

RE:VISIONS

a journal of undergraduate prose



| Spring 2007

Re:Visions

is produced in collaboration with Notre Dame's Creative Writing Program and the Department of English to showcase exceptional prose written by ND undergraduates.

We seek to publish the highest quality work that shows originality, clarity, and careful attention to language, and encourage manuscripts during our open submission period, September 1 – April 1.

For consideration, please send three copies of a work of prose of up to 5,000 words, and a cover sheet with name and contact information to:

The Editors
Re:Visions
c/o English Department
356 O'Shaughnessy Hall

2007 Editorial Board:
Rumit Pancholi, *First-Year MFA Student in Poetry*
Christina Yu, *First-Year MFA Student in Fiction*
Tim Aher, *First-Year Law Student*

Editors' Notes

As the new editors of Re:Visions, we were delighted to find a wide range of style and subject matter among the unprecedented number of submissions we received. Unlike other MFA programs, ours is distinguished by the eclectic nature of its faculty and student body and we are proud to see the strengths of our program echoed in the undergraduate classes. Like many of the pieces we have seen in our own workshops, the stories featured within these pages tackle mature themes with idiosyncratic voices that demonstrate both narrative skill and facility with language. As usual, we were looking for memorable characters and line-by-line precision and originality.

Our selection panel approached the process with a different lens, and we hope that the selection reflects our diversity as readers. In this volume, we are proud to feature Megan Pohl's taut and suspenseful *Prognosis*, the quiet lyricism of Michael Bogacz's *They Don't Sleep Anymore on the Beach*, and the engaging conversational voice of Emily Weisbecker's *Outie*, among others. Though we were only able to select ten submissions for this volume, there were many commendable entries, and we look forward to reading future manuscripts from the talented young writers who submitted for this volume.

Rumit Pancholi
Christina Yu

Re:Visions

SPRING 2007

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COVER ART

The cover of the Spring 2007 issue of Re:Visions is a photograph shot by Abraham Nowitz, a professional travel photographer based out of New York City. This photograph was taken with a Fuji S3 SLR digital camera, a self-portrait as the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus. Shot in long exposure in very dark conditions and illuminated with artificial strobe light, this piece belongs to Nowitz's 2007 Illuminations Series.

'Til the River Runs Dry, or, War Metaphor Emotion

| Patrick Wall

*You know a dream is like a river
Ever changin' as it flows
And a dreamer's just a vessel
That must follow where it goes
Trying to learn from what's behind you
And never knowing what's in store
Makes each day a constant battle
Just to stay between the shores...and
I will sail my vessel
'Til the river runs dry
-Garth Brooks, "The River"*

Shaving your leg, there is a catch, then blood. But it will stop, and more hair will grow. Tears, a landmine, burst.

Drunk on vodka then beer, "We're just now beginning to pay for our addiction to oil. And we'll continue to do so," you sip. In the distance, you see three floating yellow arches, where there should be only one. What if all the people of this country vomited at the same moment, you think. Pull into the drive-thru, you say.

He claims dramatically how he very seriously considers joining the military—though he's a pacifist and "committed moral relativist"—because it isn't right that they're the only ones dying for our sins. Well not quite the only ones, you think, also, maybe, dramatically.

Beyond the garage and the pebbled drive and the tall grass, the weeds, the thorns, and the fence, is your car. An oak tree stands beside and above it. Carelessly, you send a stone adrift in the air, it hits the rotted wall of the garage, and falls down to disappear in the grass. A cloud of dark smoke, from your mouth, for a moment is as neutral as the evening sky, then you choke and cough.

Your dad sets down the paper and the bombs hit Baghdad. Looking up at your mom he smiles, congenially, you guess. "Dinner ready?" If you write a film script, this will be a scene in it; though, you worry, it may feel forced, tired, trite. After dinner is homework, TV, masturbate, bed.

Passing a metal book shelf, *Adolescent Suicide*, everything goes dark. There is a pill you could take that would end these feelings, but you wonder if you should.

Your tears and the water become the same in the shower. And all the blood is gone. A trembling, sniffing, you shut your eyes. You think, Just don't let this be it. You must keep going. "As Americans, we must not rest until we have defeated Terror everywhere."

There is, in your bed, in the dark, a comfort you feel, knowing that, if you open your eyes, you will still see nothing. But you hear. The composed voice of an American translator asks: *Why. Why? Why!* A screaming, veiled, video head beats her face against TV glass, trying to get to you.

Upon waking, you think, quickly, calming words, like, "psychic disturbance," and, "displaced energy." You have, for such things, you remember, a notebook.

Unwed

| Patrick Wall

Filling up his car with unleaded gasoline, the man with big arm muscles was yelling at the woman with square glasses inside the car. I looked over at my mom driving the car I was in and, maybe for the first time, noticed the creases in between her eyebrows.

Dead or dying, we all get cold and hard, I thought, poetically, I thought.

Yeah, after eleven years, he just left me, my hair stylist said. He is big, square-chested, hair poking through the button holes of his shirt, hair on his knuckles, hair on his face, hair on his head with gel in it. Oh my God, I said, Oh my God. Oh it's fine, he assured me, believably. He couldn't hear, I guess, that I wasn't really talking to him. After eleven years. And it was our mutual friend, he went on, but don't worry, he continued, connivingly, or something. He's living it up right now, coasting along on cloud nine. But here's something my mom has been telling me since I was real young. Revenge is a dish best served cold. And if I don't get 'em, karma will. I was so overcome with doom that I lost my breath and my shoulders collapsed into my chest. A tube sucked the sliced hair off my neck, then I said everything seemed great, thanks.

I was squeezing him like an old pillow with my cheek on his pale chest and I wasn't embarrassed. He petted my hair and proclaimed in a breathy whisper, I really like you. Meaningfully I said I like you too, my eyes closed, speaking into his skin which, I imagined, was just inches above his beating red heart. Later he came on my chest and it was warm and the pungent smell, which he could not control, endeared him to me, almost unbearably. I let the cum dry on me. Will you see me when I come back from school? Yeah of course. With his eyes so dark and serious, wet like his lips, I had no choice but to believe him. Through the dirty windshield, from inside the car outside the apartment where I left him sleeping, the morning light was the sort of friend who loves you enough to tell you everything she knows and thinks and thinks she knows. I said I appreciate it but there's no need; I know. I turned the music on very loud. With the windows down and my dark glasses on, this scene from outside must have looked and sounded like one of those New Orleans funeral processions through the bright city streets. But, of course, I didn't know, nor did I think to imagine, what this all looked like from the outside.

My mom listened to a book on tape—a woman remembering her life, and the way her children used to need her, but now don't. I listened to music on

my headphones—a young man mourning life lived, at best, with moments of real love. On the flat freeway between my home and school there were corn and wheat fields all around us, empty now in the early winter. But there were pine trees too, once in a while, standing resiliently in the chilly air, next to the loud freeway with the poison smoke and the busy people. Finally, to myself I declared, I will not be like these goddamned people. My mom looked at me and I looked out the window. In the car next to ours was a bald man driving, a woman with unnatural blond hair sitting beside him, and a boy somewhere around my age in the backseat, listening to music on his headphones. For a moment, we looked right at each other. Then we each quickly looked down. To the woman on the stereo or the car or the road, or to no one in particular, maybe, my mom said, Yep. That's what I've been saying all along.

Prognosis

| Megan E. Pohl

First of all, welcome to New Bay Memorial. I hope the nurses have been treating you well. I know what it's like.

It's hard to be in a hospital emergency room—it seems like your life is entirely in other people's hands, hands that don't always take the best care. I'm going to do my best to tell you what's happening to you though.

