if she could out run them, she wouldn’t be able to run as long as they could, two: there were three of them and one of her. She did the only thing she was ever taught to do...

“HELP! SOMEBODY, IF YOU HEAR ME PLEASE HELP!” Sarah pleaded at the top of her lungs. She screamed so loud she began to get light headed.

“Now, come on baby, you know nobody is going to be able to hear,” Frank replied, “just sit back, relax, and enjoy this.”

Frank and his friends moved in on her. They were laughing. She couldn't believe that they actually got a kick out of this.

Why is this funny? How could he do this? Sarah was thinking as they moved in closer and closer to her. They had finally got into touching distance of her, and touching was exactly what they were doing.

Sarah fought with everything in her body. She scratched. She clawed. She bit. Nothing stopped them. They were animals. She could actually hear her heart beating. The blood rushing through her skin was so hot.

How could I have been so stupid? That is the only thing that crossed Sarah's mind.

Frank and his friends stopped at nothing. They ripped her four hundred dollar dress, her hair was a mess, and they broke her heels. Frank was the first one to sexually assault her.

He kept saying, “you should've just let me have it when I wanted it, baby.” That is a sound Sarah will remember for the rest of her life. She smelt alcohol on his breath, how had she not noticed he was drinking before this? Every time he said a word spit would fly from his mouth and land on her face. She could feel every move he made. From him pull her underwear to the side, to him ripping her to fit himself in. She knew every move that he was making.

“This is almost better than you letting me do it,” Frank said out of breath.

She was still fighting everything; she wasn't going to give into him anytime soon. With every thrust he made, she fought back harder. But he didn't stop anytime soon, she felt herself getting weaker. As he went limp, so did she.

Ryan was the second one to sexually assault Sarah.

“This isn't how I imagined our first time Sarah, but maybe in a week I'll give you a call and see if you're up to it?” He and his friends laughed. Ryan wasn't worn out, so he was going at her full force. He ripped her underwear to the side just as Frank had and began to shove himself inside of her. He was grunting just as Frank, but his grunts were far meaner. Ryan acted like he deserved to have Sarah; she never led him on, not once.

He kept whispering in her ear, “don't fight this baby, I'll be better than Frank, I promise.”

He kept shoving himself deeper and deeper, and she thought that she could feel her crotch rip. He was moving at such a fast pace she began to pass out. She focused on a non-moving object just so she didn't throw up. She felt like he was inside of her for a whole hour, but he was in and out. She knew it was Ted's turn, and it scared her because she didn't know how much more of this she could take. All she could do was cry. She didn't know how it had come to this, but it had. She wanted her bed, and she knew she needed to shower. She didn't want to be pretty, or nice.

Frank's second friend, Ted, wouldn't hurt Sarah. "I can't do this, guys...look at her," he pointed at her. It's not like he didn't have the intentions, but when it came time to actually follow through, he couldn't find it in his heart to follow through.

The boys left Sarah there laying on the ground, half a dress on, and no shoes to walk home in. Sarah swore she had never heard a sweeter sound than when Frank's car started up and squealed away from wherever she was. She peeled herself off of the ground, and tried to find her way back home. She assumed it was only 11:00, the dance was about to be over and everyone would be going to Jessica's house for the after party. She knew she wasn't going to that. She dug into her purse and found her phone: four missed calls from Harper, two from her mom, and fifteen texts from everyone wondering where she was. She locked her phone and started crying again, she couldn't help but feel everything all over again. She kept feeling their hands all over her, touching her in places that weren't supposed to be touched yet.

This is my fault. If I hadn't dated someone older than me then I wouldn't be in this situation. How could I have been so stupid? She kept wondering. None of this made sense to her. She didn't understand anything that just happened, or even if it did happen; none of it felt real.

Her phone buzzed, she pulled it out of her purse and it was a text from Frank: **Thanks for a great night, hope u had as much fun as I did.**

Sarah threw her phone into her purse; she didn't even know what to do.

On her walk home she was going step by step through everything that just happened. Her heart was still racing, and her cheeks were as hot as the Sahara desert. "He went to homecoming with me, brought me to his friends so they could *fuck* me, and left me to do what? Sit out here and die? *Fuck* him, I didn't deserve this kind of *shit*," Sarah said out loud. She was uncomfortable cussing so every word tasted like vinegar on her tongue. She was so frustrated with herself. She kept thinking that this was her fault. But how, how could something that she didn't want turn into being her fault? God, she hated Frank, she hated more than she had ever hated anyone.

Maybe my dress was too low, she thought. Maybe I wore too much makeup, online articles always say don't wear anything that is going to make a man want you because they might get out of hand, she was crying at this point. But again, why is it a lady's fault that she can't dress to impress without feeling like she is going to be raped that night? The walk home was dreadful for her, she knew where she was going but everything was moving so slow. With every step she took she feel the pain in her body. She could feel her skin on her body for the first time in her life; it literally felt like her skin weighed a thousand pounds. God, she's never felt like this in her whole life. She cried all the way until she reached her street.

She made her way home, finally. Her parents weren't home because they were still on their date, so she knew she could shower without being questioned. She undressed as soon as she opened her front door, threw away her dress and heels, and hopped in the shower right away. She wanted to stay in there for as long as possible.

She wanted to wash away the way their hands felt on her skin. The pain she felt between her legs. Everywhere water touched, it stung; mainly from cuts and

scratches, but partially from her not wanting to be in her skin anymore. She could still feel their hands on her body, so she scrubbed until that feeling went away. She went through half a bottle of body wash, rubbed a hole through the washcloth, and cried until she didn't have any tears left. She peeled herself up off the floor of the shower, turned the water slowly to the left, hoping that the colder the water, the more numb she would feel.

Later, after her shower she tried to fall asleep, but all she could do was lay there and stare at the ceiling, blankly. No thoughts, nothing, all she could do was stare at the ceiling and count every rivet in the paint. She wanted to see a sign that she should do something, but nothing was happening. She knew that she would take this secret to the grave.

"Knock, knock," Sarah's mom said with a wide smile on her face while entering her room. She sat on the edge of Sarah's bed and touched her pale, white face, "Good morning, honey."

Sarah woke up with a jolt. "Mom, why are you in here? You didn't even knock! Get out."

"Sarah Marie, what is wrong with you? I did knock and why are you talking like that to me?"

"Sorry...can you just, uh, get out? I'll be down for breakfast in a few."

"Okay, honey. Try to be in a better mood when you get down there, I love you."

Sarah hopped up out of bed as quickly as possible, but after the toll last night took on her she moved as slow as a sunset turning into nighttime. She took one look in the mirror and knew she was never going to be the girl she used to be. Her eyes no longer glowed with happiness, her smile wasn't even pretty anymore. She hated the way she looked; she saw all of her faults.

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the dirtiest of them all? Me, that's me... she thought to herself. She went to her door and locked it; she decided she wasn't going to go downstairs for breakfast.

She looked through her purse to find her phone and she had so many missed calls and texts. That should have made her happy, but all she felt was loneliness.

Sarah whr the hell were u?" Jessica said, "It was the party of a lifetime!

Hey, missed u lastnight, hope everything is OK Hannah, from math class, said.

Hey whore, were u w/ Frank last night? Don't act like we didn't notice u weren't at the dance or the party Elisa texted.

Luckily, Sarah's read receipts were off, so none of her friends know that she had seen the texts. She was dreading going to school tomorrow morning. She knew her friends would jump to conclusions and little did they know...little would they ever know... She didn't know what she would say. Where was she? Why didn't she make it to the dance? There are going to be so many questions and not many answers that she will be able to give. Sarah wasn't much of liar, so she practiced to herself the whole day.

Guys, don't worry, I had fun, that was a lie, but they would have to believe her.

Sarah didn't leave her room all day. Her mom occasionally knocked on the door to see if she was still in there, or if she was hungry, but to no surprise Sarah was always in there and she was never hungry. Her mom worried, she had a terrible feeling, but she didn't want to bother her. Her mom kept thinking that it must've been a long night.

Monday morning came and Sarah walked downstairs in sweats, slippers, and her dad's oversized hoody. She didn't like the feeling of people being able to see what her body looks like. Just the idea of someone looking at her made her feel violated. She didn't like the feeling of eyes on her anymore; she used to love when people gawked at her. She knew she was what people wanted.

"Sarah, honey, you know you have school today, right?" Her dad joked.

In Sarah's entire high school career she had never once worn sweats to school it just wasn't who she was. She always dressed to impress, everyday was a fashion show for her. She wanted to be someone that people wanted to be. But not anymore, she couldn't handle that kind of pressure.

"I know, I just didn't feel like getting ready today," she replied in her most chipper capable voice. She plastered on the best, fake smile she could muster up. She tried to move around the kitchen as best as she could; trying to act normal was hard when things weren't normal at all.

She got to school, and her friends were already waiting for her at her parking spot to see where she was and why she wasn't texting them back. She got out of her car and everyone was in shock nobody knew what to say. She was dressed terribly, and who were they to point it out? They stayed quiet for a while.

"Hey guys," Sarah started it off. She knew they wouldn't know what to say, so she figured why not start it off slow.

"Hey...so, uh, where were you on Saturday?" All of her friends said. They were curious, as they had the right to be.

"I was throwing up," she lied. "My mom brought home sushi the night before the dance and I got food poisoning," Sarah didn't know that lying would come to her so easily.

"Right...and you're not texting us back because..." Elisa asked, waiting for a better response than the sushi act.

"Well, funny story," Sarah was trying to keep it together, "I left it on top of the toilet when I was showering and I got a text and it vibrated right into the toilet!" Another lie, but none of her friends were calling her out on it, so she figured she must be doing pretty good.

"Wow, that's convenient," Jessica snapped.

She's lying, Jessica thought.

She waited a little longer before she had to end the awkwardness.

They don't believe me, but I don't care. They wouldn't understand anyway, she thought as she slowly started to back away.

"Anyway, I'll see you guys at lunch, bye," Sarah turned on her back heel and went on her way.

It was home class, so Sarah was in French. She sat in the back row. That never happens. She wrote in her notebook for most of the class. She decided that

she was over being in class and asked to go to the bathroom. On her way to the bathroom she thought, *what's stopping me from leaving campus right now?* Nothing. Nothing was stopping her, so she left. She headed down the hallway, trying not to make eye contact with anyone that saw her. She walked out of school and the fresh air hit her smack in the face. Usually fresh air would relive someone, but not today. Not for her.

Sarah was lost. She felt like she couldn't talk to anyone. Her mom wouldn't know what to say. Her friends wouldn't take her seriously. And a counselor asked her to talk too much. She knew she had to find a release somehow.

Sarah had to make a few stops before she went home. She didn't know what exactly, but she knew she had to do something. She didn't know where her body was taking her. She drove out of the school and turned left. Somehow she ended up at the cemetery, she kept wondering what it was like to be dead.

Would anyone even realize that she's dead? Would anyone care? Frank sure as fuck wouldn't, she thought while she was sitting there staring at all of the headstones. She headed back to her car, with a pit in her stomach like something bad was going to happen, but she knew she couldn't trust her feelings anymore.

At home, Sarah knew she was safe. That is where she took her first steps, said her first words, everything from start to finish happened in that house. She was in her house alone and she realized that this might be her only chance to be alone. She walked around her house, just memorizing everything. Her mom had so many pictures up in their house, her family trip to San Diego, her sixth grade trip to San Francisco, and all of the other family vacations that they went on. She kept mesmerizing and she ran into the family album.

Wow, my mom is beautiful, she thought as she saw the picture of her mom when she was pregnant with her. *Ah, I forgot she had knee surgery,* she suddenly remembered when she saw the picture of her mom in a wheelchair. She also remembered what came with that knee surgery: narcotics. She didn't know what they would do to her, but she knew for sure what they did to her mom. She began to rummage through the prescription cabinet.

"Advil: no. Allergy medicine: no. Vitamin B: nope. Norco: BINGO," she said as her hand hit the Norco prescription bottle.

She took two, sat down at the desk in her parent's office and began to write a letter.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you see me as your beautiful little girl, but I'm not anymore. Something happened that I can't undo.

She paused for thirty minutes, she subconsciously knew what she writing, but she couldn't believe that she was actually doing this.

After her break, she took two more pills; the first two weren't working fast enough. She kept writing.

I want you to know that I was raped the night of my homecoming dance, and there was nothing that I could do about it. It was Frank and Ryan, his friend Ted was there, but he didn't do anything to me. I should have listened to you when you said older guys weren't something to be a part of. I love you, mom,

I'll always be your baby girl. And dad, I'll always be your little Princess. I hope I see you guys soon. I'm sorry that I couldn't say goodbye.

Fifteen minutes later she took eight more; she knew this was it. She knew that she was committing to this; she knew that she was ending this. She knew that once the pills ran their course she would be dead, as dead as the people at the cemetery.

Her mom pulled up to drive and thought it was weird that Sarah's car was home.

"Sarah?" Her mom said, "are you home?"

Her mom checked Sarah's room, but she wasn't there. The living room, nobody. The kitchen, there was nobody to be found.

She walked further down the hallway and saw something she wished never had to see...Sarah's cold, dead body next to her empty prescription bottle, and a letter that was written from Sarah:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know you see me as your beautiful little girl, but I'm not anymore. Something happened that I can't undo. I want you to know that I was raped the night of my homecoming dance, and there was nothing that I could do about it. It was Frank and Ryan, his friend Ted was there, but he didn't do anything to me. I should have listened to you when you said older guys weren't something to be a part of. I love you, mom, I'll always be your baby girl. And dad, I'll always be your little Princess. I hope I'll see you guys soon. I'm sorry that I couldn't say goodbye.

The Few, The Proud, The Underpaid

By Taylor McClure

Her day begins at six in the morning. She jumps in the shower while lesson plans run through her head over and over. She gets herself ready as quickly as possible and runs downstairs to prepare her two children for their day at school. The children are still cranky from reviewing their arithmetic all night long. She finally corrals everyone into her vehicle. As she waits in the car line to drop them off, she listens to them recite their spelling words. At last, she pulls up to the school entrance. The children gather their school supplies and run into the building. Now she is off to care for the twenty other children who rely on her guidance every single day. This is an everyday life of second grade teacher and my mother, Colette McClure. This is how she and other many teachers being their day. The most gruesome detail about the teacher lifestyle is the close to nothing paycheck. Public school teachers should be paid more because they do more than just teach and all other professions would be impossible without them.

The career of teaching comes with many more tasks than just educating students. First aid care, mental therapy, and interior decorating are just a few jobs a teacher holds. They bandage children who have fallen off the monkey bars at recess. They comfort children with issues at home or self-confidence problems. They spend thousands of dollars of their own money, which is most of their paycheck, to provide decorations and technology for their classrooms. A more personal outlook on a side job of being a teacher comes from second grade teacher, Colette McClure. She currently holds an extremely diabetic seven-year-old in her classroom. The child brings a service dog every day to school that detects when his blood sugar is off. As the child's teacher, she is responsible for checking his blood sugar before every meal or whenever the service dog alerts, measuring classroom snacks according to his blood sugar count, and caring for the service dog during the school day. She also took a generous amount of her own time during her summer to be trained to care for the diabetic child. This training was aside from the countless hours she spends preparing lesson plans, decorating her room, and other small details to ensure the maximum educational growth for her students (McClure.) If public school teachers were simply educators, one might be able to argue they are paid enough. When adding in all of the small jobs that no one ever takes time to notice, there should be no question when it comes to raising their pay.

When individuals take a moment to think about their very own childhood, what do they remember the most? Their answer is most likely "school." Maybe even some would respond with "my teachers." Anyone who has ever been successful in life can thank a teacher. Even the greatest masterminds of our society had to start somewhere. Who taught the accountant one plus one equals two? Who taught the brain surgeon the basic functions of the brain? Who taught the President of the United States how to remember the preamble? A brain surgeon's salary is averaged at about \$400,000 per year (Brain Surgeon). A public school teacher's salary averages around \$44,000 per year (Robson and Foreman). A brain surgeon's salary deserves to be high because their job is literally saving lives, but is that not a teacher's job also? Public school teachers have taught us all the very basics of our

foundations. Many of them taught us more than just lessons from lesson plans. They have taught us life lessons that have been equal to or sometimes more important to our success. All other professions would be simply impossible if it were not for public school teachers.

The two examples I have provided are just a mere presentation of why public school teacher's salaries should be increased. District, state, and national officials should definitely consider opening their eyes and take a glance at public school teachers and the fantastic job that most of them do. We are constantly hearing from these important officials how vital a good education is. Finding invested and dedicated public school teachers will soon be difficult simply because of the poor pay. It is time for the government and tax payers to make an investment into today's future.

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A Whole Different Ballgame

By Taylor McClure

Player number 42, exits the dugout, enters Ebbets Field, and steps up to home plate with a bat in his hands. Hatred explodes from fans of both teams. The distasteful, threatening language whirls around the Brooklyn Dodgers' second baseman as he grips his wooden bat tighter and tighter. He does his best to ignore the fans, the opposing coaches and players, and the umpires, and tries to focus on what means the most to him, baseball. This was the everyday life of baseball all-star and civil rights activist Jackie Robinson. If attending a major league baseball game today, fans would expect athletes of all different races, but in 1947 an African American major league player was unheard of before Robinson hit the field. Many Americans consider Jackie Robinson one of the most excellent baseball players to ever play in the major league, but he is known for so much more than his baseball skills. He was also a great role model, and his spirit continues to inspire others. Jackie Robinson can be a positive influence to everyone because he held the traits of self-control, fearlessness, and dedication.