I know what it's like.

In some ways this is complicated. In some ways this is painfully simple. I say simple because we only need to do one test to really know what's wrong with you, what's giving you that pain in your side. You thought it was gas at first, probably. Most do. A persistent little gas bubble that refused to go on about its natural course.

When the pain lasted longer than a day though, you started to wonder. You were suspicious that the pain—probably gas, right?—didn't move on. You were suspicious of this, but you didn't tell your husband. He prefers that you keep that unfeminine information to yourself.

The pain got worse though. You felt as if you might as well have been clumsily driving a rusty nail into your side with the hammer from your garage. The nail stabbed you, wrenching your insides apart. The dented silver hammerhead, sliding of the nail, bruised the flesh around that poisoned spot.

When you finally tell your husband, the words, the saying it, make you wonder what's poisoning you. What's making you feel nauseous and dizzy with these waves of pain that feel like a tiny tiger is trying to shred you apart from the inside out.

The answer is simple because it only takes one simple test to confirm our suspicions. It's not a tiny tiger inside of you, clawing you.

It's an embryo, misplaced and poorly attached, that's simply trying to grow where it doesn't have room to.

You've heard about this before. You've heard the words. Ectopic pregnancy.

You will respond to this diagnosis in stages.

First, you marvel at that word—pregnancy—which you and your husband shy from except when he comes to a consensus for the both of you that later is better and you should focus on your career and you can't yet provide properly and a family can wait just a little bit longer. Your mind agrees with all of this.

But your body has a deeper instinct, a need to have that word applied to you—pregnant.

Of course you don't want to be. It's not the right time for you, and you don't want children, yet. But hearing this word makes you wonder if it is time. If the little bundle of cells had moved down just a few more inches, into its rightful growing place—instead of a final resting place—then what would have happened?

This is the point when you realize that you have a motherly instinct you didn't know you had. You always suspected it though. The little tightening in your chest when you see other people's children fall amidst the aisles of the grocery store—you suspected that it was a motherly instinct. Now you are sure of it. You are sure of your capacity to love this thing, this little growing thing.

As soon as you realize this though, you remember that other word—ectopic. You're not sure quite what it means but you are sure it isn't good. Like something misplaced or mistaken. The word itself even makes a retching sound that reminds you of the sharpness of the pain in your side. Ectopic. The word is foreign and foreboding. It will make that sharp pain in your side move to an excruciating pain in your chest, that same spot where you feel the warm burn of your motherly instinct.

And then, holding the hand of your husband, you will begin to blame him. You will forget about the time you forgot to take your pill. Instead you will remember only all the messy, malicious sperm that you never wanted from him. You only wanted his love, his touch, his tenderness. But now his love is the poison that is making your side ache. He is the nail driving into your most vital parts. You welcomed him at the time, but are paying for now. You feel that his love has gone sour. Worse, it has begun to rot inside of you.

And all these awful words, these bitter thoughts, so horrendous and pricking to the ear, were just caused by an attempt to love each other. It was an unintentional hurt. But you can't see this.

You won't remember it until later, but you do love him. You can't help but love him and the body he can hardly control. You do love him and the mass of him, and you always did love the thought of little pieces of him breaking off and melting into you. You will remember this later. You'll remember the ache of wanting him, so different from the ache of these new complications.

For now, you see him as the cause. He is the pain in your side. The persistent but inexplicable hurt, the repeated *I'll be fine in a bit*, the chanted *I'm OK I'm OK I'm OK*.

But now what was probably just bad gas has become a tiny fetus in your side without the know-how to plant itself where it belongs. Even though it wasn't the plan, you wonder if you would have allowed it to belong and then welcomed it to stay. It could belong. It would belong.

But you are robbed of the choice except in the hypothetical. Blue bear wallpaper or light pink cradles are only what would have been and could have been if only you and he had met inside you in the right place—just a few more inches—and connected in a more hospitable spot.

Now you see your total inability to provide. At this point—here's where it's the hardest—you see that your body is only good for creating death. That little bundle of cells, that microscopic point of growth where anything could have been possible—your body refuses to allow it to flourish. You have killed it and he has killed it by helping it to exist.

You are filled with death. And every doctor, nurse and technician can only remind you of that death that fills you. You begin to see yourself as an x-ray must see you—a slowly disintegrating, but strangely harmonious collection of bones, muscles and tissues, all harboring a thing that they all know—all the doctors, nurses and technicians know—must die. You see that all of them are plotting with you to destroy this life within you. Saving the vessel by killing what it carries.

But you will survive this. Remember. You will survive this, even though there has been a death in your body. A part of you has died, a part that no one knew well enough to warrant a funeral or even a memorial. Instead, you will scream for this death. You will scream and cry while stumbling across dark grass in the dark hours of the morning, cursing the primeval desires—yours and his—that made you a vessel for death.

But worse than that, you curse this death because it makes you realize the thing you crave with an even more animalistic urge—a life that you've created and that you must care for. I too know this feeling. You will feel the pain of not being able to have something that you didn't even know you wanted.

Don't dwell on the death. A life can do nothing but end, in the end. Like all our lives. You shouldn't forget that. Don't let yourself rupture because of what's happened, that's the real difficulty of this complication. We at New Bay Memorial will make sure that your tissues don't rupture. We will stop the bleeding from inside your organs. Your responsibility in your own recovery will be to make sure nothing else ruptures. Keep a careful eye on that spot in your chest. Don't let these blows to your motherly instinct become fatal wounds.

You are wondering how you will do this? In the end, the two of you will make the cure. In the end, he will be that comforting, permanent and solid thing that helps you along. He will hold you in his arms and he will be the thing in your life that doesn't seem to be dying. He will be so committed to you that he will seem to refuse his own decay, if only for your sake. In his arms, he will be the same as he ever was, and the same as he ever will be, even though you are falling apart. He will tell you *There will be others*, confessing that he has the same cravings you do, the same urge to create and protect.

They Don't Sleep Anymore on the Beach

| Michael Bogacz

As they were driving, Milton could see it in the distance, its white wooden architecture standing tall above the flat terrain. In the back of his mind, he could hear the joyful screams of the women and children as they plummeted down the hill. Drawing closer to it, Milton saw the bright red letters on the side. CYCLONE, it said to him. It was then that he remembered being here; back before the sign was changed, and before they reapplied the paint. He remembered what it felt like to be squashed between the uncomfortable plastic seat and the tattered lap bar. The idea of sitting at the base of the hill for the first time, awaiting the unknown dozens of feet above and in front of him, brought him back. The car kept closing in on it, and Milton closed his eyes for a moment and felt like he was there again, hurtling downwards in youthful ecstasy. He recalled getting off the ride, and insisting to his mother that they do it again, right away. It was never quite the same as the first ride, but he could always drown out the present and visualize the first time clear as day. While the memories seemed to be a general summary of times past, it was still glorious every time. He opened his eyes and took in the surroundings once more. The car, continuing on its journey, started to steer away from the relic, and Milton leaned back in his passenger seat and closed his eyes again. The remnants of joy lingered for another moment, and then crashed like waves into sleep. Sweet, dreamless sleep.

* * *

The car stopped just in front of the fence. The engine shut off and the sound of wind took its place in Milton's ears. It was a cloudy day, the ocean a slightly darker shade of grey than the sky above it. There were a few solitary birds wandering the sky miles off the coastline. The wind howled louder as the pools of water from high tide drained slowly into the ocean.

"You sure you want to get out here dad? The winds are crazy and the temp can't be much more than 40."

The old man paused for a moment. "What's the point of coming here then?"

A look of amazement overtook Gary's face. "Well," he said, reclining his seat, "I'm gonna stay in the car, is that alright?"

Milton looked to his left and nodded. "Can you unlock the door for me?"

disembarked.

The wind was every bit as harsh as Milton had thought it would be. A fine mist descended upon him, and the cold day soaked into his wrinkled skin. Milton walked down the path past the fence onto the sand, and continued forward towards the ocean. It seemed surprisingly calm given the weather, but also looked as if something churned deep beneath. He scanned the length of the beach. In the distance, apartment buildings loomed over the edge of the boardwalk. Behind him, the city was barely visible beneath the overcast skies. The only sign of life in his area was a woman, possibly older than him, stopping every few seconds to bend over and pick up something. If that was her job, he felt sorry for her. To be in this frigid air all day picking up the remnants of years past would be miserable, thought Milton to himself.

He glanced back at the car. Gary was leafing through some financial magazine, unaware his father was turned towards him. Milton was glad that he had raised a son as good as Gary. Sure, Gary had his share of flaws, his father's stubbornness being one of them, but in the end Milton was pleased. He would always think about the time right after his marriage ended, and how Gary, fresh out of college, had been so strong. How he had watched after his old dad and was always willing to listen, even if he was rambling. Gary would always sit there, calm and contemplative, staring into the distance. And now, Gary would usually indulge his father's wishes to travel to the places of his youth, which because of their distance were generally day-long commitments. It was good to have a companion. Milton turned back towards the ocean. Gary was the part of his life that made Milton his proudest.

As he neared the ocean, Milton stopped and bent over. He picked up a clod of sand, and felt the wet, uneven crystals run between his fingers. He looked out at the horizon, still the same shade of interminable grey. Nothing felt right. Was this really the beach of his youth? Even on a day like this, he would have been able to find at least one of his lifeguard friends wandering around, or maybe one of his teammates looking to throw around the football. But now there was nothing. A feeling of grief came over him, and he dipped his head in mourning. As he was about to close his eyes to avoid crying, a single yellow spark flew by in front of him. This caught his attention and his head snapped back up. Where did that come from, he wondered. He stood up and looked down the beach trying to find where the spark had gone, but saw nothing out of the ordinary. He turned back towards the ocean, and began to contemplate leaving. He was tired and his legs hurt. There was nothing left for him here but fading memories and rough sand. Then, another yellow spark whisked around him. He turned to his right to examine the source of these

blips. All he saw was the lady with her trash bag, slowly working her way down the beach. Another yellow spark flew by. Then another. Then another, but red instead of yellow. And another, and another. A meteor shower had enveloped Milton. He could no longer feel the rain or the cold as hundreds of points of light red, yellow and every shade in between rushed over and around him. As he was bathed in the vivid fluorescence, his heart began to beat rapidly. As long as he had been alive, Milton had never seen anything as glorious and as terrifying as this.

Milton turned to look back at the car, but there was a mass of luminescence where the fence had been a moment ago. He looked up in search of the sky, but that too had been replaced by the flying colors. He stared intently at the light, no longer able to distinguish between individual reds and yellows. He spun around as fast as his arthritic legs could, looking for a way out. After searching frantically for a moment, he saw a small speck of black on what appeared to be the horizon. Anxiously, he started walking towards this hole. The hole slowly grew larger, swallowing the brilliance around him. Soon, all in front of him was dark. He looked behind himself and the colors from before were gone, nothing but darkness was behind him. Milton gasped.

Suddenly, Milton felt something on his feet. He looked down and saw that he was now barefoot. The edges of waves were rushing over his feet. This can't be, he thought. He looked up and saw that he was on a beach. He realized that this wasn't just any beach; This was the beach of his youth. He looked down again and noticed how clean the sand was, how clear the water was, how smooth his feet were. In the sky was the moon just past its full stage, beginning to wane. In the distance, Milton saw the flicker of a bonfire, and a group of beachgoers playing some variation of volleyball. That was right where we would always play, though Milton. Under the moonlight, he could see a dark figure running across the beach towards them. Milton squinted to try to ascertain the identity of this person. As the being grew near, Milton's face straightened. It couldn't be her. It was her.

"Hey you. Glad you could make it out. Everyone else is here already." As she brushed back her golden brown hair with her hand, Milton spied the stack of multi-colored bracelets on her wrist. An inch of her soft freckled stomach peeked out from under her shirt, radiating the dim red of late summer. The bottom of her capri pants were damp, likely from an evening frolic in the wake. She breathed heavily as a result of running the length of the beach, but there was no exhaustion in her subtle grin.

"Yeah sorry, I had things to do." These words were foreign to Milton. He felt himself speaking without thinking. He knew right away that these were-

his words. These were the words of his eighteen year old self. He was powerless over his body. An ever more familiar feeling in an unfamiliar situation.

“Well why don’t you take that shirt off and come play some. Alex’s brother got us some drinks, so the night’s just getting started. I figure we’ll probably sleep here tonight, the weather is so perfect.”

More words came out. “Well ok babe, but I can’t stay overnight. You do remember that I’m leaving in the morning, right?”

Her smile straightened. “Yeah I know. I was just hoping that you wouldn’t actually ever go.”

“Well you know how much I’ve always wanted to go to school there. I mean this is the next chapter in my life. I have to go. I have to try.”

“But they rejected you, they don’t think you’re good enough.” She stopped briefly, regretting her wording. Her lip quivered slightly as she spoke. “I think this is a sign that you’re supposed to do something else with your life. Something here. With me.” She added softly, “Maybe.”

It was then that Milton noticed what he had missed years ago. It was the beauty in her desperation. It was how her face, despite her obvious distress, still suggested joy just beneath the surface. He thought it to be tragic that it took him this long to realize it.

“Sorry. I’ve thought a long time about this. It’s been good here. No, I mean it’s been great here. But I need to do something else. I need to see somewhere else. And to me, the fact that they rejected me is a sign that I need to go there and work even harder to get in. I need to prove myself, if for no other reason just to show myself that I can.”

She started to say something in return, but gave up and hung her head. Milton reached over and held her tight.

“I really do love you,” he said, “that wasn’t just words. The last year has been great, and I really mean that.” He pulled away slightly and looked her in the eyes. “This is just what I have to do. If I don’t do this, I know I’ll regret it.” Those words dripped of irony for Milton the older. “Why don’t you come with me?”

She started in reply, “first of all you know I have to help my family with the shop. My dad can’t work as much anymore with his back.” She stood defiantly as she spoke. “But mostly, it’s that this thing you want, this ideal, it’s just a place and just an idea. This here is real, this is happening.” Her hand motioned back and forth between him and herself. “You live in the greatest city in the world. Whatever you want to do, you can do it here. You don’t need to run away to grow up.”

The younger Milton was growing more impatient. The older Milton

wondering how his younger self could ever be impatient with her. “Look, I just wanted to come enjoy one last night with my friends, and one last night with you. We’ve already been over all of this, and I’ve thought long and hard about this, but my mind is made up. If you can’t accept that, then I’m sorry. This is my life.” Milton looked straight in her eyes as they darted around the landscape, close to forming tears.

She turned her head up and looked straight at him. “This is my life too.” She turned and walked away. She paced steadily towards the fire, not once veering from her orientation. The waves rushed over Milton’s feet as he watched her. His body didn’t move.