Being the first African American major league baseball player shortly before the Civil Rights Movement, one can only imagine the discrimination he experienced. Major league athletes are usually prepared for a group of people who constantly throw hatred at them, but in Robinson's case almost everyone with a pale skin color was against him. Instead of reacting how most would, Robinson acted with an immense amount of self-control. Although no one should ever have to experience the heights of discrimination that Robinson received, everyone can learn something from his behavior. Self-control is something they begin to teach us in kindergarten. They trained us to remain calm when someone took our toy or pushed us off the slide. Unfortunately, many people have lost the basic life lesson of self-control. With constant city riots, school shootings, and so forth, more and more individuals need to look back at Jackie Robinson's life and take into consideration the amount of disrespect he experienced and observe his behavior. The world would be a much better place if citizens increased their self-control.

Fearlessness is another great quality the world can learn from Jackie Robinson. I once had a friend argue with me over this exact matter. My friend explained that Jackie Robinson was not fearless because he knew exactly what he was stepping into when he decided to play major league baseball. I believe that is what made him so fearless. Robinson knew the mistreatment and adversity he would receive as an African American player, but he decided to face the fear of failure and continue to do what he loves. Many people have let their fear of failure overcome their dreams and goals in life. The world would have countless numbers of doctors, lawyers, and other important professions if fearlessness would be applied in more lives. Facing fears is hard to do, but the outcome will always be worth the struggle.

With any task a person may come across, dedication must be included somewhere. Dedication is to strive toward something with full force. Without dedication one has no point of trying because there is no hunger or interest. Jackie Robinson is a great example of dedication. "He was a six-time All-Star, the Rookie

of the Year in 1947 and the NL Most Valuable Player in 1949, the year he won the league batting and stolen base crowns (Schleier A03).” Robinson had to press through his adversities as an African American major league player and dedicated himself to baseball to achieve these high honors. Many times in a person’s life, he or she falls short of dedication. Whether it is writing a paper for a composition class or wanting to lose 10 pounds within two months, if dedication is absent, the task will never be done to the best of the person’s abilities.

Self-control, fearlessness, and dedication are just a few important characteristics baseball legend, Jackie Robinson, held throughout his life. Everyone should explore the life of Robinson and learn from his behavior. “Jackie Robinson’s teammate Pee Wee Reese once said, “Maybe tomorrow we’ll all wear 42 so they won’t tell us apart” (Tastad). Pee Wee Reese was implying that he longs for a day all humans will be viewed by their attitude instead of the color of their skin. Unfortunately, it is 2015 and we have yet to completely rid the problem of discrimination. I stand with Pee Wee Reese and strive for the day we can all wear 42 and live a life with self-control, fearlessness, and dedication just like Jackie Robinson.

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The Loneliest Creature

By Kenneth Trey Jackson

I'm beginning to forget what your voice sounded like. I lay awake at night and try so hard to conjure up past conversations that you and I once had; I bury myself so deep into thought that I lose reality. I even hold my breath so that no other noises get captured. I hold it there in my heavy lungs until my head becomes faint, and I'm forced to start again. It sickens me that I can't remember my own father's voice, it frustrates me to the point of nausea. The same voice that I heard every day for the first fourteen years of my life. That deep, warm, comforting sound that defined the word home—it was gone. As if I haven't lost enough already, I don't even get to keep that?

But every so often, for a fraction of a second, I hear it. It comes and goes like the spark of a two wires. I now live for those microscopic moments; they seem to restore normality. In them, you are only a few paces down the hallway, armed with fatherly advice and casual conversation topics. That imaginary thought never fails to force my face into a shaky smile and allows me to drift to sleep.

In case you were wondering, that's how I get through it—little tricks to fool my brain. I'm helping Mom the best way I know how. It kills her to see your features in my face. I can tell by the way she stares. I've tried everything, even changing my contact lens color so that the familiar blue in my eyes doesn't resemble yours. It doesn't help. There are too many similarities. She hasn't been the same, not since that late night phone call. Those three, life-ruining rings that came in the dead of night. She's more than depressed—she's broken. Being more robotic than human, more conscious than alive, and more miserable than anyone deserves to be, I have also lost her.

I never know how to end these letters. I know there will be no response. Maybe I'll see you again, and we can discuss them then.

Sincerely, Scotty.

Two years felt like two lifetimes as Scotty laid the neatly folded letter against his father's tombstone. Morning dew covered the soggy ground, preventing him from getting too comfortable. He sat in an awkward squatting position and carefully read over the names and dates on the oval rock. He examined it with a heavy heart that sat like a rock in his chest. He used his finger tips to glide across the engraved name "Scott T. Morgan" and then the words "Loving father and husband." Seeing those words gave him a comfort that no other material thing could, along with the company he found by talking to the wind. He felt the sting of tears beginning to gather in his eyes—that old sensation that reminded him to leave. He quickly repositioned the letter so that the October breeze would not blow it away then headed for school.

Sixteen-year-old Scotty was not so naïve to think that his letters meant anything. His father was dead, and that was that. He wrote them to vent, to say what he felt so uncomfortable to say to anyone else. He continually glanced at his watch while hustling through the small children's park that led to his school. There was little hope that he would make it on time, but tardiness was nothing new. The absence of

a driver's license at sixteen was not only awkward but extremely inconvenient. He believed this to be a fault of his own as he did most things. Unable to keep his mother's interest long enough, she never helped with his parallel parking. This made for numerous failed driving tests, each one more disastrous than the last. The inevitable sighs and disappointing groans from each examiner ultimately became too much because, in the end, he quit trying altogether.

The large puddles of water that stood from a stormy night left his typical route an obstacle course. His ten pound bag teeming with comics pulled at his scrawny shoulders, but he needed them. Not so much for entertainment but rather an escape; another world where his troublesome social life did not exist. The characters who lived inside were not only heroes of his, but best friends. Fearless men, women, creatures and Gods who lived tenaciously amongst mortals. He loved them. Not for their abilities, but simply for being there for him—always.

After every leap came another, more challenging puddle. He swayed and shifted his way through the trees and mud as he turned his powerwalk into an aggressive jog. Finally, about thirty yards from the school campus, he had just enough time to beat the tardy bell. *Today might actually be a good day*, he thought to himself while trotting through the school's wet grass. He took a glance at his watch when suddenly a big brown boot swiped at his shins, tripping him to the soaking turf.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't see you there." A sarcastic apology emerged followed by a sneering laugh.

Scotty knew that raspy voice all too well. It belonged to a senior named Randall Baker, an ugly lineman with a shaved head and the beer belly of a forty-year-old drunk. He was as cruel as he was popular—fittingly arrogant from endless praise and scholarship offers. Scotty's knees sunk deep into the muddy ground when he landed, while his forearms were forced to slide across the grass to save his face.

"Dammit!" Scotty blurted out. "Are you kidding me?"

It was too late, Randall had already made his way into the school as the bell sounded.

Life as an over-intelligent, quiet sophomore made him a perfect target for bullies like Randall. He understood it, but more importantly he accepted it. It was no less? a routine than eating breakfast or brushing his teeth. It was all part of the game, part of the food chain that was the public school system. He never raged about it, nor did he complain or snitch. He only bottled it up, hiding it away as ammunition for his writing and comic book sketches. In the future he hoped to find another use for all the burden he kept—optimistically waiting for a break in a life-long strand of bad luck.

"Mr. Morgan, maybe we should start class a little later for your convenience," Ms. Heck said with a snarl. "Obviously our 8:30 schedule does not satisfy you."

Ms. Heck was an ancient Science teacher who terrorized the eastern hallway. Her bony figure and wrinkled face perfectly matched her nasty attitude. It was as if she spent her weekends developing new methods of cruelty, but deep down he knew that she probably spent that time spitting on babies or kicking puppies.

"Sorry," Scotty replied. "I was held up."

He heard his classmates snicker with one another and joke about his grass-stained jeans. Ms. Heck rolled her eyes while handing Scotty a copy of their latest biology read, *The Loneliest Creature*.

“Well, it’s your lucky day. You get to read to the class,” Ms. Heck replied, taunting him.

Scotty hated what was about to happen more than anything in the world. He would often worry himself sick over it, never knowing when he would be called upon to freakishly preform for a circus-like crowd awaiting an epic failure. Sure they would be content with a solid performance, but they would *love* to see him crash and burn—they hoped for it.

An entire classroom of displeased faces stared up at Scotty as he stood embarrassed. He could feel himself turn pale. Sweat glands opened furiously from his face, releasing loads of insecurity. He knew the bright, fluorescent lights would surely expose his every flaw, but he tried not to think about it. He stood, wasting time—everyone’s valuable time. Who was he to make them wait? How could they tolerate him?

“Sometime today, Scotty.” Ms. Heck grumbled.

“O- Ok I’m sorry.”

Scotty was a fine reader, advanced in fact. But situations like these turned him completely illiterate. He took a deep breath, swallowed his stomach, and then began to read out loud.

After a few minutes of fumbling words, Scotty’s task was almost complete. *Finally!* Unexpectedly, a knock came from the door. He paused as Ms. Heck marched with her loud, clacking heels to answer. At first, she blocked his view of the visitor while standing in the entranceway. Scotty waited while trying to avoid eye contact with his peers. He felt their glares. A few seconds passed as Ms. Heck moved aside, holding a note in her boney fingers. In the hallway stood Randall Baker.

“Scotty, you’re needed in the office.” Ms. Heck pronounced.

There was a pause as Scotty thought about why he was being called out. He had never done *anything* wrong and his grades were perfect.

“Scotty! You’re wasting our class time...” Ms. Heck yelled impatiently.

Scotty jumped to the sound and hurried out, closing the door behind him.

“What do they need me for, am I in trouble?” Scotty asked.

Randall only gave an irritated look.

“No, someone said they found one of your stupid comics in the bathroom.”

Scotty stood confused.

“But- but you said the principal needed me, isn’t that where I’m going?” Scotty asked.

“Would you calm down, spaz. If it was something as stupid as a comic book then Ms. Heck wouldn’t have let you out. You should be thanking me.”

“Well, then where is it? Why didn’t you just bring it with you?” Scotty wondered out loud.

“Do I look like your maid? It’s still in the bathroom. Let’s go.”

Scotty wearily followed Randall’s giant body as they headed down the hallway.

The amount of discomfort that Scotty felt walking alongside the cruelest person he knew was vast. He didn't want to ask any more questions to annoy the brute, yet was curious as to why he *needed* to walk with him. He kept his mouth shut. They shortly reached the cafeteria where a lone restroom stood, but looked to be closed for cleaning. Scotty quickly realized that he had not been in this bathroom all week. In fact, he had only used it a few times the entire school year.

"My comic was found in *there*?" Scotty asked confused. "It must not be mine."

"Sure it is. It's the dumb one about doom buggies and retards in masks." Randall dumbly stated. "It's in the back stall."

He was of course talking about Mad Max, one of Scotty's favorites. Appalled with himself, Scotty darted past the wet floor sign to retrieve his book, immediately followed by Randall.

Scotty gradually became conscience while opening one eye. He tried opening both, but quickly realized that half of his face was numb. He laid flat on the tiled floor, his body stunned and feeble. He used the little strength he had to leverage his body into an upward position. He was confused, dazed while feeling his swollen cheekbone. Just as he began to gather his thoughts, Randall's giant body charged toward him, spearing him back to the floor. He had a lifeless look in his eyes, but they never stared back into Scotty's. Randall instantly situated himself into a ground-and-pound position, placing both knees to each side of Scotty's hips.

"Please, no!" Scotty cried out. "I'll give you anything you want."

He prepared himself for punches, blocking his face with both forearms. But no blows hit him—Randall wasn't throwing them. He suddenly felt a powerful tug on his loose-fit jeans. He withdrew his arms and immediately understood what Randall was attempting to do. A cold realization sank into his gut.

"What- what are you doing?" Scotty asked frantically. "Get off of me!"

Randall finally made eye contact, but held a different kind of expression in his face. He looked almost ashamed, but equally desperate.

"Shut your mouth!" Randall violently whispered. "I swear to god I'll bash your skull in if you say another word."

Randall tore through Scotty's button and zipper like plastic. His strong hands yanked with incredible force. Within seconds Scotty's jeans were drawn down to his knees, then Randall began to work on his own. He pushed down his own faded pair as far as they would go, down to mid-thigh level when a small pocket knife popped out of his front pocket and bounced to the floor.

Scotty noticed the knife right away but was unsure whether Randall did or not. If he had, he gave it no mind. Killing Scotty was not the task, not yet anyway. Everything was happening in a blurry sequence of tangled arms and exhausted grunts. Scotty repeatedly pushed away Randall's hands only for them to be effortlessly thrown aside. He couldn't gather his thoughts and his heart was pounding louder than he could think. Randall's plump hands reached for Scotty's briefs, but he squirmed just enough to prevent the beast from getting a successful grip. Desperate, Scotty reached for the pocket knife, feeling around blindly with his hand. Finally, he felt the small item and clutched it tight in his palm.

“Hold still, you little punk.” Randall said with an out of breath voice. “This will be quick.”

Scotty was nearly out of time when he correctly positioned the knife in his sweaty hand, flipping the blade open with his thumb.

Randall grabbed at Scotty’s crotch, squeezing with anger and intrigue. This forced a feeling of disgust into Scotty’s stomach, a repulsive sensation of tightness that absorbed his entire being. Their eyes met for a second time. Randall looked forcefully hungry as if he was starving for Scotty’s innocence. Scotty stared back as he took a deep breath. Randall broke eye contact and began to go back to business when simultaneously Scotty swung.

Randall’s body smashed against the tile floor, blood spattering from his temple and spilling down the side of his face in small streams. He roared in agony and pressed both hands to his wound.

The relief of the heavy weight from Scotty’s legs sprung him active as he positioned himself over Randall’s stunned body. *He* was now in control. *He* was now the aggressor. Without thought, he jabbed again, sinking the blade deep into Randall’s cheek. A once rational state of mind was completely gone. He had utterly lost himself in the chaos of battle. He gored the already wounded Randall a third time, and then another, and then another.

Scotty fell back in exhaustion, breathing heavily as his death grip on the knife remained snug. His mind was blank and adrenaline coursed through his body like venom. Though shaking profusely, he was oddly calm. He examined his blood-stained hands, gazing at them in disbelief. Never had he seen so much blood. It was something out of a horror movie. He raised up, stood over Randall’s lifeless body and tried to process the situation. There were not enough words in the world to explain why the sight of this disfigured bully made him grin, but it did. He abruptly thought of every time that Randall embarrassed him in the hallway or pushed him to the ground. Every instance of humiliating finger pointing that made him feel like a zoo animal on display. Not to mention what he had *just* attempted. He was going to happily snatch away every bit of his dignity without so much of a second thought. He deserved what he got, right?

These dark thoughts passed through Scotty’s brain as he stood up and stumbled over to the spotless sink. He looked at his pale reflection in the mirror then threw up his breakfast. Immediately moving to the next faucet, he began to wash his hands of the blood. So much blood. He continually questioned why there was no panic—why there was *no* desire to run for help. He couldn’t even cry, his eyes wouldn’t let him. The only feeling his body supplied was a satisfying sensation that sat perfectly in his midsection. An almost prideful feeling. It was odd. He was hungover after being wasted with rage as if a fire had been lit inside him. For as long as he could remember, he played the victim. In what seemed like every scenario, he ended up with the short end of the stick. There was no code of ethics in his world, no karma, no fairness, just a godless place that dealt him a shitty hand. His mind continued to race and thoughts sprung from out of nowhere. ‘*No more,*’ he thought out loud. ‘*My turn.*’

The problem; however, was that Randall was a mere pebble in an overflowing pond of bullies—jocks, cheerleaders, skaters and burnouts—and yes, even

teachers. Verbally reckless people who carelessly neglect the feelings of others. An idea suddenly emerged in Scotty's head—he was going to fix it; he was going to cleanse the school of all its filth, all its evil. And after, he would be a hero, just like in his comics. He would stand amongst them in stature and prestige while astounding mortal eyes. This was his chance, his big break, his revenge. There was no shadow of a doubt in his mind. His brain slowly cut the strings of innocence which hung from society's puppeteer—those heavy burdens of expectation that controlled his entire existence. He looked at Randall one last time, realizing how easy it was to kill him, how good it felt. He turned and walked out of the blood-stained bathroom and into an empty cafeteria. He couldn't remember the last time he felt so fortunate. There was not a soul in sight. No teachers, students or faculty. Everything was falling perfectly into place. *This is meant to happen; it's supposed to happen.* He felt excitement from his genius plot as he began walking home.

Rain now poured down heavy as gusts of wind blew it sideways. No one was in sight. The heavy drops of water stung his skin. It soaked his cloths, washing away much of Randall's blood. He felt in some sort of a daze, almost as if he was possessed by some other soul. He thought about nothing—felt rage, but *thought* nothing. He walked like a man on a mission, not worrying about the muddy puddles of water that he previously avoided. He let out a sudden roar of laughter—an unexpected and pleasurable release of now exposed madness. He laughed at the world just as the world had once laughed at him—his laughter was louder though, louder in every sense of the word. It was stronger, fiercer and more devastating; it crawled with bad intentions.

He arrived to a noiseless house where his mother was locked away in her bedroom, sleeping the day away as usual. He had no time to worry about her though, and clearly the feeling was mutual. He opened the hallway closet and stood on a small crate to give him height. He shifted his hands around the upper shelf in search of his mother's gun. It was actually his father's, but his mother kept it for protection. A jet black 9 millimeter pistol, a beautiful weapon. His father often took him to the shooting range on the weekends, so the grip felt comfortable and familiar in his hand. He stepped down from the stool as he admired the shine of the black exterior, still feeling the high from killing Randall. He checked the clip and chamber for bullets then slid the gun under his belt, pulling over his shirt for concealment.

Just as Scotty began to walk out the door, he thought about his father. It was an accidental thought. There was something missing in the series of events unfolding, an emptiness. He was not sure what it was, but he felt forgetful. He looked around the empty house and suddenly realized what he was overlooking. He drew a chair from the cluttered dining room table, grabbed a pen and a blank sheet paper, and then began writing one last letter.

Today in school we learned about the loneliest creature on Earth. A whale who has been calling out for a mate for over two decades, but whose high-pitched voice is so different to the other whales they never respond.

It was a sad story, but familiar. I realized that we had a very common problem, that whale and I. His endless, grey sea of loneliness was my life. It was me. Neither of our voices held any importance, just a simple waste of sound waves. That whale did not choose to be born different; it just was. It was forced by something greater than

itself to lead a life of loneliness, just as I was forced to exist as a socially-awkward, parentless nobody who is targeted in school bathrooms by confused fucks with sexual orientation issues.

Scotty's aggressive penmanship tore a small hole in the paper. He took a second to gather himself, then continued writing.

I'm so angry with you. Angry that you permanently left without saying goodbye, angry that you left Mom to fall to depression, angry that you only gave me 14 years. You didn't prepare me for any of this. I don't know how to control this rage or handle these thoughts, I haven't the slightest clue. It's like I'm drowning, but the anger is keeping me alive, giving me breath.

I'm about to do something bad. Evil probably.

But it needs to be done. It has to be. And for the first time, I'm glad you're not here. Not here to talk me out of it, not here to see me this way... I still don't know how to end these letters, especially this one. I love you, Dad. And if by some chance you are looking down on me, I hope you close your eyes for this part.

Sincerely, Scotty

Don't Get Bit

By Alyssa Kelough

Chaos! everywhere. The general population is in a rise of panic. Cities are being evacuated, but there are traffic jams. Now the military has been ordered to drop bombs in every major city and in the background the flame of fire is lighting up the sky. Innocent people are dying and there are creatures that are hunting the living. People are being attacked by groups who have quickly bonded to one another to kill and fight for life's necessities such as food and water. The world is forever changed and there is little hope for survival and confusion. Human instinct says to run home and lock the doors, but there is nowhere to really hide. These things are everywhere. The zombie apocalypse has officially begun and now the people that are left in the world will have to adjust to an entire new way of life. Over the past decade the idea of a zombie apocalypse has become more of a true possibility to the world. Many people are preparing for the days for when they will need to keep themselves from becoming infected or killed by a zombie, a zombie apocalypse could spread through diseases and scientific discoveries, people will need to learn the harsh new ways of survival, and in order to reconstruct and re-establish a safe society people must band together.

"Zombies are not 'undead' in the traditional sense, as they continue to decompose and rot and (in most cases) lack cognitive abilities" (Saunders 86). There are two types of zombies. One type is when a human's brain has become infected by a disease and is mutated into a flesh-eating being, these are called living zombies because most likely the human did not die only become infected. The second type of zombie is commonly known as a dead zombie. A dead zombie is a human who had died and risen from the dead still a rotting corpse, without mind control who eats human brains and flesh. These two ideas of a zombie are quite similar. "The prototypical zombie walks slowly and in a stilted fashion, compelled forward by some unearthly force that cannot be reasoned with or stopped" (Saunders p 86). Both types of zombies have the same general idea of eating human flesh and always stalking its prey. The general idea of a zombie is known to spread its disease by biting, scratching, or can spread its infection through saliva and blood. Once this is in contact of a human then it can turn a person into a zombie as well. In many zombie films, the only way to kill off these creatures are to shoot a bullet through the zombie's brain. Simply cutting off the head or severing the body will only mutilate the zombie, as long as the brain is still functioning, they will continue to seek out the living.

Over the past decade, zombie mania has swept the world. New found diseases and popular films such as *28 days later*, *Zombieland*, and *World War Z* have fascinated people into believing that this could be a future apocalyptic possibility in the world. Pop culture has created a comic series which has been created into a popular AMC television show called "The Walking Dead" only causing more anxiety, curiosity, obsession, and paranoia with the general public. Many people have already began planning ahead in case a zombie apocalypse does occur. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Pentagon have an actual plan of emergency for such an occurrence. The plan is called CONOP 8888 and it is

designed as a how to guide for the military to isolate the threat from the undead. This includes ways to kill and destroy several types of zombies such as chicken zombies, vegetarian zombies, and even an evil magic zombie (Lubold). The CONOP 8888's summary reads:

This plan fulfills fictional contingency planning guidance tasking for U.S. Strategic Command to develop a comprehensive plan to undertake military operations to preserve 'non-zombie' humans from the threats posed by a zombie horde." Because zombies pose a threat to all non-zombie human life, Strategic Command will be prepared to preserve the sanctity of human life and conduct operations in support of any human population.(Lubold)

Whether or not this plan is fictional or based on a true emergency, the plan does exist and it is there for a sort of protocol to follow. The CDC's blog on May 16, 2011 provided a guide on how to identify the types of emergencies that are possible in a home area such as tornadoes, earthquakes, flood, but the zombie apocalypse was also mentioned. The CDC's blog recommended having two meeting places for groups and families, use emergency contacts, and have an evacuation route (Deaton). However, this may have only been a ploy to create attention to the safety for natural disasters. There are many people who are preparing for a zombie apocalypse. Alfredo Carbajal is concerned about a bio lab that was recently built near his home. He has created an entire group of ex-military and police officers to join him during his preparations for a zombie epidemic. This group regularly meet and hold target practices, they time themselves when placing on protective gear, and they have a large bunker without windows, surrounded by a gated fence which holds their stock pile. They have weapons, fuel, non-perishable foods, and water filtration supplies (Zombie Preppers). Alfredo Carbajal says, "It is not a question of if a zombie apocalypse will happen, it is a question as to when it will happen." At Michigan State University there are students enrolled in a class called "Surviving the Coming Zombie Apocalypse." This class teaches students how the general public reacts during plagues and earthquakes and they attempt to predict how people would act during a zombie invasion. The idea of this class is to teach the students how to stay calm and react appropriately in any type of emergency situation (Learning to Survive a Zombie Attack 2). Whether or not the zombie apocalypse will become a real issue it is clear that there are many people who believe that it will be one day soon. Paranoia is out in the world and preparations for a zombie apocalypse for many people is no joke or laughing matter even if the CDC may find it to be.

Scientific studies could easily cause the spread of an infection which could cause a zombie apocalypse. There are many case studies that are being done in bio labs and it would only take a clumsy circumstance that could release either a new disease to a test animal or livestock or possibly a releasing of an airborne disease (Zombie Preppers). In order to cause a large outbreak, a disease can be transferred to an animal that is in the human food chain then it is very likely that a large epidemic would arise. Another theory of a zombie epidemic includes drugs. In 2012, a man in Miami attacked a homeless man while naked and ate half of the homeless man's face. It is said that the cause of his actions were due to a mind controlling

drug substance called bath salts (Zombie Preppers). He was shot several times he turned around and growled at the police officers and then he was shot until he was killed. If he was not a zombie, he did show many zombie-like characteristics under the influence of bath salts. Drug induced zombies have been around since the time of slavery and is still known in Haiti by those who practice voodoo. Voodoo witch doctors are known to use certain chemicals from the puffer fish and other natural substances to mind control people (Frisby). In 1962, Clairvius Narcisse was declared dead by a hospital and buried. Miraculously, eighteen years later they found him wandering around the village. When he claimed to be Clairvius Narcisse, he was asked many questions and tests were done to prove that he was in fact Narcisse and that he was poisoned then taken to a sugar plantation to work until he was able to escape (Frisby). This could very possibly be what a zombie is meant to be, a mind controlled slave, but in the sense of a zombie apocalypse, logically this is not what would cause an outbreak of zombies. There is a belief that not enough research on diseases such as SARS, Stem cells, and Ebola have been done and if not carefully monitored they and diseases like them could cause the zombie infection to spread (Cereska).

To survive a zombie apocalypse and outbreak, there will be a large adjustment to what is now known to life. The ability to go to McDonald's, Wal-Mart, or have running tap water in general will be non-existent. One will need to survive zombies, humans, and find ways to fulfill basic life necessities when society is gone. In the AMC television show, "The Walking Dead," these three things are the basis to survival along with the strength in numbers of a group. Zombies are killed by being stabbed through the brain with sharp objects and bullets to the brain. The main characters of the show must find many places to live for shelter, raid houses for food, and find natural springs for water. Living on a constant move to keep from a heard of zombies from overwhelming the area. Although, it would be assumed that the zombies are the enemy, once man loses his humanity and means of a society then he is also the enemy and cannot be trusted. There may be a need to kill another human being to keep from being killed. Throughout the series, the main character, Rick Grimes has been forced to kill his best friend among others in order to survive and protect others that he is in a group with. "How many walkers have you killed? How many people have you killed? Why?" These are the three questions that Rick Grimes asks any stranger before allowing a newcomer into his group (The Walking Dead) If these questions weren't used, then what type of trust could be obtained from an outsider? It is important to know what type of person could possibly join the entire group. Safety and lives depend on the new person.

The movie, *Zombieland*, features a shy boy called Columbus who is on the search for his parents during the zombie apocalypse. Columbus uses several rules to survive in his zombie universe: Rule number one is Cardio because running is a must in order to escape. Rule number two is the double tap because the zombie will need to be hit twice in the head in order to be sure it won't come back and attack or stalk again. Rule number eight is get a kick ass partner there is more of a chance of survival when a group is higher in numbers (*Zombieland*). These rules are important to understand because people will panic. When panic arises then common sense is gone and that is how someone gets killed. If a zombie apocalypse does happen,

always stay calm and follow the rules that zombie movies and television shows have provided throughout time. Some important ideas to take from zombie expert, Matt Mogk are the following: Step one, is to watch *Zombieland*. Mogk states that this movie gives a close idea to what zombies will truly be like if an infection were to happen. Step two, is to check Facebook. Social media and the internet is not going to shut down immediately. If an outbreak were to occur, posts would be everywhere and provide a heads up regarding the situation. Step three, is to make supplies a first priority. In order to live all humans need water and food. It is always best to keep stocked up on as much water as possible. Step four, stay close to home. Mogk says, "The grass is not greener on the other side in a plague. If you think it's really bad where you are, it's worse somewhere else." By staying close to home you have an advantage to knowing the area. Step five, whatever you do, don't go to Wal-Mart. Mogk states that staying away from Wal-Mart and other big box stores and gun stores are best because these are the places other people are more likely to go (Bradley). Remembering that people are dangerous and cannot be trusted is important, but also a larger store can also mean that more zombies are hiding behind the closed doors of a favorite retail store. These five steps are important because they provide a logical sense of survival among with what have already been shared by movies and television. There's no guarantee that a zombie outbreak will happen, but the idea of having to fight for survival is not often thought about in today's world. Most people in today's society are not educated as to how to cultivate nor dare to imagine drinking dirty water or filtering rain water to drink. These basic necessities that are taken for granted can disappear at any given time and could be gone in minutes during a zombie apocalypse. Also, the idea of killing other people is not on a normal person's mind. But, it can be possible that during a zombie apocalypse there will be a situation when humanity will need to be turned off in order to survive. These situations could be as simple as another human being stealing your weapons, food, water, possibly shelter. Another highly situation is the possibility of being in a kill or be killed situation. Rick Grimes did not want to kill his best friend, but he was forced to. The idea of taking a life in today's society is appalling, but in a chaotic world as a zombie outbreak there may not be any other choice.

When the world has reached chaos and disorder it is possible to reconstruct civilization. Zombies may crowd the world and give the impression to a point of no return. However, human kind has achieved many reconstruction periods throughout history. Although, the common man is not a rocket scientist, it is human nature to take control and survive. At the very least there should be two places available at the time of a zombie outbreak: the safe zone and the infected zone (Frisby). A safe zone will be a small and protected area keeping humans protected from the danger of the walking dead. The infected zone will be an open space that the zombies are open to roam. However, throughout time the safe zone will become larger as more areas are cleared of zombies. This can only happen if people decide to band together and fight against the real enemy, not one another, which are the flesh eating monsters. Be careful not to end up in a safe zone town like Woodbury, Georgia (*The Walking Dead*). This town had appearance of a structure, however, it only held dangers inside the town from its Governor and his close followers. The Governor of Woodbury on AMC's "*The Walking Dead*" had an authoritarian style of leadership.

Safety may cause for strict rules, but the Governor was forceful with his people and he would take all weapons away from those who entered into his area. Although a safe town may give an appearance of being safe, during a zombie outbreak common sense says that at any given moment a zombie could leak itself into the area and hunt the living only to take the safety from the safe zone. This leaves all those inside the area without a way to protect one's own self. The safe zone can still be dangerous. Even during an apocalyptic time it is still important to lead a democratic way of life. This may explain as to why Rick Grimes has been successful with his group of people. They band together and provide a democratic way of structure before making any important decisions that may cause any major effect to the entire group.

Although the Centers for Disease Control may have made a mockery of a zombie apocalypse with its blog and how to guide for survival of the apocalypse, many people such as the students at the Michigan State University and Alfredo Carbajal are taking steps to prepare for the upcoming zombie apocalypse. They would rather be safe than sorry if the pandemic were to occur. Taking precautions by practicing self-defense, learning to stay calm in a panic situation, and stocking up on life's general necessities such as non-perishable foods and water. When placed in the times of a zombie apocalypse it is important to remember how to stay protected from zombies and other people. Movies and television shows have provided general and logical rules to live by in order to keep basic survival such as stay away from big box stores, don't get bit, and the fact that there are strength in numbers. During the apocalyptic times humanity may have to leave momentarily for survival, but it is also important to remember to bring a level of humanity back in order to keep the possibility and hope of a reconstructed life. Reconstruction of civilization is possible and humans can join together to make the world a safe place again. The process of any type of reconstruction will need its people to work together, always stay cautious, and remember the importance of having a democracy.

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Find the Mermaid

By Alyssa Kelough

Imagine yourself sailing on the high seas in the early 1600's. You are out to discover new land with your crew of one hundred sailors. You are surrounded by water, the hot sun, and sweaty men who have not bathed in weeks. As you lean against the rail and stare at the sea, you notice a large splash. You think most likely it was a whale or a dolphin. Your admiration and love for the sea keeps interests high so you continue to glare at the waters. You notice there are two eyes glaring back at you from the water below. A beautiful woman with long golden hair is in the water. You call out to the other sailors on the ship to help you retrieve and save the woman. You wonder, how did she make her way so far out into the ocean? As you turn your head from the others and back to find the woman, she is no longer there. You then see a large scaly fish tail splash right in front of you. She is gone, and now the entire crew believes you are making up another sea tale. Unless she was a mermaid. For thousands of years, the legend of mermaids have peaked interest all around the world. The possibility that these creatures of mythology do exist may be closer to the truth than once believed. Sightings of mermaids have been documented and claimed throughout history. Only seven percent of the world's oceans have been studied. There is also the scientific development of the Aquatic Ape Theory to help support a mermaid's existence.

Mermaid sightings have been documented throughout history all around the globe. Each location has a depiction of what a mermaid looks like, and each one has a story of the supposed myth included. A common idea of the mermaid is a being that is half human and half fish, the upper body being that of a human and the lower body representing a fish. Irish mermaids known as Merrows are said to have lived on dry land below the sea and are reported to be the souls of pagan women banished from the land by St. Patrick (Paranormal Ocean). The Greek version of a mermaid was called Derketo. The legend says that Alexander the Great's sister was transformed into a mermaid after her death and is rumored to still live in the Aegean seas. China and Japan each have more than one version of the mermaid. China mermaids are believed to be childish water nymphs with colored tails. Their tails would be purple and smell of happiness or the tail would be red and smell of sadness. The Japanese mermaid is known as Ningyo and is depicted as a fish with only a human head. Chinese and Japanese legends also have a version of the mermaid that they share called the sea-dragon or dragon-wives (Marine Bio). Each location shares a version of the same type of sea creature of half human and half fish. Moreover, when these legends began, communication was not well played in history's past. Phones, the internet, and postal services were not available for communication as they are today. Most cultures did not communicate to one another even with ships that sailed. It is very peculiar that so many different cultures would share a version of a mermaid without actually seeing a creature to base the myth. In January 1493, Christopher Columbus logged that he saw three mermaids in the area of the Dominican Republic. Instead of the beautiful creatures he saw in art, Columbus stated that the mermaids looked masculine. "They were not as beautiful as they are painted, although to some extent they have a human appearance in the

face.” He also noted that he had seen similar creatures off the coast of West Africa (Epoch Times). In 1614, Captain John Smith, known famously for the story of Pocohantas, stated he saw a mermaid off the coast of Massachusetts. John Smith logged, “the upper part of her body perfectly resembled that of a woman, and she was swimming about with all possible grace near the shore.” It had “large eyes, rather too round, a finely shaped nose (a little too short), well-formed ears, rather too long, and her long green hair imparted to her an original character by no means unattractive” (Epoch Times). Having spent many weeks out at sea, it is possible that explorers such as Christopher Columbus and John Smith saw manatees or sea cows believing them to be mermaids. However, manatees and sea cows have small heads and large bodies keeping them from having any humanistic facial features. Both Christopher Columbus and John Smith were highly experienced explorers and sailors which make this logic of a manatee or sea cow sighting unlikely considering the long amounts of time they previously spent at sea before this documentation. A possible explanation for such sightings are reports of women divers working of the coasts and islands of Japan going back 1500 years. They dive for shellfish, seaweed, starfish, octopuses and pearls and do this all year round. Most of the women dive topless or in the nude wearing only a belt to hold their catches for the day (Woman Thou Art God). These deep sea diving women were not discovered by the general public until the 1960’s. Mostly because women were not known as the money maker in a household. If so, it was kept secret due to how weak the husband would appear to peers. This also may explain the name for mermaids in Japan mentioned previously as, dragon-wives. If women, as deep sea divers, were hidden as general knowledge in Japan, it is possible that women who did this in other locations throughout the world may have been sighted and confused with a mermaid as well. But this does not explain the fish tail described by the legends.