Milton was overcome with a great sadness. While he always knew he had made a mistake, he never let the thought surface. But now the truth was all too apparent, and it lingered like a dead fish floating in the wake. While his younger self stood stoic and determined, Milton wept and cried and moaned. Why had he ever been so stubborn? And for what, some idea of a better life? What could have been better than what he already had? Simple and plain as his existence had been, there was a sense of release in the lack of complications. How he now longed to run after her, and undo his actions. He could spend the night and tell her that had been all wrong, and that he would stay here, and that maybe they could start a life together. He would help out at the shop and go to community college at night. It would all work out perfectly. With this newfound resolution in his mind, Milton tried to move his legs to start running, but failed and was forced back into the reality that this was apparently merely a memory and not a second chance. Still he tried his hardest to move his young legs with his old, weary brain. He kept pushing but nothing came. Pushing and pushing, for the first time in his life he felt alive, albeit in his futility. This had to be a second chance. And then it happened; his left foot moved forward ever so slightly.

Martin was shocked. How had he been able to accomplish this? The whole time he had been in this place, he hadn’t been able to control the slightest movement of his body. And now there was his left foot. Naturally, he then tried his right. And this time it worked, slightly better than the left had. And then his left again. His feet kept moving slightly more each time he willed them across the sand. They moved more and more until soon he was walking and then running, trying to catch her before it was too late. He felt the slight ocean breeze brush against his face, and prayed that this glorious revelation was real. It had to be real. But as soon as he wished this, a yellow spark flew by. And then another yellow spark, and then a red one. More and more flew by as the night sky shifted from a moonlit black to a shade brighter than day. Now, there

was another hole at the end of the horizon, but it wasn't black. It was grey, the exact shade of grey Milton remembered from earlier. This grey enveloped him, as that warm summer night had minutes ago. And then all was grey, wet and cold as before. Milton found himself still running, now on the beach of the present. His failing legs buckled under his weight and defeated, he fell to the ground.

As Milton lied in the cold sludge, his mind raced. Why had he been running? Where was he? How did he get here? Unable to get his arms out from under his body, Milton stayed where he was. As the waves advanced up the beach, he worried that he might drown. He was helpless, a beached whale on the barren seascape.

Gary rushed over to help his father. "Oh my God Dad, why were you running down the beach? You must be out of your mind." He picked his father up by his shoulders, brushing some of the sand off of his jacket. "Dad, look at me." Gary waited for Milton to collect himself. "Do you remember why you were running?"

Milton tried his hardest to recall, but it was all a blur. This place was familiar, in fact he knew this was one of his favorite places. But even though he knew this, his tired mind couldn't remember any of the preceding events. "I don't know," he blurted, weary and exhausted.

"Fuck," muttered Gary to no one in particular, "I hate to see your brain do this to you." He craned his neck and looked his father in the eye. "Do you want me to take you back to the home so you can get some sleep?"

Milton soured at this suggestion. He didn't know where exactly he was, or what he was doing there, or why his knees hurt so much, but he knew he didn't want to go home. He wanted to sleep here, he was sure of it. He no longer noticed the pounding wind coming off of the surf, or the drizzle soaking what was left of his grey hair. This place was warm and familiar, and he wanted to stay here tonight. He wished for nothing but to lie down and sleep, and to feel what it was like to wake up in the morning here. He never wanted to leave again. He wanted to sleep here tonight. Sleep here tonight. Sleep here. Sleep. Sleep.

"Yeah," gasped Martin, disconnected, "I want to sleep." This idea of sleep was all his mind could process. The idea of sweet, dreamless sleep. As they drove away, the winds swirled about the landscape. Rain descended in sheets, cleansing the sand of its impurities. The ocean churned on and on, ignorant of the happenings on the neighboring land. A single gull dove down close to the water. It lingered for a moment until it flew away, on a straight and steady path into the distance.

Outie

| Emily Weisbecker

You roll over on your bed and groan. Some sitcom is on television and the laugh track is driving you crazy. As though it's not enough to pepper the dialogue with mediocre jokes at best, the producers have to insult your intelligence that much more by telling you when to laugh. It's actually not funny at all, so you grab the remote and the screen flickers to black. You hear another groan and you prop yourself up on an elbow, confused. That didn't just come from you, and the television is off. Next comes a squeak and a drawn out swoosh of air.

"Ungh. Mmhmm. *Yes.*" It's not groans, but moans, and they are passing easily through the wax paper walls between you and your neighbor, Nick. You never expected dorm living to be as private or as comfortable as home, but you didn't realize your next door neighbor would be quite so sexually active. Frankly, you still can't understand it. The guy is between 250 and 300 pounds, but a tall kid so it evens out more or less. He's the type who might frighten small children just by looking at them. When donning a t-shirt, curly black hairs poke out from the neck, especially in the back. Short sleeves reveal thick hair crawling down his arms, tapering just enough at the fingers to ward off suspicion of him being a closet werewolf, but just barely. Your friend tried to explain his appeal to you by pointing out that there are some people who just ooze sex. They might not be attractive in the traditional sense of the word, but you know they want sex, which sometimes tricks people into thinking they are sexy, and then they get what they want. Still though, you can't buy it. The guy is a bear. He's not even allowed to play skins for quad sports. You wonder if it's because people don't want to accidentally touch his fur, or because they can't tell him from the shirts. Either way, it's better for everyone.

You remember the last time you played volleyball with him, and luckily you were both on the shirts team. What he has too much of, you don't quite have enough. You could be considered scrawny, but you'd prefer to call it trim. You might be called so shockingly white-skinned that people would feel compelled to shield their eyes from the blinding rays reflected off of your stomach, but you'd prefer to call it—well, you'd prefer to keep your shirt on, at least out in the sunlight. But there was real beauty in the skins team that day—Ellie. She was from another dorm, but she joined you and your friends for games every so often. You didn't know her well, but you had a feeling she would be able to

appreciate your delicate shade of white. Her own porcelain exterior kept catching your eye rather than the volleyball so often flying past your head. Her snug blue sports bra kept her surprisingly free of bouncing so your eyes wandered to the tiny, hypnotizing shadow in her navel and then to the subtle arc of her hip which softly curved inwards and dipped beneath the waistband of her shorts, leaving you to imagine the rest. By the end of the game, your team was losing by a considerable margin, largely due to your lack of coordination and concentration. Her skin had developed a rosy pink shade from too much sun exposure, and you suddenly found yourself desperately wanting to press your thumb just above her navel. Not too hard, just enough to leave a thumbprint, the way sunburn lets you do. Just enough to see if your thumb would leave a small oval of white. You wanted to know how long it would last. At the same time, it was all you could do resist offering her an aloe vera rubdown. Even now, you blink, seeing yourself squirt the green gel onto your hand and then her back arching ever so slightly as you make contact between your cool, slippery hands and her lightly toasted skin. Then the green bottle would slip from your grasp, your eyes would lock, and you'd lunge hungrily at each other, at last seizing this long-awaited opportunity.

But apparently that is Nick's area. After that game you had smiled and looked away, giving a hasty goodbye over your shoulder. You stab at the power button on the remote, now hoping that you can find a laugh track loud enough to drown out the vocal stylings of next door. When the skinny metal bed frame begins to tap rhythmically against the wall, you plunk headphones over your ears and turn to the computer. If Nick can do it, you can't so far behind that you have no chance. Right? Maybe Ellie would consider being nice to you. No reason not too. You remember how you left off at your last encounter, the volleyball game, and figure she's not especially impressed with you. Maybe you can make up for it? Surely your sly instant messaging skills will come in handy here.