Only seven percent of the world’s oceans have been studied. The average depth of the ocean is 14,000 feet and 71% of Earth’s surface is covered by ocean waters (NOAA). Mermaids cannot be ruled out of existence due to how little is known about the ocean. In the past ten years, thousands of unknown species have been discovered such as the yeti crab. The yeti crab has hairy pincers and is white haired, hence the namesake yeti. This species is so unusual that a new family of animal had to be created to classify it and even after a year of study scientists say there's still much about it they don't understand (Mother Nature Network). If thousands of species have been found in the past decade and we have only explored seven percent of the oceans, then the possibility of a mermaid’s existence still lingers. Mermaids would need to live in the deep of the ocean in order to stay hidden from the dangers of the ocean waters. They would need a safe place to hunt, rest, and even hide from sharks or any other life-threatening living being. With all of the pollution and large ships of today’s world, this may be the cause as to why mermaids choose to stay cautious of human habitats. Therefore, causing sightings to become less of an occurrence.

Finally, the Aquatic Ape Theory should be considered regarding mermaids. Originally the idea of evolution is supported by The Killer Ape Theory. This theory represents the evolution of humankind from apes into man which suggests that man evolved by coming down from the trees and live on the African plains (Mermaids Are

Real). However, in the early 20th century, marine biologists noticed that the blubber of dolphins, seals, and whales closely resembled the fat of human beings. Sir Alistair Hardy introduced the idea of the Aquatic Ape Theory in 1960 which was further developed by Elaine Morgan in the 1980s. Morgan stated that man evolved by coming down from the trees to live near the seashore rather than the plains to hunt. Living by the sea allowed the human ancestors to survive on food from the sea which helped the brain to develop and evolution to its current size. A human brain is three times larger than an ape's brain. This was caused from the omega from eating the fish and crustaceans by the seaside. Regarding furthering the evolution process and how humans can now walk on two legs, Morgan states the following: "With these apes wading for most of the time, foraging in the water, they would become used to standing upright and in the end stay this way while on land. Primate fur is virtually useless in keeping an ape warm when it's soaking wet and so it would no longer be of any use. It began to disappear. Evolution also gave an advantage to fatter apes whose fat kept them warm in the water. Eventually the apes lost most of their fur and gained subcutaneous fat, which allowed them to thrive in their new environment." (Mermaids Are Real)

True scientific evidence proves evolution from a land animal to a sea animal transition has happened. Orca whales have evolved from a wolf like ancestor millions of years ago. A more recent example is when a group of brown bears split from the rest of their line 150,000 years ago and evolved into a new species which are known as polar bears. Polar bears are capable of holding their breath for minutes at a time underwater and they have developed webbing in their front paws in order to help them swim (Mermaid a Body Found). Humans also have finger and toe webbing. Significantly, what would be the reason to have this webbing unless to use for swimming, fishing, or other survival purposes. If this type of evolution is possible with animals, it could very well be possible to have happened with humans as well. Over time, some of the Aquatic Ape ancestors may have chosen to stay on land while others decided to move further into the ocean waters eventually breaking the ties from land completely. Through time, like the orca, eventually mermaids furthered themselves through the process of evolution and exchange their legs for a tail; hence the mermaid that we think of today, half human and half fish.

The existence of mermaids has yet to be proven, but the world's history has captured many tales from across the globe to support a similar myth of the mermaid throughout a time of non-communication. The undiscovered oceans leave great possibilities of many species yet to be discovered, identified, and studied. The Aquatic Ape theory supports that mermaids are evolved from mankind and could have easily transformed from the same ape ancestors that humans are known to have developed from.

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Runaway Kid

By Alyssa Kelough

My parents worked hard every day for everything we had. Not only did they each work forty plus hours a week in the factory, but they did odd jobs for an extra ten or twenty dollar bill. My one and only brother was only three years older than me. However, he spent the most time raising me since our parents were away so much.

Our parents were hard workers. No doubt. Unfortunately, they also had a gambling problem. They spent their days working and their nights either at the casino or at the bingo hall. I can remember my brother giving me a coloring sheet and some crayons instructing me to be quiet while he watched television.

"When is Mama coming home? Why is Daddy not home from work yet? I would cry to my brother feeling confusion and tears behind my eyes.

"Because they don't love you. So shut up!" My brother would scream as he would push me out of his sighted view so he could continue watching his television stories.

"I'm hungry. What are we going to eat? I promise I won't bother you again if you fix me something." I would beg and promise as I tugged on his oversized shirt.

He would ignore me until a commercial came on the television. He would walk into the kitchen pull out a package of Ramen Noodles and then begin boiling water.

"I want a hamburger." My eyes would gaze toward him pleading for something other than the normal package of beef or chicken flavored noodles that we ate every day for the past week.

"This is all we got. Eat it or go without." He would reply with harshness in his tone making me feel smaller than the six year old I already was.

I would run to my room to cry. I can still remember how I had attempted multiple times to run away. Each time I left the same note. It would say:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I hate you. You don't love me. I'm never coming back.

BYE,

ALYSSA

The sad part is, my brother had helped me a couple of times to write the note and then he would laugh as I packed plastic Wal-Mart bags full of clothes. Each time I would try to leave and find my own independence in the world as a six year old little girl, well I would barely make it two blocks down the street before turning around and running home.

One hot summer morning, my brother was playing Nintendo and he wouldn't let me play with him. We immediately began arguing. I pinched him. He kicked me. I slapped his arm. He punched me. I cried so hard that my face was red and I was hyperventilating from not breathing properly. I was in agonizing pain and my heart was broken. *He never let me have any fun. Why did he hate me so much? All I wanted to do was play Nintendo with him.*

"Mama! Mama!" I forced her name out through my loss of breath. I searched for her and dad everywhere in the house. She wasn't there. He wasn't there. I made my way back to the bedroom and saw that big brother was playing his Nintendo game again. I walked outside and sat on the porch for two hours waiting

for my mom to show up. The heat felt like it was a billion degrees outside and I was drenched in sweat. I walked back inside the house and into my room. I changed into my hot pink, one piece bathing suit and slipped my clear jelly flip flops on. I grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil and I wrote a new letter.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I love you.

BYE,

ALYSSA

I left the note on the kitchen table. I reached into the linen closet and retrieved an old towel then walked out the door.

I walked three blocks until I reached the community kiddie pool. My favorite thing to do in the summer had always been swimming. I immediately threw my towel on the ground and placed my shoes next to it. I jumped in. I began splashing around and made instant friends with the other kids around my age. I remember how we all pretended to be mermaids. I stayed at the pool for a long time. So long that I didn't even notice that the sun was about to go down and the lifeguard on duty had begun draining the pool for the end of the day. Slowly all of my new friends began to leave with their parents. I finally felt how alone I really was as I had started to dry myself off. I watched a little girl younger than me sliding down the slide with her daddy at the bottom catching her. I walked over to the swings and sat there wishing my Mama or Daddy was with me. Even my mean older brother. *What good is the park without Mama and Daddy? Why does it matter? They don't love me. They don't even know I'm gone.*

The little girl and her dad left the park. Then I really was alone. I didn't think about walking home. I didn't want to. I just kept playing on the swings. I sat in the swing, tangling the chain tightly until I released it so I could spin really fast. Once I grew tired of the swing I moved to the merry go round and slowly kicked myself around. I could see the street lights come on as the sun was finally setting. I debated on whether or not to go home. But my heart would begin beating fast each time I did. The dark streets appeared scary and dangerous and I was terrified.

I don't remember how long I sat at the park feeling alone and scared in the dark. But I do remember my eyes burning from two bright car lights pulling up at the park. I immediately panicked. I was incredibly afraid that I was about to be snatched up. Brother had told me a million times before that I was an easy target for strangers. *I should have stayed home instead of running to the park to go swimming today.*

"ALYSSA!" I heard a familiar panicked scream come from the car as a shadowed figure stepped out.

"What?" I screamed back with curiosity.

"GET OVER HERE BEFORE I SPANK YOUR ASS FOR RUNNING OFF AGAIN." The voice replied in a harsher tone.

I stood up from the merry go round and tilted my head wondering if the car was my mom's and if the voice truly belonged to her as I had hoped it would be. I slowly began walking toward the headlights with my eyes squinted. I saw my brother jump out of the passenger's side of the car.

"I ought to beat you up for leaving the house without telling me. I've been looking for you all over the neighborhood." Big brother said as he wrapped his arms around me. He started crying silently and I felt his tears drop against my forehead.

My Mom pointed toward the backseat of the car. Her eyes told me to sit down in the back and buckle up without any words being exchanged. I listened to her instructions and feared the silence in the car as we drove to the house.

Once we arrived home, all three of us jumped out of the car.

"Go sit on the porch, Alyssa. I need to talk to you." My Mom said as my Dad began to walk up toward the house.

"I can't believe you took off! I've been searching for you everywhere since your mom and I got back from the city." My dad addressed me frantically and out of breath as he made his way to sit beside me on the porch.

"Go inside the house and we'll talk to you later." My mom told my brother as she opened the screen door for him. He obeyed and walked inside into the living room with his head down.

"You can't keep running off all the time. What if somebody picked you up?" My mother spoke with tears running down her face as she stood in front of me. "I can't imagine anything bad happening to you. You're my baby. I love you."

"I just went to the park. I was coming back." My lip quivered with fear of getting a spanking from the day's adventure. "You're gone all the time. I just wanted to go swimming and he wouldn't let me play Nintendo with him." I attempted to point the blame to my brother knowing that it was my actions that lead up to this talk.

My dad wrapped his arm around my shoulders and said, "We have to work, Alyssa."

"You don't have to keep going to Bingo and the Casino!" I screeched with tears running down my face.

"We go there sometimes so that we may try to win some money to be able to provide for you and your brother. We don't go to abandon you. We always come home." My dad attempted to explain his gambling addiction in a more dignified answer.

I placed my head down. "Why is it always just me and him? He's mean to me. He hates me. We only ever have noodles to eat and he doesn't let me do anything." I raised my head and my eyes were pleading toward my mother as I continued, "Please stop going to gamble."

My mom glared at my dad. My dad looked back toward my mom. My dad stood up and opened the front door to speak to my brother, "Come outside we have to all talk as a family."

My parents stood side by side as my brother sat next to me.

"We've been telling you that we have been going to play bingo and the casino, but it's really not the entire truth." My mother began in a low toned voice, "You know your daddy works all the time mowing lawns and gardening around town and then at the factory every day. Yes, we do go out sometimes at night, but our days haven't been filled with just working."

"Are you going to finally tell her?" My brother questioned mom as his eyes opened wide.

I looked toward my parents for some type of an answer and their suspense was frightening me.

My dad squatted down to face me and he blurted out, "Your mom has been sick. We've been going to the city a lot because she's been diagnosed with cancer."

My brother looked at me, then grabbed my hand. As he held it tight he whispered to me, "We'll be okay. I promise. I will always be here to take care of you."

In the Blink of an Eye

By Madison McKinnis

Seconds; that is all it took. Flashing like a strobe light right before my eyes, although seemingly slow as a turtle. Three, two, one, and I was being lifted forward out of my seat. Filling the air was a sound similar to an abundance of fireworks exploding in the night sky. A whirlpool of emotions rushed through my body; fear, regret, disappointment, sadness, confusion, and gratefulness. Like buzzing bees, hundreds of questions swarmed my mind; Why? Why? Why? What if? What if? What if?

It was the night of October 15, 2011. I was in Choctaw, Oklahoma at my cousin, Adam's house. "Come check it out," his friend, Garrett, said after we had been talking about his mom's brand new, shiny, black, Mercedes- which was completely loaded. Garrett and I went outside and got into his mom's car as he continued to tell me everything about it and show me the interior. Not having a clue that this normal, fun day with my family was about to turn into a night that I will never forget- along with sounds and emotions that are now embedded in my mind forever- we shut the car doors. Putting on my seatbelt did not cross my mind, when it should have.

He began to gradually press on the gas pedal as he cruised down the neighborhood street. I thought he was going to the end of the street then turning back around, but he took a sharp right onto the main road. Twenty miles per hour, forty miles per hour, sixty miles per hour; I grasped hold of the handle on the door with my right hand. Eighty miles per hour; my left hand found its way to the middle console, holding on tightly. We raced through the first stop sign. One-hundred miles per hour; my heart started thumping like the sound of feet thumping on sidewalk as they were being chased by a criminal lurking in the shadows. One-hundred and ten miles per hour; the car hopped and swerved from side to side. One-hundred and twenty miles per hour; we were running out of road. One-hundred and thirty miles per hour; panic swept into the air and he began to forcefully press on the brakes.

Skidding and swerving across the country road, Garrett managed to get the car slowed down to sixty miles per hour. At this point, it was no more fun and games. My heart continued to race uncontrollably, my face began to flush, and my hands started to sweat. I felt myself squeezing the handle tighter and trying to push myself back with my other hand on the middle console and my feet stretched out, pushing against the floorboard. At the very end of the road, which came to a "T", sat a tree that resembled an outstretched and upheld hand barreling up to the sky with its trunk as big as a hippopotamus and hard as a rock. It felt as if I was in a tunnel and all I could see at the end was that monstrous tree that we were approaching. It all happened so fast, yet seemed like it was in slow motion because I knew it was about to happen. My life flashed before my eyes. Fifty-three miles per hour, fifty-two miles per hour, fifty-one miles per hour, fifty miles per hour; we raced through the second stop sign. Smash! Crack! Clank!

With tears and a great amount of blood dripping down my face, into my eyes, and all over my clothes, hundreds of shards of glass covering my hair and penetrating my forehead, bruises forming on my arms, and muscles so tense, I

climbed out of the car, out of the ditch, and onto the road. At the time, I did not know how severe things were, but I still should not have moved. "My mom is going to kill me," I said worriedly as I sat looking down at the ground in shock and with many questions circling my head. "What just happened? What are we going to do? Why didn't I wear my seatbelt? Why didn't I tell him to stop? Why am I so stupid?"

Garrett picked up his cell phone and called Adam's other friend, Seth, who lived right up the street. Seth and his dad hopped in their truck and sped down to the scene. He told us to jump in and the four of us drove back to my aunt's house. I remember the exact feeling of my stomach dropping and panic beginning to take over my whole body as I looked in the rear view mirror, seeing my face for the first time. It reminded me of something I would see in the goriest horror movie. We arrived back at my aunt's house and Seth's dad helped me inside, made me sit down in the dining room, and went to wake up my Aunt Pappy and Uncle Londo. My aunt came rushing into the dining room with a look on her face that perfectly defined worried. Her eyes bulged and her jaw dropped as she took one glance at me. Everyone inspected me to make sure I was okay and nothing was terribly wrong other than my forehead. They gave me a towel to hold on my forehead and my aunt decided to take me to the Emergency Room.

We headed outside to the car and made our way to the Emergency Room. On the way there, we had to take the road that not only has physically scarred me, but has also emotionally scarred me to this day- and probably for the rest of my existence. The sick feeling I had in the pit of my stomach seemed to grow as I felt like I was reliving the whole accident again. We finally arrived at the Emergency Room at about midnight. At one point, my aunt called my mom and stepdad, who were in Yukon at my GiGi's house, to inform them of what had just happened so they could meet us at the Emergency Room. Pulling up to the doors, I remember seeing my mom come rushing towards me with perturbation written all over her face, along with tears rapidly tumbling from her eyes.

Walking into the Emergency Room, everyone in the waiting room was staring at me like that of the stares the new kid at school receives on his first day. I covered up my forehead with the towel and put my head down in shame. A cold, stiff, numbing feeling had taken over my whole head. After sitting in the waiting room for about thirty minutes talking to a police officer and filling out a police report, the nurse called me back to a room. She asked me a list of questions and had me lie down on the bed. I remember seeing my mom, my aunt, my step dad, the doctor, and about three or four nurses standing around me. One of the nurses began trying to clean the blood off my face, and the glass out of my hair and forehead. It might as well have been a bristle pad that she was using to clean my forehead. After showing obvious frustration with the nurse from the excruciating pain of my forehead being scrubbed, they gave me two doses of Dilaudid- a narcotic analgesic that treats moderate to severe chronic pain- through an IV. As soon as it entered my veins, I could feel it flowing through my body- starting at my toes and crawling to my head. After a few minutes of seeing double of everything and mumbling odd, funny things to my family, I finally fell asleep. The nurses then continued to clean me up.

The next thing I remember is sitting up in my aunt's fluffy bed the next morning looking out of the window as I watched the large glowing sphere rising

slowly into the beautiful morning sky. I was overwhelmed with gratefulness as I was given this opportunity to be able to witness this ravishing view again. "You are beyond lucky," I heard come out of everyone's mouth over and over. I know I was. I like to think that a certain beautiful angel was watching over me.

Marilyn Monroe once said, "Everything happens for a reason." I strongly believe in those wise words. The night of October 15th, 2011, was a major eye-opener for me. To this day, every morning, I still thank God for being blessed with this beautiful life. It could have been taken away from me in a matter of one second.

The River

By Anna Smith

Elijah sat and stared out of the window as his eyes followed the sway of the tree branches outside. He daydreamed about taking a walk through the woods back home at the farm as Ms. Edmondson finished announcing the homework assignments to the class. The bell rang, and Elijah barely caught the end of it when he realized that it was time to go. He packed up his things, put them in his bag, and headed off toward the school bus.

Though it was a long drive from the school to his house, Elijah was too caught up in the after-school activity he had planned to notice. Often he lost himself in the world outside rather than interacting with the students at school. Even Grandma had a difficult time getting him to do his homework and chores because he was usually outside exploring the farm. If he wasn't there physically, he was most definitely there in his mind. He would run through the trees and pretend that he was racing the wind, tagging each tree as they passed him. He loved to feel the rough bark on his fingertips. He could lose himself in the woods, and be confident in that he would never actually get lost, all the way to the river that is. Elijah had never crossed the river that split his favorite forest in half, but today... this was the day. Today was his father's birthday. Elijah considered the years before, but was never able to build enough courage. He promised himself it would happen this time.

"Grandma! I'm home," Elijah yelled.

The words echoed through the two-story farmhouse. It wasn't the sturdiest post in the fence, but Elijah loved it. Faded memories flooded his mind as he looked through the house, each room reminding him of a certain time spent with his parents. He stopped in the kitchen doorway and remembered the many holidays and good times spent at Grandma's making the food. Momma always let him lick the cake bowl after she was finished with it.

"Get over here and make you a sandwich, ya munchkin. There's chips in the cabinet if you want some." Grandma kissed his forehead and got back to preparing for supper. "How was your day, honey?"

"It was good Grandma. Can I go explore the woods out past the pasture?" Elijah didn't want to waste any time. Grandma was always light-hearted and knew how important it was for boys, especially 12 year olds, to explore their world.

"Got any homework?" Grandma asked.

"Nope!" Elijah replied as he spread the mustard and mayonnaise sloppily to both slices of bread.

"Get your chores done?" she continued the list ritualistically.

"Yep!" Elijah said. He did them before he left for school. He knew he wouldn't have the time after he got home.

"I don't care," she smiled. "But we got a small shower comin' and I want you back about an hour before sunset. Supper should be ready by then, and I want you all washed up in time." Elijah knew the drill.

“Hey!” Grandma yelled sternly, pointing a butter knife in his direction with furrowed eyebrows and dead-eye contact. “You don’t step foot near that river, you understand me? It’s too dangerous right now.”

“All right Grandma, I won’t.” Elijah lied. She always said that. He didn’t care about her scold. He was too excited. This time was just like every other time except he was finally going to do it. He was going to cross the river to see what was on the other side. He hopelessly wished Dad would be there to watch him.

Elijah wolfed down his sandwich and ran upstairs to his room. He never left for an adventure without grabbing his pocketknife and his dad’s Oklahoma University ball cap. He fit it on his head and ran downstairs, through the dining room, and out of the door.

The sky wasn’t very grey. The sun was still shining through the misty clouds and the stickiness of the air made Elijah’s t-shirt stick to his back. He paused on the porch, took a deep breath, and smelled that fresh May, rainy, earthy smell that he loved so much. Elijah took another deep breath and sprinted off toward the forest line. He had to pass through the big back yard leaping over the dog’s toys, jump the dog’s house, duck the chicken pen roof, and get to the barbed wire fence. He stepped on the bottom barbed wire, pulled the next one up toward the sky, and fit his little body through the opening. After the fence, he was home free except for the horses. Horses always made Elijah nervous. Cows were fine, but horses were different. Someone could look into a horse’s eye and feel something deep and intelligent. They were unpredictable, and the deep sound of their hooves on the ground at full sprint was terrifying. Cows were stupid and most of the time just mooed at him. He scanned the pasture looking for any threats. There were a couple of bulls far out to the east and one horse grazing just a little bit closer toward him but not too close. He saw the chance and took it, sprinting toward the tree line as fast as he could.

As soon as he ran past the first tree, he stopped to catch his breath. He finally made it. He always felt that as soon as he cleared the woods nothing could ever find or stop him. He was invincible.

As he took step after step deeper into the brush, memories began to flood his mind again. Momma and Dad loved to take him out here on nature walks when he was younger and visited Grandma’s house. Elijah passed his favorite tree that looked like a toilet at the bottom. The trunk circled perfectly outward to shape a toilet bowl and seat as the rest of the tree acted as back support. He remembered the time Dad found it and sat on it, teasing Momma until she was red in the face from laughing so hard. Dad was so funny. He kept walking, taking everything in as he passed each memory. He stopped at one tree that had a low tree limb winding out making it a perfect seat. Momma used to set him up on that tree and pretend that he was riding a horse. They called it Ol’ Smokey.

Life was so good here. Elijah kept walking and walking until he looked ahead and found the opening. He knew that through that opening was what he had been looking forward to all day. He thought about Dad’s birthday and knew that this was the time. He stood at the bank overlooking the river that was exponentially wider

than he remembered before, but he didn't care. He remembered the last time he was here and flashed back.

Momma was picking wild onions along the bank, and Daddy stood beside Elijah, looking to the other side.

"Daddy, can we cross that?" Looking to the unexplored territory approximately 30 yards out.

"Not today son. We don't have enough daylight left, but Ill take ya sometime in the summer. Deal?"

"All right, I guess..." Elijah stomped off toward Momma, and Dad chuckled. He was just as light-hearted as Grandma.

Elijah thought how he never knew that would be the last time he and his parents would go on a nature walk. It was four years ago to the month that the storm came through and changed his life. He remembered sitting in the living room at home with his mom watching from the kitchen. Daddy was out in the field putting horseshoes on the horses. Elijah was frustrated that the weather advisories and tornado warnings kept interrupting his show, but he had no idea. He was so used to the thunderstorms. It was in the middle of his favorite part when the distressing beeps sounded from the TV screen and the weatherman gave the warning.

"Gary England reporting from the storm warn team on news channel 9. Folks this is not something to take lightly. Take shelter and heed warning right now. Do not hesitate, again we plead, do not hesitate to get in your storm shelters if you are in these regions or counties."

As he finished, the sirens rang, and Momma saw that they were under a severe tornado warning. The storm had taken an unexpected turn straight for them. She snatched Elijah and ran to the cellar. She grabbed the lantern and lit the flame, sat Elijah in the far corner away from the door, hung the lantern, and looked at him.

"I've gotta go get your daddy son. Do not come out for anything you hear me? You stay put in here even if it takes a long time for us to get back here. Do you understand Elijah? Momma will be right back." She kissed his damp, soft cheeks and held him to her chest. "You stay put Elijah."

Elijah nodded his little head with tears in his eyes. "Momma!!" He screamed as she closed the cellar door behind him. He remembered waiting a long time for Momma and Daddy to come back. He screamed and cried as the roars and clashes sounded from outside. He didn't know that the horses were going crazy and busted through the fence, sending Daddy after them to round them up. Daddy had no idea what was about to happen, and Momma couldn't find him to warn him. She never gave up looking, but it was too late. Elijah remembered falling asleep and waking up as a man in a blue shirt with a cross on its pocket opened the cellar door.

"I've gotta cross this river... I've gotta do it," Elijah said to himself. Maybe he thought he'd see his parents on the other side. He didn't know, but he knew this was something he had to do for himself.

It had started raining a little back at Ol' Smokey, but he didn't really think much of it. He loved the rain. It made him feel peace in his heart. It made him feel home. As he sat on the riverbank, the rain washed away his tears. They fell in fat droplets, landing on his head and spilling down his face. It started down heavier.

"I guess it's time," Elijah couldn't have prepared himself for this emotional realization. The sky was getting darker as the clouds billowed in front of the sun, and the rain fell without relenting. He started down the riverbank.

The roar of the rushing water was all too surreal. It brought him back to that day in the cellar. Elijah had a gut feeling that this was too dangerous, but he didn't care. His stomach twisted and churned like the waters that stood before him. He hadn't realized how much emotion he really bottled up until he stood on the edge overlooking the raging river. If he could just get to the other side, he'd feel better. He could leave all of his heartache there. He put one foot in the water.

This isn't so bad, he thought to himself. He took another step. The water shaped itself around his ankles and it was freezing. He felt sturdy. He took another step feeling the crisp tingling sensation in each hair follicle as the water began to swallow his legs. He continued until he was in waist deep. He kept telling himself, *just swim, you can do it. Swim hard.*

He took a deep breath in and let it out. Again, a deep breath in and then out... He had to build the confidence. He knew this wouldn't be easy. He waited for what seemed like forever until finally he said to himself, "one... Two... THREE!" He thrust his whole body forward using the tip of his toes sending himself further into the rushing waters. He no longer had footing in the clay and began to thrash and swim for his life toward the middle of the river. He had underestimated the power of the current. He knew it would send him down stream but not to this extent. Elijah panicked and began to kick harder. He was already tired and up to his ears in the water. He watched as the trees to the other side sped by, and the rain began to sting his face. How was he going to reach the other side to catch and pull himself out when he couldn't even get to the middle? Elijah knew he just had to keep his head above water and keep swimming as hard as he could, but that was easier said than done. The consistent, raging roar of the river was enough to convince Elijah he had no chance. He thought he would never be able to escape the sound of defeat until the water began to fill his ears. The rain stung his eyes as he opened them to measure how far he had left to swim. He lost all confidence in his ability to reach the other side, and as he got to the middle of the river, he tried to scream for help, but water filled his mouth. Elijah's feet kicked around feeling for any sort of leverage that could enable him to stand, but all he felt was the emptiness that surrounded him. He felt hopeless. The rain wouldn't relent. Elijah could feel his body tire, and he didn't have much energy left.

"NO! Don't give up... you can't!" Elijah pushed himself. "Just swim harder! You have to get to the other side."

Elijah's adrenaline kicked in and he swam harder than before. "If you can just make it past the middle, you can get there. Just keep going."

Elijah kicked, thrashed, and held his chin toward the sky with his eyes clinched shut as the rain pelted his face.

He wasn't focused on anything but getting to the other side. He didn't see the giant tree stump that was rushing directly toward him. Elijah was just past the middle of the river when the giant log side swept him. He let out a cry from the excruciating pain and a ring went off inside of his head. As soon as he opened his mouth, water filled the empty space. He gasped for air, but water took its place instead. His ribs

ached and throbbed, and Elijah had no strength nor the energy left. His limp kicks and weak arm thrashes were no match against the majesty of the river current. He couldn't hold himself up any longer, and his head went under.

Elijah's world went dark. He could feel the pull of the river take him over, and he knew instantly there was nothing he could do. He tried to hold what little breath he had left as his body turned and twisted underneath the water's surface, but he was running out of time, and his lungs couldn't take anymore. Panic and urgency slowly faded to a still calmness as Elijah's consciousness began to sweep away like the water that had claimed his body. His mom's face appeared in his mind, and she looked at him and smiled. She was more beautiful than he remembered.

"Tell Dad I'm sorry, Momma... I love and miss you so much."
Even in the last seconds of awareness, the heartache still throbbed in his chest.
"Tell Dad I almost made it Momma, tell him I tried." His throat swelled.
"I'm so sorry," he said as stillness overtook him and everything went dark.
"It's okay baby, I'm here... Momma's here."

“God is dead.”

By Jacie Chaffin

When Friedrich Nietzsche dared to pen the three words “God is dead” in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, he put a complex idea into those simple words and, surprisingly, managed to make perfect sense (22). Nietzsche takes the idea of modern day Christianity, along with everything the followers believe in and work towards, and proves how irrelevant and out of date religion truly is. By way of Zarathustra, Nietzsche explains that human beings have surpassed religion. Looking back centuries into the past, society required religion for truth. In order to explain and understand life, love, death, space, etc. people demanded a creator, or multiple creators. Today, society easily understands these topics; therefore, religion remains merely as habit or tradition. The human brain has evolved to a point that lacks need of spirituality. It has progressed to a point of factual satisfaction above religious satisfaction. The way that people live in the world today is far more focused on the present material truths rather than an eternally happy future in heaven. Nietzsche lectures about selfishness; he encourages it. He demands that humans not only hurt others, but willingly feel pain themselves. He also concludes that God pities humans far too much, and as a result, humans can no longer put their faith in God. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* there are also some explanations about the evolution of the idea of God himself. Because this faith requiring power has been seen and worshipped in thousands of different ways, it is an unstable concept for which to live. The Christian God in present day is entirely different from the Christian God whom humans worshipped one-hundred years ago. Humans must constantly change and evolve, but they cannot devote themselves to a creator who does so. To put it in basic terms, Nietzsche argues that God is irrelevant, inconsistent, and too much of a “softy”; therefore, he might as well be dead.

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Poetic Myths of Transformation

By Jacie Chaffin

By definition, to metamorphose means to change the form or nature of or to transform. *Metamorphoses* is a series of mythological tales or legends in verse by Ovid. As a Roman poet born only a year after Julius Caesar's death, Ovid wrote tons of almost unconnected stories that traced life amongst the gods and men from the beginning of time to his present day (Lawall and Mark 1134). *Metamorphoses* consists of fifteen books, each of which contains multiple narratives that all have much interaction between mortal mankind and immortal gods and goddesses. The one connecting theme among the tales is that each describes a character that undergoes a drastic physical change because of the heavenly powers. Sometimes the gods performed these changes out of kindness, other times out of cruelty.

Ovid's work has much importance in historical, philosophical, cultural, and literature sense. Although his stories were indeed myths, the people of his time looked upon myths as historical accounts and explanations for why humans existed and the purpose of life. The work's cultural importance is found more by Ovid's readers of today. By studying *Metamorphoses*, readers can understand and imagine what it was like to live in the first century A.D. This work provides explanation for how people thought during that time, what they desired, what they feared, and exactly how much they knew about life. Ovid's writing exemplifies highly elaborate literature and how much of a master in his art he was. Each piece has almost nothing to do with the previous one, but Ovid makes them flow with utter beauty to the reader's eyes. He plays with all the different types of literary devices, has much fun with syntax, and even jumps around among different genres.

Many of the narratives that Ovid penned relate to human life in modern America. Most of the characters' issues and conflicts result from love. This still seems to be a common theme in America. Humans face difficulties everyday that are always laced with the affects of love lost or love gained. Whether it is family love, platonic love, or romantic love, love creates conflict, and Ovid obviously understood this very well. As for beliefs and values, the humans of ancient times held fairly similar morals to the humans of today. For example, in the story of Iphis and Ianthe from book nine of *Metamorphoses*, young Iphis must face the lurking guilt of stepping into a marriage under false pretenses. Just as in today's world, the people believed it morally wrong to marry someone without them knowing who one truly is. Being born a woman against her father's wishes, Iphis spends her young life hiding her womanhood and pretending to be a man. When Iphis' father arranges her marriage to a young woman named Ianthe, "Ianthe waits impatiently to wed; she longs for what was promised and accepted, her wedding one she takes to be a man" (Ovid 1163). In other words, Ianthe thinks she will be marrying a man, but Iphis is secretly a woman. Iphis knows the wrongness of the situation and asks the gods to change her into a man. The gods kindly take pity on her and answer her prayer. Other narratives from Ovid's collection deal with incest, sacrifice for love, fairness and justice, and pride.

If Ovid's work is a correct representation of the human nature of his time, then the people must have been extremely free-loving yet traditional. They followed

practices that had been passed down for centuries, such as royalty needing to produce a male heir, but also lived happy, desire-driven lives (Ovid 1161). The characters of Ovid's stories see the gods and goddesses as nearly irrelevant presences in their lives and rarely look to them for guidance. More often than not, mankind only prayed to the gods when asking a favor. An example of this disrespect for the gods is provided in the story "Venus and Adonis." In this short story from *Metamorphoses* Venus is angry because she helped a mortal man to win his bride and he never thanked her for it. As a result, she turns the man and his wife into lions (Ovid 1180). The supernatural forces of that time period were more feared or ignored than respected. The tales of *Metamorphoses* represent a strong connection between mankind and nature. Throughout the stories, humans were turned into such things as trees, a cow, a lion, and flowers. It seems that the humans viewed themselves as somewhat interchangeable with nature or that they believed their gods to view them in such a way. Because so many different conflicts occur in Ovid's work, and not necessarily an "eternal conflict," many different triumphs occur as well. In the tales that discuss a human being transformed against his or her will, the triumph is in both nature and god; however, in the ones that talk of the transformations as answered prayers, the triumph is in man.

Although *Metamorphoses* meets most the conventions for the Epic genre, it seems to incorporate aspects and themes from nearly every other genre of literature. The work is much longer than an average Epic and contributes themes of lamentation for the dead, unhappy endings of the tragedy nature, and even the celebration of rural life. Because of these elements it seems that the work is an Epic but is also much more than that. The conventions of an Epic that *Metamorphoses* does follow are the invocation of the muse, characters of international importance, a vast setting, influence from supernatural forces, objectivity, and extended formal speeches. Other conventions of this genre such as sustained elevation, stating the theme, and beginning in the middle of things were not used by Ovid in his writing.

There seem to be elements of the hero's journey in each separate narrative of *Metamorphoses*, but, because each story is short and rushed, none contain every step of the hero's journey. From book five, Proserpina's abduction by Pluto is an instance of a call to adventure (Ovid 1152). From book ten, Myrrha's nurse was a helper when she aided Myrrha in seducing her own father and crossing the threshold of adventure. From a separate story in book ten, Hippomenes' race against Atalanta was his test, and Atalanta's love and promise of marriage was his elixir. Hippomenes even received help from Venus in his task of winning the race (Ovid 1178). These elements of the hero's journey seem to be a bit random and do not necessarily follow the steps in the normal order they are usually presented. While Ovid has over one-hundred main characters because of all the different narratives in *Metamorphoses*, the hero's journey tends to only happen in those main characters. The minor characters of each story show no elements of the hero's journey.

A story is not studied thousands of years after its conception unless it is truly important. Ovid's writing is studied for the same reasons as Homer's, Plato's, or even the books of the Bible. All of these literatures help people understand life, knowledge, relationships, creation, and purpose in ways that connect mankind to its beginning. Because of such writers, humans are not separate from their history.

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The Incident at Farm View

By Jacie Chaffin

On the 28th of February in the year of 2013, there was a man named Felix Arcturus who went looking for a job. Felix had just recently moved back to Gibsonville, North Carolina, after a nasty breakup with his high school girlfriend. Ava Clarke had been the love of his life for all of five years. When they graduated together from Gibsonville High, they made a spontaneous decision to move up north to York, Maine. York was a beach town with lovely views, shops, and history, but it had not been lovely for Ava and Felix. Once the high-school-sweetheart feeling had faded away for the young couple, only boredom and resentment were left. Because Ava and Felix had planned to live a simple life in York, neither of them prepared for a college education. A little over a year after their move, Ava began blaming Felix for their dual decision to go straight into the work force. Ava hated her job as a secretary and griped about it every day when they both got home from work. Felix worked at one of the many piers in the seaside town and found it to be decent but not completely satisfying. Each night they ate a cheap, bland, homemade dinner. They would watch a bit of television, news or sitcoms, and then retire to bed.