"Hey, what's up," you cleverly text from your computer, safely two miles away from hers. The "hey" suggests casual cool, while the lack of a question mark furthers your impression of suave nonchalance. But the question "what's up" has to be there, to show that you do in fact care and you are in fact interested. It only takes you about seven minutes of retyping and re-formatting to get everything right, but she will never know that. You try out different fonts and colors and toy with the idea of an emoticon smiley face, but decide against it on the grounds that it would be excess enthusiasm. When she responds, you are so thrilled that all possible topics of conversation immediately leave your head at a sprint. Luckily, she senses that, so it seems, and she propels the con-

versation for a euphoric twelve and a half minutes. You begin to sense a connection between the two of you. You can do nonverbal communication without even being in the same building. There's the possibility that she merely possesses superior conversation skills—but no, clearly this is a matter of the two of you coming together in mind, spirit, and maybe even eventually body. But you're getting ahead of yourself. As the weeks pass, the two of you progress to more complicated exchanges ranging from "how was class" to vague quotations of song lyrics in away messages, injected with thinly veiled longing.

Following a fateful encounter, the two of you begin studying together in the student center. You are both seated there under the guise of being studious, but really just conversing and teasing one another, interspersed with directing the internet browser on your laptop to useless websites having nothing to do with your accounting test the next day. She is doing more or less the same thing. Only she has her legs propped up on your side of the booth, on your seat, right up next to and actually touching your knee. This is the central point of focus for you, this physical connection between ankle and knee, two bony surfaces nestled together; it means something. It feels hot, and you are certain that if you look down, the point of contact would be flushed, maybe even glowing. Such is the progression of your sweltering romance. When she re-crosses her legs in the opposite direction, her ankle grazes your thigh. This is love; you have not a doubt in your head.

Studying together develops into a regular thing, and you find yourself feeling thrilled when you realize that the two of you actually have a regular booth. Your comfort level swells as you find more things to say. You count four separate occasions of making her laugh. Technically it might be three, because one of the times, you are almost sure she's laughing at you. Her words were, "Don't worry, I'm not laughing *with* you, I'm laughing *at* you." But that was followed with more laughter, and it didn't appear sinister, so you're going to go ahead and count that too—anything to make her smile. On this particular night, both of you are pseudo-studying when Nick strolls up to the table. His hands look especially hairy today. You send him a mental warning not to bring those hands anywhere near Ellie.

"Hey El, how are you?" He gazes intently at her, not once making eye contact with you, or even recognizing your presence with a swift nod or a punch to the left eye.

"I'm good, how about you, Nick?" You notice her pull her foot from your side of the booth. Is she squirming in discomfort at the unwanted attention of this manbeast? Or perhaps she is intentionally distancing herself from you to appear available. Then there's the chance that her foot fell asleep. You

she tapping it to get the needles out?

"Are you free this Saturday?" Nick croons, cradling her with his oddly-shaped eyes. You wondered if she notices how far apart they stretch over his nose.

"Umm, I think so, how come?" You detect the false friendliness in her voice. Beneath the surface there is a nervous anticipation, she's fearful of the answer, you can tell.

"We're having a dorm dance, and I was wondering if you would be my date." At this point, you tear your attention away from her and turn your disbelieving eyes to him. You have clearly been spending more time with her than him. You are sitting there. He is the one who has been lounging in couches and nearby chairs eyeing her eagerly. Does he not recognize the palpable chemistry humming between the two of you? Has he no shame?

"Gee, thanks, let me just check my calendar." She flips open her date book, quickly scans the page, and then slaps it closed again. Turning to him, she furrows her brow a little. You can see that she's feigning disappointment. "Shoot, I'm sorry Nick, but I have the art department picnic that day, and I don't know what time it will get done—it tends to go into the night. Thank you so much for asking though!" You feel a heavy sigh of relief erupting from your core, but you attempt to stifle it, filtering it between your teeth so as not to let on that your entire self was hanging on her response. Nick tips his hat, just as a sixty-something man wearing a jaunty beret might do before tap dancing out of the room. As soon as he passes out of earshot, she turned toward you, a smile wrestling its way onto her face.

"Can you believe that? I mean, I'm sitting here with you. Why would he think it's appropriate to ask me to a dance in front of you?!" She shakes her head and you imagine yourself doing a victory dance on top of the table. Then she pages through her date book to the relevant weekend once more. Her finger traces over the page to Saturday, coming to rest by her own handwriting. "The picnic is actually from one to four. Shh! Don't tell!" Her confession mixed with her giggle seal the deal. You walk her home. After clearing your throat a few times and almost dropping the whole plan, you ask her to join you for dinner at the Star of India.

* * *

You step out of the shower, toweling off your hair. Rubbing some Degree deodorant under your arms motivates you to congratulate yourself for making such a concerted effort to be presentable. You even have plans to stray

the daily uniform of t-shirt and sweatshirt, all to benefit your date. She's impressively out of your league, so you have to show your appreciation. Not that she'll remind you of it, hopefully, but all the same, its obviousness must be subtly acknowledged. Pulling on your white and blue striped shirt, you focus on your reflection for a moment. Will she notice that she's about half an inch taller than you? It hasn't been too obvious during your study sessions because you're both seated most of the time. For that reason, it shouldn't be a problem tonight either because you will be seated for a majority of the date. She might not care anyway—what's a couple inches? That's nothing to worry about.

You pull up to her dorm to pick her up for dinner, but there's no legal parking, so you have to call her cell phone and ask her to come out. When she reaches the car, her muscled calf enters first, followed by a flowing green skirt, a pale freckled arm, and a smile. You feel like you're back at step one. Sure you had every right to be friendly in a study setting, but this is entirely different. Her expectations may be entirely different, far higher than for a study companion necessary to keep from getting bored out of her mind by dull required classes. Or worse yet, maybe her expectations would not change, because she sees this excursion as a mere extension of your slowly developing—platonic—relationship. You stammer a nervous hello and wonder why you of all people had to be graced with sweaty hands. At every inopportune time possible, they flare up, like they have their own little water ducts just waiting to make your life more challenging. You drag them across your pant legs and then freeze, hoping she didn't notice you blatantly exposing your secret. The sooner you get to the restaurant, the better, you figure, so you reach down to shift into drive.

Instead of shifting out of park, your hand lands on her knee and trails back a bit to her thigh before you realize your error. You spring back in alarm, wondering how she'll react, whispering an apology. She laughs lightly and shrugs it off, but then crosses her legs on the other side of her seat.

"So this Star of India place, I've heard good things." You know that a positive conversation change might salvage this turn of events. "It's supposed to be really cheap, er, good." You forget for a moment that this is not a characteristic to highlight to your date. Now she's going to assume you chose it because you are also cheap. Shit. You forge ahead anyway: "It looks a little run-down from the outside, but you know how these places are. Sometimes the sketchiest looking ones hidden in mostly closed down strip malls turn out to be the best ethnic food you've ever tasted." This may be an overstatement, seeing as you have never actually been here yourself, but you might as well talk it up. Upon arrival, you discover that there is a buffet available, only none of the

food is labeled. You hope she doesn't have any pressing allergies. The two of you pass from one side to the other, noting the dry meat, the soupy meat, the unidentifiable spheres, the greenish-grayish concoction, and the warm naan. That's the one thing you recognize, the bread, so you pile a stack onto your plate and motion for her to do the same. You finish filling your plate before her, so as you wait for her, you have a chance to observe without being caught because she is focused on making her selections. Her black tank top presses her breasts together and you take note of her impressive cleavage. Is the temperature different there, somehow warmer in between? You wonder if she ever stores things there. Pencils, keys, loose change. There's enough room for it. But then she's done taking her food and you're jarred from your thought process so you both can return to the table together.

You savor a bite of naan and look up to find her nose wrinkled over a sampling of the first of three soupy meats. Her face straightens out, however, when a waiter approaches the table. He says something in a language you don't understand, but it sounds like he's making an inquiry. You ask him to repeat himself before thinking that he may not understand you in the first place, and repeating what he just said will serve no purpose. He then begins shouting at you in what you could swear sounds like Russian and he points frantically to the window beyond your table. You look at Ellie, confused, and then stand up and peer in the direction he is pointing.