On January 17th, Ava came home with a strange look on her face. She quietly went to the bedroom and removed her coat, scarf, and boots. Felix was in the bathroom, and Ava sat on the couch, waiting patiently for him to come out. He walked out and greeted her with his daily unenthusiastic “Hey.” Ava stood up, and Felix stopped in the midst of his journey to the kitchen, for he could tell that something was different about his girlfriend.

“Felix, I’m done,” she said calmly: not angrily or sadly; calmly.

Felix searched her face, trying to read it, and finally met her eyes. He nodded. He had known the ending was coming for months. It surprised him that it had taken Ava so long to figure it out herself. Over the following week, Felix slept on the couch and Ava packed all of her belongings. She did not tell Felix where she would be going; she only mentioned that she would be out of the house within a week. Felix found himself immensely confused about why he did not feel sad over the breakup. He lay in the dark living room each night with no feelings at all. He debated his next move but could not find the will to make any move at all. Once Ava was gone, he gained the courage to call his father and tell him about the unfortunate event.

“Henry Arcturus speaking,” his father answered in his usual booming voice.

“Dad, you really need to start saving names to numbers on your phone. Don’t you think it would be helpful to know if it is someone you don’t want to talk to?”

“Son! It’s so good to hear from you. How are you and the pretty lady doing up north?”

Felix allowed a nice moment of silence before answering his father’s question, “Well, that’s why I called. Ava left last week. I’m kind of at a loss of what to do now.”

The senior Arcturus skipped no beats when it came to consoling his son.

“Felix, I’m so sorry to hear that. Are you okay?” he asked, voice much softer.

“Yeah, Dad. I’m actually not that torn up about it,” Felix replied coolly.

Henry's nosy personality crept up and forced him to ask, "Where did she run off to?"

Felix smiled, thinking that his father just might have been able to read his mind. "That's the other reason I'm calling. She never told me where she was going, and I want to know if she came back home to Gibsonville."

"Well, I just spoke to her folks yesterday, and they didn't say anything about her moving back."

With a relieved sigh, Felix spoke up, "Great! I mean, I was thinking about coming back home. I don't know anyone here in York, and I feel like my life is not here. It's back there in Gibsonville; it always has been. I should've never left."

A bit surprised by his son's sudden plans to move back, he inquired cautiously, "Have you already planned all this out? What if she does come back home, and you run into each other? That's going to be a pretty awkward situation, Son. And where are you going to live? Do you already have a job lined up?"

"I was hoping I could stay in my old room for a little while until I get everything figured out," Felix declared matter-of-factly. The rest of the phone conversation was talk of rushed plans and preparations for Felix's move back to North Carolina. Henry had a hushed conversation with his wife, Olive, about the consequences of letting their son move back into his childhood home. Felix could hear every word of their almost silent argument. Finally, Henry told him that he could stay until the end of April at the latest. Felix thanked his father and immediately went to packing once he hung up the phone.

By the time all of his belongings had officially been unpacked or put away in storage, it was February 27th. Henry instantly went into lectures about possible job opportunities the moment Felix had walked in the door. Felix lay down on his full-sized bed after hanging up his last item of clothing, and his father walked in with a determined look on his face. He pulled the town newspaper out from behind his back, flipped to page five, and handed it over to Felix. He looked down at it to find a circled article discussing the slaughterhouse outside of town.

"Oh, you've got to be kidding me," Felix mumbled under his breath.

Farm View Slaughterhouse was the creepiest place Felix had ever laid eyes upon. In middle school, he and his friends would ride their bikes out of town in the evenings and sneak around the scary building just for the thrill of it. Benjy Andrews once peeked inside of a high window. His face went ghostly pale, and he never revealed what he saw in the shadowy place. Of course, Felix was not scared of this place now, but a slaughterhouse would not be an inviting place to work, regardless of having a name that sounded like one of a peaceful retreat. The place was several miles out of town, and only farmland surrounded it. The closest establishment to the slaughterhouse was a small Methodist church about two miles away. Felix found himself surprised that the place was still open. He quickly scanned the article and, indeed, found that they were looking for new employees. They required someone of the age of twenty-one with a strong stomach. Felix would have been a prime candidate if he had a strong stomach; however, Henry seemed persistent on this opportunity for his son. He pushed him to call for an interview.

The next day Felix grabbed the newspaper off the kitchen table and dialed the given phone number for the slaughterhouse into his cell phone. It rang many times before anyone picked up.

“Farm View. What can I do for you?” a scratchy female voice answered.

Felix took a deep breath and made his statement, “Hello, my name is Felix Arcturus. I saw the request for employees in the Gibsonville newspaper, and I am very interested in a position. I am wondering if I could speak with someone about a possible interview.”

Felix waited for a reply, but only heard the woman yelling “Mel!” in the distance. After an annoying five minutes of Felix tapping his fingers on the table and waiting for anything to happen on the other side of the line, a man finally came on to the phone, “This is Mel.”

Again, Felix took a deep breath, “Hello, my name is Felix Arcturus. Are you the one I can speak with about an interview for employment?”

The strong southern accent confirmed, “Yes, sir. You’re speaking with the slaughterhouse supervisor. How old are you?”

“I’m twenty-one.”

“Perfect. What time can you come in today?”

Knowing his father would be thrilled at his immediate gaining of a job interview, Felix said, “I can head that way right now if you’re not too busy, sir.”

Felix again waited for a reply but received a distant yelling, “Cinda, I got a young ‘n coming in a few minutes for the job. You’re gonna have to cover the floor while I interview him.” To the phone, Mel finally said, “That’ll work out just fine... What did you say your name was again?”

“Felix Arcturus, sir.”

“I’ll see you soon, Arcturus. Don’t keep me waiting.”

When the line went dead, Felix was a bit stunned by the sudden possibility of going to work at creepy Farm View Slaughterhouse. He did not know for certain that they would hire him, but it sounded as if they had not gotten any other calls. Felix began to truly consider what it would be like to kill animals and cut them to pieces for a living, to be around blood and guts on a daily basis, and to turn around and eat a meaty meal each night for dinner. He truly hoped the job did not ruin his hearty appetite. For a moment, Felix considered dressing up but did not feel like putting in the extra effort. He quickly got dressed in his usual attire of dark denim jeans, new Vans, and a button-up, Polo shirt, combed through his impossible hair, and grabbed the keys to his black Nissan Sentra. After waving goodbye to his father, who seemed to be on a business call, Felix hurried out the door.

Once out of his parent’s driveway, Felix felt extremely weird driving around his old hometown. Gibsonville was a relatively small town with more open spaces than roads. Trees lined the few sidewalks, and these sidewalks were all nearly worn away with weeds, cracks, and dirt. As soon as Felix exited the town, trees and buildings quickly turned to vibrant green farmland. In seventeen minutes, Felix passed two churches, cruised by one small gas station, and followed an infinite amount of fields. He finally turned on the road belonging to the slaughterhouse. The building was a long and skinny rectangle with an off-white color painted over the bricks. There were exactly three windows on the building, all very high up. The roof

was flat. In navy blue, the words “Farm View” were sloppily painted above the front door. The main building was small, but there were several stables and barns further back, all on a large amount of acreage. The driveway was only dirt. A rusty chain-linked fence surrounded it all. Felix drove his Nissan through the wide opening in the ragged fence and made his way up the nonexistent driveway. He parked the car and took a deep breath. His usual calmness enveloped him, and he did not feel the least bit uneasy from the setup.

Once inside, Felix found only chaos. There were two small offices, one on each side of the entry, and beyond that was a wide open space with machines and strange contraptions everywhere. Felix only won a small glimpse at the impossible gore being showcased before he peeked into the office on his right and located a woman he assumed to be Cinda. She smiled and kindly pointed him towards the other office. Felix then walked over to the office on the left that belonged to Mel. Mel welcomed him in, gave him the once-over, asked him a few simple questions such as “Do you have reliable transportation?” and “Do you have weak stomach?” and quickly gave Felix the job. Of course, Felix lied about the quality of his stomach. Mel did not give Felix a grand tour of the main building and explained that “new ones can’t handle the gross stuff.” Felix would not get to see the other small buildings until his first day of work. Mel stood up, told Felix to wait a moment, and walked out of the office. Finally, Mel returned and introduced him to a man, around the same age as Felix, named Angus Pine.

“Nice to meet you, Angus.”

Angus looked slightly offended, “Don’t call me Angus, man.” Looking at Mel, he asked, “Did you not tell him the rules around here?” Then, back to Felix, he stated, “Call me Pine. We go by last names in this place; all except for Cinda and Mel, that is.”

Felix acknowledged the rule and said, “Well call me Arcturus, I suppose.”

Pine smiled at that, shook his head, and went back to work. Mel told Felix that Pine would be training him. Pine was the newest employee before Felix; he had been hired three years ago. Felix was surprised that Farm View did not take on new employees very often. Considering his lack of friends outside of work, he hoped that he could at least get along well with his coworkers at the slaughterhouse. Pine seemed like a funny guy; despite the depressing setting of his job, he had an optimistic attitude. Felix was glad he would get to train with the guy. He returned home after Mel gave him a stack of paperwork. His father was enthused about the speedy hiring and told Felix that it would be a lovely job. Felix was not so sure about it being “lovely” but nodded his head and said, “Sure, Dad.”

The first week of Felix’s time at Farm View Slaughterhouse went surprisingly well. Pine showed him all the extra buildings that held the pigs and chickens. The slaughterhouse was too small and low-budget to house cows. He took him to the best spot in the pasture to eat lunch, away from the smell of dying animals. Felix and Pine joked about ordinary male topics, and he was even starting to get used to the other employees calling him Arcturus. Sometimes Felix and Pine relaxed casually against the sole tree in the pasture and watched one of the other men march and conduct pigs on their way to the main building. The pigs were tied together with ropes around their necks, and the first pig was led by the man yanking

firmly on the end of the rope. The pigs squealed and screamed, but it did not faze Felix, for he had not yet seen the most gruesome acts of the slaughterhouse. The first week had been calm. He knew what happened to the animals, but he had not seen it being done. Giving in to his curiosity about the acts of the main building, he gained the courage to ask Pine how it all worked. Felix knew how the animals arrived on the location, by giant trucks packed almost as full as the ones that used to drive to concentration camps. He knew the animals were fed mutated food full of hormones and lacking nutritional value. He understood how he was expected to treat the animals, as if their importance was only for his next meal at home. Felix just could not quite grasp how the animals went from being living creatures to processed chunks of protein. He had yet to connect the two in his mind.

“Arcturus, the main building isn’t anything wonderful, but it’s not something to be scared of either. It’s just life, I guess, or the end of it.”

Felix swallowed deeply at the statement, his prominent Adam’s apple moving swiftly down then up. For the two weeks after he asked Pine that question; he feared the main building more than he ever had before. Pine had meant to calm him, to ensure him that the acts were inevitable, but the *inevitability* that Pine pointed out to Felix is what scared him the most. The fact that if these people in Gibsonville, North Carolina, did not slaughter these animals and use them for food then someone else would daunted Felix more than anything else. It was disheartening for him to think about the hundreds of other slaughterhouses in the country. Finally, on March 22nd, Mel walked into the small barn where Pine and Felix had been shoveling animal droppings and told the two men that it was time for Felix to train in the main building. Felix felt his stomach drop to his ankles at the new orders from the boss. His face grew pale, and he attempted to hide his horrified expression from the others. Mel led the way, and Felix and Pine followed suit.

They entered the main building through the back door. Felix’s nose immediately picked up the scent of blood and death that he had not noticed on the day of his interview. He quickly turned his head in every direction, making note of each eerie machine. Mel walked back to his office, and Pine motioned for Felix to follow him to the closest machine. The first series of machines were specifically used to process the chickens: one to slit the throats of each bird, one to remove the feathers, one to remove the feet, one for the beaks, and so on. The other few machines were obviously for the pigs. The pig process required more manual labor than that of the chickens. The workers held a device called a Captive Bolt Pistol to each pig’s head and pulled the trigger. This device rendered them unconscious before their approaching slaughter. The workers also manually skinned the pigs, and only then were the animals ready for the three waiting machines. The machines basically broke the pig, soon to be pork, into the demanded areas for sale: the back used for pork loin, the neck area used for chops and bacon, the ribs, the back legs used for ham, the front legs for pork sausage. Felix observed and attempted to memorize each button and lever and its sole use in respect to the machine. Once the training process was finally through, Pine told Felix to choose between working with the chickens and working with the pigs. Without hesitation, he chose the chickens. That area of work seemed far less gut-wrenching. Pine proudly stated that he liked to work with the pigs. He presented the position as desirable and

almost glorious as he smiled at the devices and machines used to slaughter the pink creatures.

As the days flew by at Farm View, Felix Arcturus quickly fell into place at his position on the beak-removal machine. He was getting along with his parents quite well and had started searching for a small place to live and call his own. He had enough saved up for a deposit on a place but was hesitant to jump into anything too quickly. His father often asked questions about the slaughterhouse, but Felix did not reveal much. When he went to work at Farm View each weekday, he felt that he was travelling to an entirely different dimension: one where animals were only looked at for the value of the meat on their bones, where they did not even receive sorrowful care before their demise or remorseful care afterwards, where jokes and bets were made about the lifeless bodies far before they ran out of life. Felix did not want to admit to his father that he worked every day surrounded by careless human beings. He did not want to confess his suspicions that he would soon become one of them: if his carefree and unemotional attitude during work hours was a sort of foreshadow.

On the morning of April 4th, Felix woke up and dressed himself for another grueling day at Farm View. He lazily combed his hair and glanced in the mirror just as he had done every other day since his first day of work. He waved a silent goodbye to his father and dragged his feet as he walked out to his car. Felix pulled up in the dusty driveway, killed the ignition, and sat in silence for a moment, letting out the same deep breathe that he always did in order to prepare himself for the horrific day ahead of him. He finally got out in just enough time to not be late. He entered the main building through the ragged front door, said hello to Mel and Cinda, and made his way over to his designated machine. Pine was already working fast with the Captive Bolt Pistol, engrossed in his job in the pig area of the house. Felix waved at him, but Pine did not notice. Felix started up his machine and observed the few dead chickens that had lined up before him, waiting to be removed of their beaks. As he worked, he hummed a song to distract him from the surrounding gore. He tried to keep a blank mind at work and not torture himself with deep philosophical thoughts concerning the wrongness of his situation. The song that had played in the car on his way to work quickly came to mind, so he began to sing it. The man working at the machine just before his in the line-up began to sing along with him. Felix knew the man's last name to be Morrow. Felix and Morrow glanced at each other and lightly laughed as they belted out the tune. Soon, a few other employees had joined in, and the scene could have been one from a musical. For one beautiful moment, Farm View Slaughterhouse emanated joyous chorus.

The next moment struck quickly with a pig squeal and a hollering man. Felix's head jerked up, and his eyes quickly located the source of the disruption. Pine had his arm wrapped around a pig's neck, and the pig struggled to break free. "Stay still, fucking worthless pork!" he yelled with angry intensity. Pine suddenly swung his right leg up and kicked the pig in the back. He held the pistol loosely in his left hand, trying to get a firm grip while simultaneously trying to hold the pig. The rest of the workers in the main building were frozen and silent, afraid to take action, waiting anxiously for the scene to play out. Felix felt the stiffness in his limbs, the shutting down of his brain. He was unable to move, unable to act. Pine finally stilled

the pig by landing another kick in its side. He pulled the Captive Bolt Pistol up to its head and fired. The horror did not end. Instead of falling unconscious, the pig let out the highest pitched noise Felix had ever heard coming from such an animal. The pig turned its head back and forth swiftly, and Felix spotted the hole, clearly in the wrong spot on its skull. Pine had misfired. The pig was conscious, bleeding, and feeling every bit of pain. Pine pushed the pig to the floor and held it down by way of his elbow, pushing into the poor creature's neck. He finally managed to place the pistol in the correct spot of the pig's head and fired again. The pain that everyone felt seized. Pine stood up, glanced at the horrified faces surrounding him, and went back to work. After a moment of pause, Felix and the other employees also continued with their work. No one discussed the incident. No one involved Mel in it. No one acted as if it had ever happened.

A week later, someone reported it. Felix could not say who had done it, but he could feel the slowly creeping guilt for not reporting it himself. He was the newest man, the least influenced by the awful ways of Farm View; why had he not immediately told everyone about such a violent act? He had never seen such a thing in his life; it was his responsibility to acknowledge just how awful it had truly been. Someone else reported it, though. Felix kept his frightened little mouth shut. Farm View Slaughterhouse went under a thorough investigation. All the employees lost their jobs when the place was deemed unfit for business. Felix never saw Pine again. He never saw any of the people he had worked with in that murder factory. He found a peaceful job in the town library after the incident and moved out of his parents' house by the end of April. He lived content in his simple life, but Felix still had nightmares every night about Farm View. He avoided ever having to drive by the deserted building. Felix often had nightmares, flashbacks, and emotional reactions to everyday events that reminded him of the incident. It was not certain that Felix would ever completely recover from the horrible experience, but he did become a vegetarian and treated every animal he came across, from small birds to giant dogs, with utmost care. The incident took something huge away from him, but it was a part of his life that he would eventually have to accept. For the first time in his adult life, Felix felt true and intense emotions every day. He felt what he had not been able to feel at the loss of his one love. The incident at Farm View *forced* Felix Arcturus to be emotional, and that was the one positive result from it.

Holding the World Up

By Jacob Sanders

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1.

Dilly and Rita were Siamese twins. Joined awkwardly at the shoulder, which favored Dilly, being a head taller and a good two stone heavier. Dilly had a cock. Rita lived under the crooked weight of the lumbering larger side of their self at all times it seemed. Rita had a pussy. Though Dilly had the favor of two legs and Rita only one, Rita still supported the bulk of their balance, being like a kickstand for the larger portion of their lopsided body. Dilly's brain was shrunken and had a sizable hole in the frontal lobe, yet he was quite capable none the less, considering the odds. Rita's brain was grossly oversized, which made her head bulge, bringing out varicose veins on her temples. The weight made her dome-piece bowl around when they'd walk, which had made her eyes go bad at an early age for never adjusting and spine go worse for all the constant swirling and rolling. Two Brains, two hearts, one being. They were the mystical creature in high school, the mascot of the small oilfield town, second in town tourist popularity to the giant burger festival. Well liked, yet they had never been truly loved, except by each other. Only by them-self.

Along with each side having an individual brain, they each had a complete central nervous system. All autonomous but that shoulder, which connected the nerves allowing each of them to experience the sensations happening in the other side of the body. They found this out as toddlers, shut up in their room, playing with each other all night. Rita would pinch Dilly's thigh or stretch his balls. Dilly would put his fingers in Rita's vagina or bite her hair, none of it sexual of course, really just a form of self-exploration. They could feel each other. Pain, pleasure and curiosity. Once Dilly bashed Rita in the head with a magnifying glass for not letting him burn her. He never hurt her again. The same for Rita, she once stabbed a crayon up inside Dilly's big honking nose, so fiercely that it punched a hole in his nasal cavity. She had to sit and panic and gasp for air right along with her other side. It was heard around, that doctors had said, Rita and Dilly wouldn't live past their thirteenth name day. Today was their eighteenth.

Fuck them all Rita thought. She'd never cared for any of the town. For all the public kindness and praise they'd bestow upon their sweetling town mascot, the town's folk were thrice cruel and unjust in private. Some degenerate inbreeds Aside from missing a couple of the small assignments, I did the quick writes and was willing to read them aloud. down the road, had had their way with them when they were thirteen. The year they were projected to die. That was one in a lifetime of cruel secrets.

Fuck them all. She'd think it all day, repeating it inside her mind, the only place she was alone. Rita was an atheist for this reason, the thought of her mind always being occupied and watched sent shivers throughout her psyche. She couldn't accept that in the depths of her mind, someone else was there. That would mean there is no privacy. It was too much to bare in the psychical life, let alone the mental. Dilly on the other hand was a simple believer, remembering everything their ignorant and cruel Father and Mother had taught them about god, and duty and all that crap. Another situation stacked outside Rita's favor. Three to one favored the god she thought pretend, which meant they went to church on Sundays and youth-

group on Wednesday. No matter where they'd go, people would see them as a victim, and if they couldn't see them as a victim, they'd make them a victim. The youth group was the holy epicenter for their victimization. Smarmy teenage prayers, laying hands on them and speaking in tongues. Dilly would chant and cry and wail, the whole time with his disproportionately small arms held to the sky, flopping in the Holy Ghost. All his flops made Rita's head bowl all around like it was known to do, but in the church setting it made her look drunk the spirit. Though Dilly was so grateful and thankful of the churches work, Rita had little to appreciate about the bi-weekly experience. The only relief came when the preacher would pray over her and steady her head between his shaking hands, saying the same prayer every time.

"Oh FATHERRRRRR, oh ssweet Fatherrrrrr!" His hands squeezing her temples "Om-shall-la-la let her stay with us fatherrrr, let them stay oh my Jesus! Ah-skeeki-lada-sah my great god, oh-shal-la-la-likki-you are goooooo Lord!" His hands always sweaty against her dripping brow "Goelosh-my-sheeki! Goeloshi-mah-sada my Lord God!" "Oh please Jesus keep these sweet twins with us for another week my King! Cast off the demons of tumors and sickness Jesus! Let them be useful to you Lord, they are here as soldiers in the spirit Lord Almighty!" That's when he'd throw his hands back and send her head bowling again, the moments comfort over.

Their mother thought that their deformity was God punishing the family for bad things their Grandfather had done in the oil field. Rita thought her a foolish wretch for this; blaming her grandfather when they were thrice as wicked. Their father was as stern and foolish as Evangelicals were known to be, always finding some connection between every little thing and "God's plan." They had the same grandfather, making them first cousins, a thing overlooked by the mostly inbred town. Anyone smart could see that it was possible that the inbreeding had affected the pregnancy. That and the six abortions that their mother had previous, before they'd finally came to god. Three of the fetuses were far more twisted than Rita and Dilly and were said to have lived minutes after being pulled from her womb. The father had performed all six, well into the pregnancy, when she couldn't hide it anymore. Guilt and ignorance glued them together as well as bound them to the church. Anyone smart could see, but the townsfolk were idiots, seldom thinking past their menial tasks and loopy ideals. They romanticized firearms and loved to trash shit, generally hated all books but the Bible and had little vision outside of rodeos and mega-stores. People did talk about it around town, but it was often far from any true communication, just gossip.

Fuck them all, damn this oily shithole. Rita'd think to herself all through the sleepless nights. It really was an oily shithole. The land was baron and the water contaminated. Always crisp and windy, blowing depleted soil into dust, sandblasting eyeballs and any exposed skin. Rita probably would have been a genius if she'd had a solo life, but as she was here, she was bound to always compete with her other half. Dilly had little idea there was any other reality than this. And technically, there wasn't as far as they stood. They were joined...and also separate. Democracy without a choice. Their bozo seventh grade government teacher made them work together and draft a personal constitution and bill of rights, claiming to use them as an example of how we are born into democracy. Cruel shit, yet completely on point to their personal existence. To be continued.

A Place Called Dome

By Bailey Posey

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“Darius, get up! We need to leave, now!” my dad proclaimed quickly, shaking me awake like a mad man.

“Dad? What’s going on? What time is it?” I said with a yawn. I slowly move my tired head towards my alarm clock; it is one in the morning. “Shouldn’t you be gathering resources until Sunrise? What are you doing home so soon?”

“Pack your clothes and whatever you feel you can’t live without. We need to hurry up and leave, pronto!” he exclaimed in a frenzied voice. Once I caught a glimpse of his face, I immediately knew something bad was happening. The fear in his eyes was the first thing I noticed, taking my focus off of the sweat dripping from his face and from how heavily he is breathing. He dashed out of my room and went down the hallway to open up the attic. At that moment, my head is filled with questions. What’s happening? Why isn’t Dad with the other Scouts? What’s my dad so worked up about? Are we in danger? Is something threatening in our neighborhood? As these questions darted through my mind, I did what Dad said and began packing most of my belongings.

All that I managed to pack were mostly clothes and my Samsung Galaxy S14. I decided to leave behind my video game console and comics, considering that the situation is probably too urgent to bring those; bringing them would also create extra weight to carry.

Once I exited my bedroom, I watched as my dad climbed down from the attic and dart past me to his and Mom’s room. I could hear their conversation from down the hallway. I decided to stay and listen to what they have to say. “Richard, what’s happening?” ask Mom.

“I can’t explain right now. All I can tell you is that we are in danger and that it is essential that we must leave our home as soon as possible. Go to the living room and wait with Darius while I pack our things,” said Dad in a panicky voice. Mom came out of their room and walked along side me down stairs to the living room.

At this point we are both worried and clueless of what it is that has Dad so worked up. Neither one of us says a word until we sit at the couch. “Perhaps the news is covering what has your father so panicked,” she says while turning on the TV and changing the channel to the nightly news. My mom suddenly gasped a moment after she made it to the news. I turned my head to the TV screen to see what has startled her. I begin to feel both frightened and confused when I finally came to terms with what it said under “breaking news”: THE DOME HAS BEEN BREACHED BY UNIDENTIFIED INTRUDERS.

“Oh no,” my mom whispered in a quiet, scared voice. I don’t believe it; the Dome is being invaded. Who or what could have got through the dome and how? Throughout my life, I was told that the Dome we live in housed the last of humanity and that no other human beings populate the rest of the planet. All there is said to be down there is the ruins of the old world and mutated creatures. Every history teacher explained the End of Days War, from centuries ago, is what has us living in the Dome in the first place. It was on the final day of the war that all of the world’s major superpowers fired all of their nuclear weapons and wiped out almost all of civilization

and demolished every major city across the globe. They also mentioned that the result also mutated almost all of the animals on the surface. The only ones to have witnessed these mutates up close are the scouting teams that fly down to the surface to collect the resources we need to maintain our living condition in the Dome. The history teachers also pointed out that those who never got the opportunity to live in the Dome were annihilated by the nuclear warheads that turned Earth into a barren wasteland. The few who could have survived would have either died from radiation poisoning or were devoured by the animals horribly mutated by the radiation. And even if it was those creatures, it would be impossible for them to pass through the Dome's defenses or put a crack in any part of the Dome. Besides, we are thousands of feet in the air; it would have to take a winged monster or an aircraft to reach humanity's only sanctuary. Also, the Dome's glass is virtually indestructible; it would take tons of explosives to penetrate through the Dome.

We continue watching the broadcast, anticipating what the terrified reporter has to discuss about the event that have unfolded. At the moment, I am as scared as my mom and that reporter. I am quivering at the fact that I do not know if whether or not we will survive this. In the background there are burning buildings, heavy smoke, and...airships? These aren't our standard Defender's military gunships, bombers, or aircrafts; these look like the airships from the 20th century. But these look different from the ones I've seen in any history book. These airships look like they're loaded with heavy artillery and can carry at least a hundred men. So we are being attacked by other humans? Are more of them living on the surface? Why weren't we informed about this? Once in a while, scouts are sent down to the surface to get resources. Dad has worked as a scout before he and Mom tied the knot; surely he and the other scouts must have encountered these other human beings. These turn of events and my thoughts on the matter have left me somewhat puzzled, but mostly panicked. I could hear Dad's footsteps as he is going from room to room, collecting the items we own. I try to block out his footsteps and attempted to focus on what the reporter has to say, "We don't know who is attacking us and why, but hopefully the Defenders will put an end to this invasion as soon as possible. As you can see behind me, the Defender's jets have flown in and are currently confronting the enemy as we speak. May God bless those men and women who are laying down their lives for..." before he could finish his sentence, a woman screams as a fiery projectile comes in from behind him. When it hits, an explosion appears for a split second until the screen becomes fuzzy. The scream and explosion caused my mom and me to jump right out of our skins.

The TV cuts to the news anchorman, "I just got word that Brian Jenkins was killed in the fiery explosion you all just witnessed, along with the camera and sound crew that accompanied him. We here at Channel 7 news hope that they rest in peace," he said in a gloomy tone. He lowers his head and is completely silent for a few moments. Afterwards, he slowly lifts his head and continues with the broadcast, "Back to our current situation, I'll remind all of you who are watching to get your loved ones and evacuate to the Defender's military base up north where you will get transported out of the Dome as it has turned into a warzone and in case the enemy overpowers the Defenders." Those were the last words I heard from him before my mom turned off the TV.

My dad hurried down the stairs carrying luggage in both hands. "Laura, do you have what you need?"

"Yes dear," said my mom.

"Darius, are you all packed up?"

"Yes Dad, I'm ready."

"Okay great! Let's go to Mick's place. I called him before I made it home and he offered to let us ride with him and his wife in their hover van," he said as we ran out the door and down to our street corner.

"What happened to your car, dear?" immediately asked Mom in a surprised voice.

"I crashed it two blocks from our house. I was driving so fast, I swerved when a dog ran in front of me, causing me to crash into someone's garbage disintegrator," Dad said so quickly while trying to catch his breath. Mick is a friend of my dad's who holds the rank of lieutenant in the Defender's Military. The Defenders operate as our city's high-tech military and police force. They do their best to keep everything in order and keep the peace within the city and the surrounding areas. They also have flying vehicles while we are stuck with ones that only hover. Mick works in the police division; he is usually patrolling the neighborhoods and the city streets.

We arrived in time as Mick and his wife, Kelly finish packing their bags into the van. "Are you sure that this is in good enough condition to get us up north?" my dad asks Mick.

"I'm positive. Yesterday I filled it with plenty of water and last week I repaired one of the combustion chambers and inspected the other chambers," says Mick as he entered the driver's seat. The rest of us got in and headed northwest toward the uptown part of the city.

We arrived to a traffic jam that I assume was over a mile long. As we waited, I turn my face toward the window and listened to echoing explosions coming from downtown. After a few minutes, I turned toward my mother and broke the silence. "Mom, where do you think the military will take us?" I asked her.

"I don't know, but as long as I still have you and your father, I'll accept anywhere they take us to as home," she said with a comforting smile on her face. Her smile helped me relax a bit despite the scary events happening.

I wouldn't say the same thing for my dad; his panicked state is worse than the one I saw while waking up. He is probably thinking that we might not make it on time. "Let's go there on foot," he suggested, "staying here won't get us any farther."

"Ralph, you know I am not in the best condition to walk more than 50 yards," Kelly whined. Ever since she married Mick, Kelly has been a stay-at-home wife. During the years they have been married, she has put on extra weight as the years went by. She is now at a point where is probably having to wear XXXL clothing, no offense to her.

"I agree with Kelly, dear," said Mom, "Let's wait this out and make it to the nearest left turn. Surely there must be a short cut."

"We do not have time to wait!" My Dad cried, "Sure the invaders may still be in the downtown area 10 miles from where we are, but perhaps they have finished raining Hellfire onto downtown and are making their way to our position as we

speak!" We immediately took what he said into consideration and decided to leave the van behind and travel by foot.

When we got to the sidewalk, a huge explosion rocked half a mile down the road. When the sound stopped ringing in my ear, the sound of people screaming was mainly what I heard. I looked at the site of the explosion and saw a dozen men pass through the flames. At a closer glance, I noticed that these men wore ragged outfits with metal plating. These men could be responsible for the attack. My assumption was correct as the five of us stood there frozen in horror while we witnessed these insane bastards slicing through innocent people with cleavers and machetes. It wasn't long until Defender's vehicles flew to the scene. Each vehicle fired rounds of ammunition at these invaders as they continued to slaughter innocent civilians.

We headed toward the nearby alleyway to avoid getting caught up in the battle. But before we exited the alley, one of those hostile men fell from above and blocked our path. This psychopath slowly made his way toward us while lifting his left arm, which held a machete in the grip of his hand. Intimidated by the killer's presence, Mick pulled out his side arm from his jacket pocket and fired a clean shot into the savage's forehead, causing him to lean his head backwards. He continues to stand up instead of collapsing. Next thing we know we hear him laugh hysterically and slowly he lifted his head, revealing that there wasn't even a single scratch on him. "You worthless little shit-stain, your bullets cannot hurt me or my friends," he said with a creepy grin slowly spreading across his face, "now your asses are mine!" He dashed toward us, prepared to deliver a fatal blow with his machete. But before he got close to Mick, a Defender jumped in and tackled him to the ground. Another Defender came in and directed us out of the alley. He offered us a ride in a Defender's civilian transportation vehicle. As we began taking off, I saw the Defender who saved us fly through a bus with the enemy's machete sticking out of the back of his chest. I sat there horrified by all that I just witnessed with my own eyes. My heart raced while I am trembling in my seat as the thought of almost dying has left me completely terrified.

I wrapped my arms around my mom's waist as she started crying. Suddenly, I remember a question I never had a chance to ask Dad. "Dad, how did you find out about the invasion?"

"Well Darius," my dad began, "it all started when we were heading back to the station from our latest scouting trip. While we were depleting our ship of the resources we gathered, a loud "boom" goes off and the whole facility is shaking. Everyone assumed one of the machines somehow managed to blow up, then suddenly there came another loud "boom." Each and everyone one of us rush outside to see what the commotion was, suddenly, what we saw left us as still as statues. There were perhaps dozens upon dozens of airships floating right outside of the domes exterior. At that moment, as I am frozen in fear, my mind is racing, wondering what in the hell is happening. Then, all at once, each airship fired two rounds of explosive artillery. All it resulted in was breaking off a shard of glass that was the same size as a baseball. Afterwards, I immediately knew what was coming and made a break for it. As I made my way to my car, I stripped myself of the scouting attire that I wore over my regular clothes and dug through my pants pockets

for my keys. When I finally found them, I got in the car, started it, and drove as fast as I could through downtown. Now here we are, heading for the military base. I hope that the three of us make it out of this fiasco alive. And I pray that if one or two of us make it, it would hopefully be you and your mother. I could not stand to see my little boy die at such a young age.” He says as he began to break into tears.

“We love you, honey,” said Mom in a broken voice. She turned towards me and wrapped her arms around head, pulling herself closer to me for a hug.

We arrived at the base and forced to wait in a single-file line in order to board the Harriers. This would be my first time riding in one; I’ve been told that they are big enough to transport over two-thousand people. If I wasn’t so terrified by the tragic events that occurred in the past hour, I would probably be excited to see a Harrier up close. Hopefully there was enough room for us. As we waited, we heard one explosion after another growing closer. The soldier at the entrance is allowing small groups to enter, but not before he confiscates certain items passengers are not allowed to have. When we were next in line, he frisked our bodies from top to bottom. When it was Micks turn, he asked him to open up his jacket to reveal his sidearm. “Sir, I am afraid you are restricted to bring a firearm on board.” He stated.

“Young man, I am lieutenant Harold Mickey Arnolds of the Defender’s Police Division.” Mick asserted, showing the soldier his badge, “I have the permission from the authorities to carry this pistol at all times.”

Oh, my apologies Lieutenant,” the soldier said in a remorseful tone, “You and your party can go right ahead.” And finally, we made it on just in time.