The spot where you left your car is empty, but the yellow lines point you in the direction of where it has ended up on the other side of the parking lot, just outside of a deep ditch. What appears to be another waiter is straining against the back bumper, holding the car in place to prevent it from rolling farther.

"What? Why the hell would that happen?" You toss an apology to Ellie over your shoulder as you stride toward the door and toward the car. Ellie follows, first bending to undo the straps on her heeled sandals before hopping on her bare feet around the gravel in the parking lot. You fumble with the key to get the driver side door open and realize with horror that your shift is still in drive. You had been so startled and embarrassed about trying to shift Ellie's leg that you just didn't bother to put the car in park at all. Maybe you aren't getting enough sleep. You hop in the car and slam the shift into the correct spot, but then transition back to drive to return it to its parking spot. The waiter who had been holding the car walks by your window, sweat dripping around the contours of his eyebrows, fists clenched and teeth bared. Shaking just a little, you open the door and think, shit, the night is ruined. What will she think?

"Everything okay?" she asks, sounding genuinely concerned.

"Well, we may or may not have been eating hamster in there, and my car almost killed a man. So. Yes?" She laughs. A light, tinkling sound. Your stomach lurches with hope. The two of you return to your meal and pick around the food that seems edible, hoping that no angry staff tampered with your food in your absence.

* * *

The night goes by entirely too quickly and before you know it, the two of you stand in front of her dorm and you have yet to utter those ever-important words: "Would you like to do it again some time?" You wet your lips to prepare for the delivery of your carefully thought-out phrase when she starts coming in.

Panic! What is going on?! This is good. This is very bad. What does she want? You haven't hugged her yet, let alone kiss. You don't want her to think you too forward, too aggressive, but what if that's what she wants? What if that's not what she wants and now she will think you're trying too hard, asking for too much? The likelihood for disaster is too great. By the time she is a fraction of a millisecond away from your face, there is no time to look to her hands for clues. At the last possible moment, you opt for the safe route and turn your head, opening your arms slightly in an attempt to welcome a hug. Immediately you know your decision was wrong. Her lips fall on the lower part of your right earlobe and her approach does not work smoothly with your arms spreading, so they are squashed midair and sent helplessly back to your sides. You freeze, mortified, and she rocks back on her heels to survey the damage. You hope your eyes don't betray the feeling of bile rising in your stomach at this unforgivable transgression, and you stare back, waiting for her to make the next move.

To your amazement, she smiles. "Let's try that again." Could it be? She begins to lean in again and this time you meet her lip to lip. You never would have guessed how good vanilla lip balm could taste on her lips. You try to focus on what you are doing but you are also stunned that the date actually went well enough to merit this kind of an ending. Maybe you're more charming than you thought. Certainly more charming than Nick. When she reaches the door to her dorm, she turns and waves, her strappy sandals still dangling from her hands. You wave back and as soon as she steps out of sight you can't keep from grinning. Success.

A Shortsighted Southerner

| Barbara Sloan

Mrs. James took a sip of tea. She drew the cup away from her lips and hastily wiped lipstick from the china pattern. "I never much liked this veranda," she said, dabbing her mouth with a napkin and looking across the savannah.

"Why's that?" asked the colonel, brushing biscuit crumbs from his moustache. "They're quite comfortable on summer evenings."

"Well that's just it. The Rutters pass by in the evening. That ragged old horse, and those...children," she smoothed the grey-blonde wisps that sprayed from the sides of her chignon. "I'd be sure to cancel their rent, but no one else would make use of the land."

"Damnable war."

The lady blinked disconcertedly.

"Ah, my apologies." The colonel delicately took another biscuit from the plate; its smooth round edge clashed with the callous on his trigger finger. "And how is Mrs. Rutter these days?"

"Well, clearly not the same since...She did love that boy."

"The deaf one?"

"Come again?"

"The deaf boy; the sickly one. Her third child, I believe."

"Yes, Lawrence. 'Twas a pity, really. But what's past is past I suppose." Mrs. James drained her teacup and took the sugar off the spoon by passing it between her lips, leaving red stripes across the silver.

"I suppose the hospital didn't have the proper things available, after all the wounded soldiers."

"No, there's plenty of medicine in the city. Mrs. Rutter couldn't pull her purse together to fund the treatment. Really quite a pitiable situation. She came to the door one night with the little boy coughing into her chest. Reeked of goose grease and kerosene. She begged last months rent money returned. I told her I could do nothing of the sort, not in these hard times, and that perhaps she would not be in such a pinch if she hadn't been so hasty to buy that blue muslin for Ginny and Patty's school dresses." Mrs. James paused while the colonel's horse shook and nickered. "I offered leaves for tea but she would have nothing to do with it. Brought it upon herself, really. And not a week passed before the boy was dead and those girls' dresses looked like every-

thing else they own."

"Really most unfortunate, these times."

"Indeed."

"Well I suppose I should return. Thank you for the tea, ma'am."

Mrs. James' teeth gleamed ivory, framed by deep red. "It was nothing, really, what's a tariff on top of everything?"

The colonel nodded, disappeared under his hat and descended the veranda. Mrs. James cleaned the red stripes from her spoon with a napkin, smudging lipstick onto the daisy stitch. She rubbed the fabric to quit the red oil but it became embedded more deeply than before. She folded the napkin to hide the stain and placed it under the biscuit plate. "Indeed..." Through the trees came the sound of an approaching horse and cart. The carriage emerged. Two dusty girls sat in the back and their shoes dangled over the edge. A woman in front was hunched sadly over the reigns of the ragged horse. All their faces were hollow. Mrs. James looked out into the evening savannah, and through the grey-blond wisps that played in front of her eyes, watched the carriage pass.

An Unlikely Rose

| Barbara Sloan

The flower shop was dark around the seams. Maria Sylvia Graciela Melendez Echeverria dropped her eyes from the Begonia arrangement and let her lids droop. A bustling day in lower Manhattan had long since heeded to the evening crowd, subdued by a rainy New York night. Rico Pesci had closed his cannoli shop across the street hours ago, but Sylvia had four weddings this weekend and lots of arrangements to touch up. Her only company were a sequence of halfhearted raindrops outside and the slew of fresh flower components that shone at half-hue underneath a single hanging lamp.

The Begonias were for a puertorriquena. They 'were' meaning they were not for her anymore. The woman had called three days before her wedding and canceled the order through hiccupping sobs. A good arrangement wasted, really, thought Sylvia as she pushed leaves into the floral foam. The stems squeaked in protest. There was no reason she shouldn't have offered the same bouquet to the couple that placed an order the next day. She would have had to throw it all away. In all her years as a florist, she'd never wasted an arrangement. Sylvia smiled. She had, though, sold many half price to love struck young men, or apologetic boyfriends who stumbled in off the curb at closing time.

A man gave her roses once, when she was younger. His name was Spencer. Sylvia's father had allowed him to pass the summer painting the landscape at their small farm on the outskirts of Queretaro. He wore a hat during the day, and stood out white and pasty amidst Sylvia's brothers, but at night the sun rose in his eyes and his cheeks gleamed. Sylvia brought him and her father beer while they sat on the porch and watched the landscape grow dark around the seams. Spencer said he loved her. He brought her roses. One of the roses had a ring tied around it with a white ribbon. Spencer said 'Si?' and Sylvia said 'Yes', and they both pricked their fingers trying to get the ring untied. They had laughed. Papi let Spencer drive the car into town to find a suit. Mama put the roses in water and brought her old wedding dress down from the attic. She was pinning the hem around Sylvia's feet. "Now Maria Sylvia," she muttered through pins, "You must always keep fresh flowers in your home. Take them from the field or from the garden. It will remind Spencer of his one true rose, and he will love you and care for you forever." Sylvia smiled, rather bloomingly, her head and shoulders rising from the collar of the white gown.