As we take off, hundreds of savages storm the military base. One by one, these men looked like a giant riot. This was indeed a sad day; we lost our home to the enemy. I watched in horror and sadness as those who didn’t have the chance to leave on time were slaughtered by those savages. Where did these men come from? Why are they attacking us? How did they manage to gain the upper hand? Why couldn’t the one we saw in the alleyway die? Are they all just like him and cannot die? And more importantly, why did these poor men, women, and children have to be massacred? They did nothing to deserve it. Thinking about these questions and about the fact that we lost our home and about those pure people who died at the hands of these monsters, I cannot help but feel heartbroken by all of this. I began to shed tears as these melancholic thoughts role through my mind. My mom reaches over to hug me; she has not stopped crying since the aftermath of the alleyway encounter.

After a while of sitting there in my mother’s, a loud bang causes the Harrier to shake, sending us to the floor. It was difficult for us to get back up as the ship was shaking and is leaning forward at a different angle, causing my parents, the Arnolds, and me, along with other people in our cabin to slide towards the wall that separated this cabin from the one in front of it. My parents and I are holding on to the seats to avoid sliding to the wall crowded by other passengers. As she and Mick are holding onto their seats, Kelly’s head is rapidly moving back and forth as her whole body is shaking and is giving us an awed expression on her face, “What’s happening?!?” Kelly screamed, frantically.

“Those savages must have fired and hit us; the engines have blown up,” yelled Mick. “We’re going to crash! Brace for impact!”

My parents pull me up to them and wrapped themselves around me. Judging by how tight they were holding me, I presumed they were trying to shield me off from the collision. At this point, I am freaking out and worried sick. "Mom, Dad, I hope to God we manage to make it past this. I know I do not want to die, but I also do not want to lose you guys." I proclaimed in a despairing tone of voice.

"Darius, I want you to know that your father and I are proud of you. You are our greatest achievement life has to offer us." Mom said while bawling.

"Dammit, do not say that! The three of us may survive this, we might all make it.

"We have always wanted you to live a rich happy life son," my dad said with tears flowing from his eyes, "If one of us had to survive, it should be you, you have so much to live for, Darius. Also, we want you to know that..."

"We love you," they both said at the same time. Then everything went silent.



Memories Never Fade
By Chelsea Maddox



Abandoned by Life
By Chelsea Maddox



Welcome to Small Town
By Chelsea Maddox



Low Heights

By Chelsea Maddox



Burry-go-round
By Chelsea Maddox



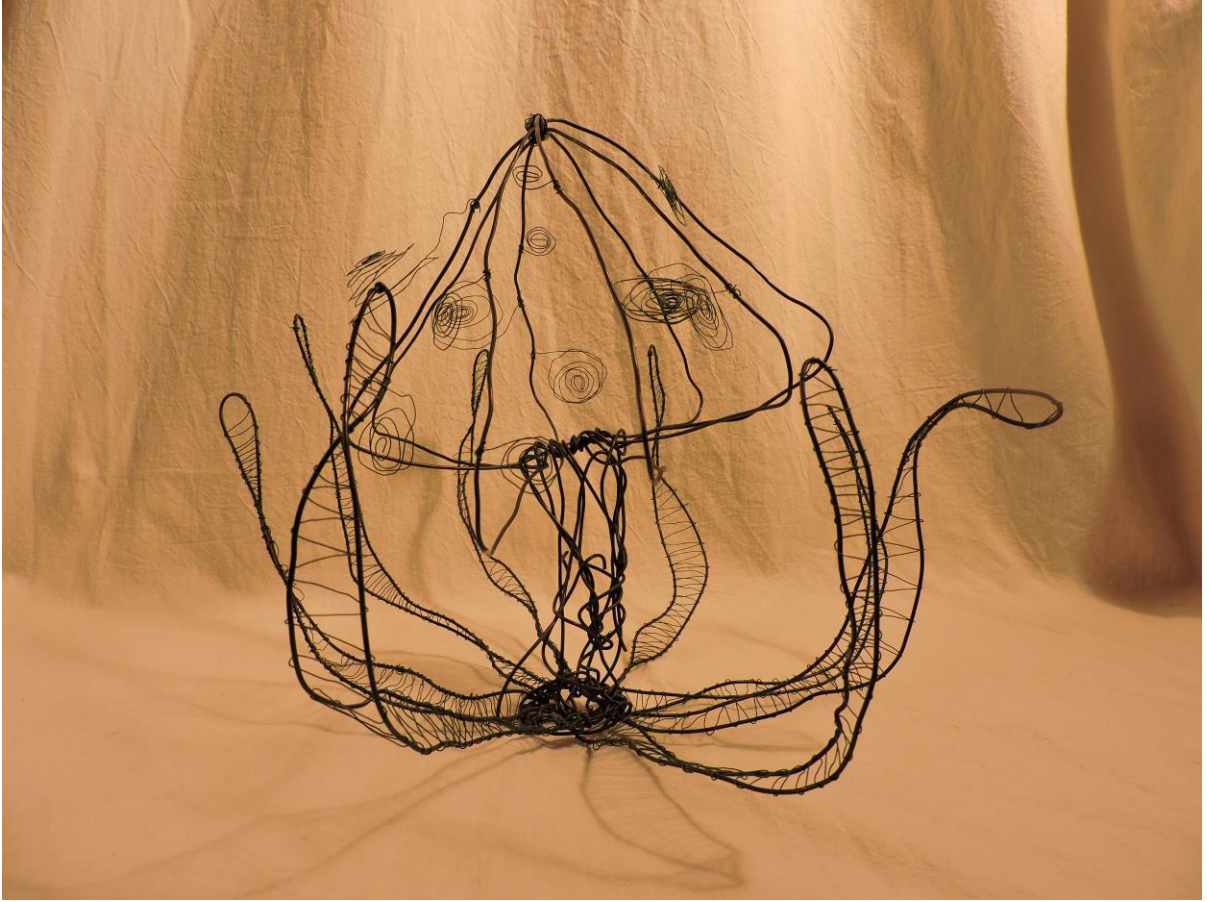
Aged to Perfection
By Chelsea Maddox



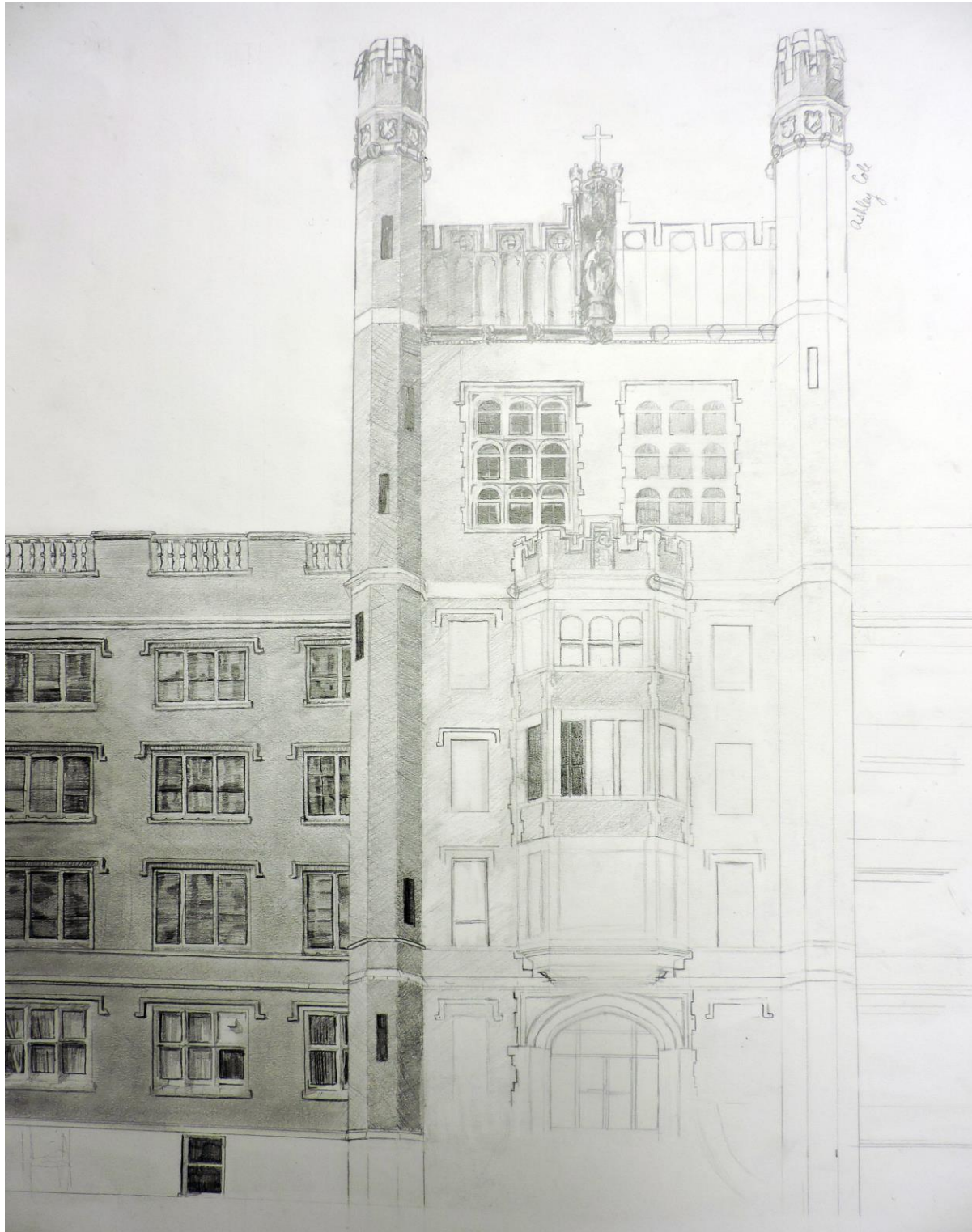
Untitled
By Micah Evans



Bismuth
By Micah Evans



Infected Mushroom
By Micah Evans



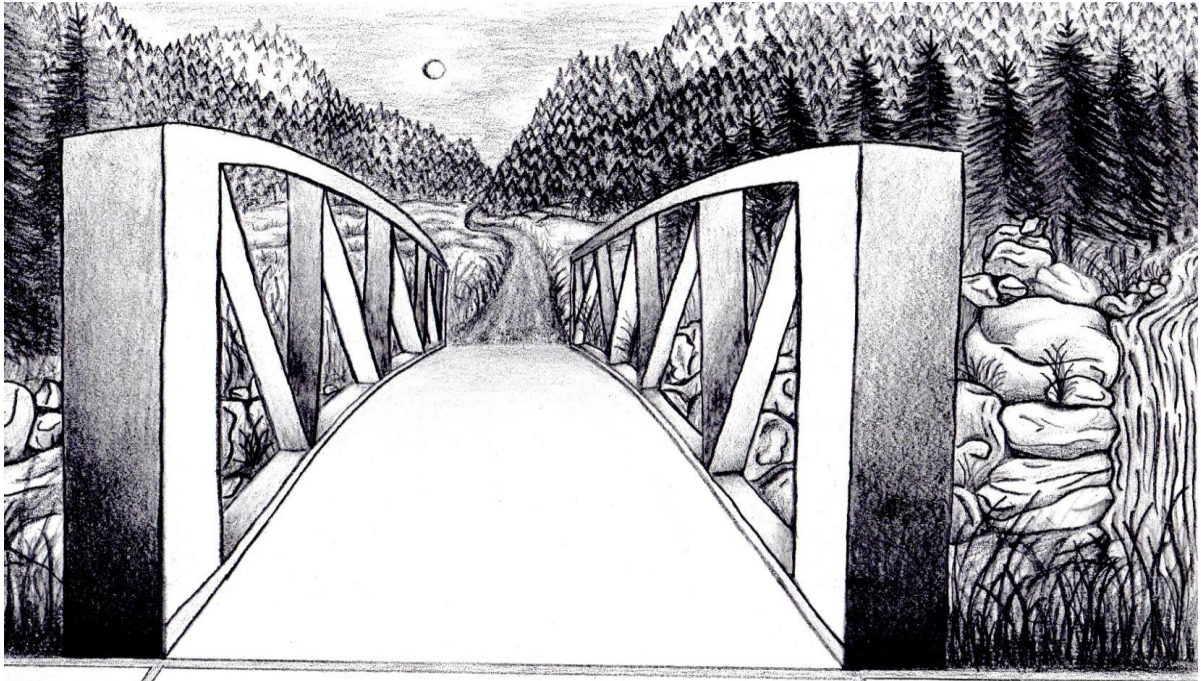
Studies in Architectural Design
By Ashley Cole



Wolf Vase
By Madison McKinnis



Forever and Ever
By Madison McKinnis



The Bridge
By Caleb Evans



Oil on Canvas 1
By Tina Chapman



Oil on Canvas 2
By Tina Chapman



Oil on Canvas 3
By Tina Chapman



Watercolor and Gouache
By Tina Chapman



Words Hurt
By Jessica Hinton



Film Queen
By Jessica Hinton

Untitled

By Leoncio Gonzalez

Beauty never ceasing, always left to weep.
Lonely and always wanting something that is true.
Looking but never finding.
Beauty is quickly fading. Not waiting for mister right.
Time is wasting; you are wasting; now everything is gone.
Only Wasted life and wasted time.

Mommy's Heart and Soul

By Morgan Teague

Beautiful sky blue eyes,
a smile that lights up the world,
little legs that carry you,
to the edges of the Earth.

Where you go,
I have no fear;
I will always be there.

In heart and in soul,
you take me wherever you go.

You may grow big,
no longer an infant,
yet always mommy's baby.

Wherever your little legs go,
know there will always be love.
Near, far, or right behind,
Mommy's heart will always be.

In heart and in soul,
you take me wherever you go.

Deep Blue Sea

By Chelsea Maddox

I've been swimming for a long time..
In this deep blue sea.
My arms are getting tired..
I cant swim anymore.
I give up on trying..
trying to stay alive..
to stay up.
Now im sinking.
Does nobody notice?
Im sinking faster and faster
going deeper and deeper.
Farther into the darkness..
Im starting to run out of breath..
My heart is slowing..
My energy and will is gone.
Ive touched bottom.
The sand is soft..
I close my eyes..
My breath is gone.
Now im laying here on the bottom
of this deep blue sea.
Where its cold, dark, and lonely.

Perfection

By Kade Davis

The essence of your body,
and the perfection of your smile,
the beauty of your kiss,
and the elegance of your heart
will always be second to your flawless mind.

Underappreciated Anatomy

By Jacie Chaffin

I love my hand.
I love the scrawny lengths of my fingers.
I appreciate the average shape and color of my nails.
I happily study the lines on my palm but have no desire to read them.
I am devoted to the callus at the top of my right, ring finger.
I respect the way one of my hands can fit all the way around its opposite wrist.

I love my elbows.
I am enchanted by their boniness.
I adore the way they only require lotion on rare occasions.
I worship their ability to fight through crowds.
I utilize their help with slipping into any tight fitting top.
I am delighted by their double jointed talent.

I love my shoulder blades.
I am enchanted by their sharpness.
I cherish their free movement.
I appreciate their awkwardness.
I enjoy the flexibility that they give me.
I have a weakness for the way they look in tank-tops.

I love my neck.
I relish its abnormal length.
I am thankful for its easy pairing with a bob hairstyle.
I am friendly with all the sights I've been granted access to by it.
I yearn for scarves, ascots, and necklaces to dress the glorious thing up.
I adore the way my neck muscles become visible when I'm anxious.

I love my waist.
I lust over the scar/mole perfectly centered between the two halves of my rib cage.
I have a growing affection towards the extremely high placement of my hipbones.
I am infatuated with the way my arms don't brush against my waist when they are relaxed at my sides.
I have a soft spot for that soft spot just below my belly button.
I appreciate the way my stomach kindly passes all the fats to my tush.

I love the backs of my knees.
I idolize their ability to be touched, unlike the fronts of my knees.
I am obsessed with the almost bonelike muscles that protrude back there.
I am fond of their ability to hold all of my weight during hours of standing.
I enjoy the way they feel when I cross my legs while sitting.
I am thankful that they are the easiest places to reach when shaving my legs.

I love my feet.

I have grown attached to the weird bone that sticks out on the outer edge of each foot.

I feel tenderness towards my strangely shaped pinky toe.

I respect the scabbed blisters on my heels that are never fully healed before they are opened anew.

I am devoted to my feet's flawlessly awkward balancing techniques.

I lust over their ability to feel almost nothing at all.

I love his body, I do,
but I love mine so much more
because I need to.

Love Book

By Thomas J Lloyd Smith

Did you write the book of love?
I need help on Chapter One.
It gets confusing after line one,
where you say love is easy.
I'm not sure that this is true,
But shouldn't it be in Chapter Two?
I need to know how to love,
then you can help me with making it easy.

**The Muse
Literary and Fine Arts Contest**

Sigma Kappa Delta, Upsilon Alpha Chapter, sponsors a contest for authors and artists submitting their works to the anthology. We send all submission to a qualified judging committee, and they choose the winners and honorable mentions (HM) in each area (poetry, prose, and art). Cash prizes go to the 1st place winner in each category and honorable mention recipients receive recognition and a certificate. Only students of Seminole State College are eligible for prize money. Should a judge award 1st place to a work by faculty or staff, Sigma Kappa Delta acknowledges their achievement with a certification, and the next ranked student will take the case prize. The winners for the 2014 edition of *The Muse* are listed below by category. We thank our judges and all contestants for their hard work. We would also like to thank Lana Reynolds specially for her continued support of *The Muse* Literary and Fine Arts Contest.

Grand Prize:

Alyssa Waldron, “A Secret that Kills”

Poetry:

1st: Jacie Chaffin, “Underappreciated Anatomy”

2nd: Thomas J. Lloyd Smith, “Love Book”

Prose:

1st: Kenneth Trey Jackson, “The Loneliest Creature”

2nd: Alyssa Kelough, “Find the Mermaid”

Art:

1st: Tina Chapman, “Watercolor” (Cover)

2nd: Ashley Cole, “Studies in Architectural Designs”