Spencer did not return from town that night. The next evening a different car returned to their farm. Papi listened to the police officer with concern and waved him on. Mama, tearful, told Sylvia the news. A white and pasty man who could not speak Spanish was shot outside a tailor's shop when he would not give up his car. Sylvia felt sick. She put her hands on the table to steady herself. The sun was casting its orange evening light across the wood. It caught on her ring and flickered through the clear water of the rose vase and across the red petals, deepening in hue as they folded over one another, fresh in the center, mysterious, and spreading out in their bloom until they became part of the craggy flower's circumference, exposed and superficial. She did not hang the roses to dry. She did not want to save them.

The flower shop was dark around the seams. Sylvia rose from the table. It was a beautiful arrangement. She grabbed her raincoat and reached to switch off the light.

Black Arrow, Bleeding Heart

| Matthew Pavlov

Three miles down a derelict road and ten miles away from its nearest neighbor, a light shone in a second story window of the house that sits atop a lonely hill.

“Let’s not go out tonight. We could stay in bed and watch TV,” Benjamin said as he looked towards the bathroom. Lying in her bed, smelling her scent was all he wanted. He had had enough of other people with their troubles and their pressures. “This room is all we need”, he thought as he rubbed his swollen knuckles and pulled her mother’s quilt tight around his chest.

“Just the two of us, you know. We don’t need anyone else.”

Natalie peered out of the bathroom as she attempted to put a silver moon earring in her left ear. Her charcoal hair wrapped around her delicate cheeks giving her an implicit sweetness that made her instantly likeable.

“We have to go. Beverly is expecting us,” she said. “Don’t worry about it, Benjamin. Nothing is going to happen tonight.”

The telephone rang and Natalie stared at it. The ringing stopped almost immediately.

During the daytime, the house on the hill was a nice place—her favorite place. Its warm yellow paint, sunflower garden and beautiful Weeping Willow tree reminded her that this was where she was supposed to be. It was home.

Benjamin rolled towards the bathroom. “This is a high school thing, right? A bunch of people who graduated with you will be there?”

Natalie nodded her head yes as she gave him a kiss on the forehead. “He isn’t going to be there. He wasn’t friends with Beverly in school. He wasn’t friends with anyone.” She smiled. “Anyways, I doubt he will ever come near us again after last night.”

The silver-blue Buick LeSabre rode cautiously up the rugged, desolate road.

At night, the house was different. The sunflower garden was hidden beneath the house’s looming shadows. The pale moonlight faded the warm yellow paint into the jaundice tainted color of an alcoholic’s skin, and the Weeping Willow’s limbs slouched with a sinner’s sorrowful stance. Usually, the only light coming from the house late at night was from the electric blue bug zapper that hung above the porch swing.

The bald-headed man reached across the plastic dashboard to grab the pack of Camel 99s sitting above a tattered sticker that read, "Don't drive faster than your Guardian Angel can fly." He was an ugly man. His bulbous head focused the look of general meanness that emerged from his fatty scowl. This unnatural physical meanness developed from a boyhood of defensive cruelty; cruelty that inevitably turned to true meanness in his adult life.

"We gonna get that fucking whore, Jackie. Don't you fucking worry about that. We gonna get her." The calm coldness in his voice and sharp stabs of his fucks shook the younger man sitting in the passenger seat.

"You sure we doing the right thing, Craig?" Jackie asked his brother as he slid a cigarette out of the pack. Where his brother's looks were so distinctively cruel, Jackie would have been unrecognizable in even the smallest crowd. His mamma use to say that if it wasn't for his shimmering blue eyes she wouldn't be able to pick out her own son from any other boy in the schoolyard.

"This place is a good place, Craig. It ain't right to do something like this here," he said, but Craig continued giving him a harsh, disapproving stare. "I'm serious, Craig. I ain't even sure if I can hurt her. I love her," Jackie said with a desperation that sickened his older brother.

"Listen to me, Brother. You say you love that girl in there?" Craig asked as he pointed the two fingers that were pinched around his cigarette at the lit window.

"Ye-yes, I think I still do."

"But...but did that girl ever tell you that she loves you?" Craig asked fiercely.

"Yeah, she did, Craig. Yeah she did," Jackie answered wondering what his brother's meaning was.

"Well, last night when she humiliated you in front of the *whole* town by running around with that *fuckin'* city boy, talking down to you and watching him sucker punch you... Well, that didn't look like love to me. What'd it look like to you?"

"I don't know," Jackie said. "But if I still love her..."

"That don't mean a thing, Jackie. That don't mean a thing! There is only two things that matter in this world: Pride and loyalty. That cunt took your pride when she betrayed you. She said she loved you, but she is a goddamn liar in my book. And we gonna make her pay." Craig smiled, knowing from the contorted, disturbed look on his brother's face that he won the argument. "Anyways, you are gonna handle her fucking city boy. I am going to deal with her. I'll be goddamned if a lying whore gonna make a fool out of my

handed it to Jackie.

The brothers sat quietly for a few minutes, letting the previous night stew in their heads. Jackie tried desperately not to let himself think that last night was his fault. Craig is right he told himself. Pride and loyalty are all that matters. It has to be done.

“Craig, you ever done something like this before?” Jackie asked, hoping his brother would reassure him.

Craig looked away from his little brother for a second before saying, “Yeah...yeah, I did them McClusky boys from Dodge City. You remember them?”

Jackie did remember them and he also remembered hearing that Eddie Guice was the one who did them, but he decided that it was best to believe his brother. He had to believe something.

“Yeah, I remember them, Craig.”

Suddenly, the light went out in the window. All the brothers could see in the cold moonlight was the fluorescent bug zapper on the front porch. The bzzip of frying bugs settled their nerves.

With a sudden rush of light, Natalie and Benjamin stumbled out of the door. Benjamin cocked his head back and laughed as Natalie bent over to fix her high heel. Her hand was wrapped tightly around Benjamin’s back for support. The pale moonlight suddenly looked warm and forgiving as it shone down on the two lovers’ faces.

“You ready, little brother?” Craig asked as he slapped a piece of cold metal in Jackie’s hand.

“I’m ready,” Jackie said soberly as the adrenaline began to pump through his veins. They simultaneously cocked their guns and slid quietly out of the Buick.

Natalie’s car was parked on the near side of the willow tree, glimmering in the moonlight and distracting her from the two men creeping in the shadows. Craig and Jackie slid slowly and deliberately into the deep shadows of the Weeping Willow to wait for the lovers’ approach; guns tucked loosely in the back of their tattered jeans.

As Natalie and Benjamin strolled down the rocky drive, the moonlight shifted past the steeple of the house revealing the two shadowy figures.

“Oh my God. Jackie wh-what are you doing here?” Natalie asked with a gasp. “You shouldn’t be here.” She inched closer to Benjamin. “Oh, please don’t be here,” she repeated to herself in a desperate prayer.

“I shouldn’t be here? He shouldn’t be here, Natalie.” Jackie felt his reservations fall away as he saw the love between the couple. “That *son of a bitch*

shouldn't be here, goddammit!"

"Please, Jackie, you know I am dating Benjamin. You have known that I've been dating Benjamin," Natalie shrieked, her terror mounting.

"Don't say his name! Don't say his fucking name, Natalie." Jackie's voice wandered somewhere between shouting and begging.

Benjamin moved slightly between Jackie and Natalie and said, "Listen, Jackie, we don't want any trouble. Please just get in your car and go..."

"Don't want any trouble? Well, son, you are gonna get some," Craig said with malice.

There was a moment. A single moment before it happened, when Jackie watched matching tears roll from Natalie and Benjamin's eyes. For just that moment, Jackie questioned himself. But then Benjamin, with a burst of courage, pulled Natalie behind him.

"Just get out of here, Jackie. You haven't done anything yet and we can forget all of this ever happened. Just leave Natalie alone," Benjamin said coolly, calmly.

Jackie stared, flabbergasted, at Benjamin. "Protecting her from me," Jackie thought. "Who is this fuck to protect my girl from me?" Silence soaked the air and, in an instant, rage burnt through Jackie like fire through cordwood. He pulled the gun from his pants, took aim and fired. The burst of light out shone the moon and the bug zapper and Natalie's shimmering tears as a bullet ripped into Benjamin's head. Suddenly, to have love and to lose love merged into one with a violent ejaculation of violence and confusion. Jackie glared at the dead body while Natalie screamed as her lover's shattered head dripped past her shattered heart. Jackie felt his soul surrender to that cold void buried inside all of us, and just like that all that had transpired no longer mattered. Love. Hate. Pride. Loyalty. They all evaporated with Benjamin's life.

Jackie turned towards Craig as he lifted his gun vertically against his head. "Craig, please just finish it," Jackie begged as his eyes land on his brother. Craig stared down at the shards and chunks of gore that once was Benjamin's face. He watched blood flow over and around pieces of skull and smelt the stink of gunpowder and burnt flesh, and, suddenly, his cheeks puffed up and vomit spilt down his shirt. The menace that seemed permanently frozen on Craig's face had been replaced with terror and shame.

"Please, fucking finish it, Craig!" Jackie ordered as he turned away, but Craig just sat in silence.

"*Oh God, Jackie. What have you done,*" Natalie screamed as she collapsed into a fit of tears.

Jackie tried to block out Natalie's cries, but the painful shrieks pierced

eardrums. "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! This is your fault. It is your fault," Jackie shouted as he covered his ears with the gun still in his hand. But as Natalie's cries grew louder and louder, the terrible realization of what he had done ripped at his brain. There was no going back. The only thing left to do was to finish it. With a rush, Jackie charged on Natalie and shot her three times in the chest. She fell over dead. He looked down at his lifeless love and searched for a prayer, a prayer of forgiveness or redemption or anything, but no prayers came. Jackie shot her one more time in the head and turned away.

Frantic, Jackie looked to his brother to find him sitting cross-legged on the gravel driveway. Craig looked stupefied as tears and vomit mixed on his shirt.

Craig had felt this feeling once before. The feeling of having done something so atrocious and terrible that it doesn't seem like the images of his crimes would ever vanish from his mind. The only other time he felt this feeling was when he was in high school. He had been getting into a little bit of trouble, selling weed and getting into fights. Nothing too serious, but he was beginning to subscribe to the fear and respect way of life. A kid in his class had made the mistake of squealing on Craig for selling his little brother pot, and got Craig expelled. In a rage, Craig went to the kid's house to give him what was coming to him, but, finding the kid's house empty, Craig had another idea. In the kid's front yard, cowering in its house was a small brown and white beagle. Craig snatched the dog and brought it into a back alley. Then he took out his gallon can of gasoline and poured it all over the little dog's body. Craig remembered the immense feeling of power that swept over him as he watched the soaking dog cower from him. Then Craig did it. He flicked a match at the dog and watched it go up in flames.

It wasn't at all like he expected. The terrible squeals and yelps of pain echoed through Craig's head, and he was suddenly terrified and ashamed of what he had done. Not knowing what to do, Craig watched the poor dog slowly collapse and die. Burdened by shame and guilt, Craig didn't leave his room for four days. When he finally reappeared, word of what he had done had spread throughout town. Craig was given the fear and respect that he wanted, so he buried his guilt and enjoyed being known as the craziest, toughest guy in town. But, occasionally he was still visited by the lingering stink of the dog's burning flesh.

But this...this terrible crime he had just witnessed was a thousand times worse than the dog. The gun shots and screams echoed in his ears and his nose stung from the vomit caked around his lips. Visions of their immaculate bodies being torn apart by bullets kept flashing before his eyes.

past his brother, hoping that he would get up and become the protecting older brother he once was.

Craig remained motionless, hopeless, crushed under the terrible weight of his brother's crime, and he finally decided to do the right thing. "We shouldn't have done this, Jackie. This is all wrong."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Craig. This was your fucking idea and you didn't even have the guts to pull the trigger. Now get the fuck up and let's get out of here!" Jackie shouted.

"You can go, but I got to call the police," Craig said with frightening sincerity. "You got to understand, little brother, I can't have this on my conscience."

One more time Jackie tried to get his brother to run away with him, but it was useless. Jackie, with images of police sirens, court rooms and prison flashing before his eyes, looked at his brother—his brother who was always tough, always in charge, and had talked him into doing all of this—and only saw an echo of guilt and cowardice. He wasn't Jackie's brother anymore, and Jackie was not going down because Craig had lost his nerve.

Jackie moved slowly towards his brother and placed the gun against his temple. "I'm sorry Craig," Jackie said with a hopeless, broken voice. He pulled the trigger and watched his brother crumple into the cooling lake of blood that had formed in the roots of the Weeping Willow. Jackie put the gun in his dead brother's hand and started running as fast as he could back down the derelict road that had led him to his crimes.

Has Elvis Left the Building?

| Meghan Wons

“Mama she done told me, Papa done told me too, ‘Son, that gal you’re foolin’ with, she ain’t no good for you. But, that’s all right, that’s all right. That’s all right now mama, anyway you do,” Tom sat on the faded green paisley couch with an imaginary guitar propped up on his knee. He attempted to mimic Elvis’s crooked smile as he crooned the King’s lyrics. Kate sat beside him, tapped her foot along to the beat, and noticed the individual letters tattooed on the knuckles of his right hand spelled out “L-O-V-E.” He had a bluebird that looked like it was drawn by a six year old on his left.

“Wow! We’ve got a regular Mr. Presley on our hands, here. We really need to get you a guitar, Tom.” Kate smiled and Tom smiled back, empty space where his two front teeth should have been.

“When I was five years old, my daddy taught me how to play the guitar. He said, you’ve gotta know the notes up here, son,” Tom tapped his head, “before you can know ‘em in your fingers. He was right, you know. Five years old, I was, and I learned how to play my daddy’s gui-tar.” Tom started humming a little bit of “Blue Suede Shoes.”

“The real story, though, is fifteen years later, when I went to Graceland. Yes sir, Graceland. Elvis was a king, you see. Not like that crap they show you on the TV. Real royalty, yes sir. My daddy bought me a Mustang when I was sixteen. Man, how I loved to drive that baby – owwwwweeeee! Come my twentieth birthday, I was still playing the gui-tar like a mad man. Since I was five! That’s a long fuckin’ time to play the gui-tar. My daddy, he came in my room one night when I was pickin’ out a song and he said, ‘Tom, I think it’s time you took a trip to Graceland.’ My daddy said this and I thought a little while about it and it didn’t take me long to say yes sir, I’m goin’ to Graceland. Yes sir, that’s what I need to do.

“So, I packed my bag that night. Just one bag and a gui-tar, that’s all I needed to make my trip. I loaded up my Mustang and I set out for Graceland the next morning, a Saturday. It was July, and a hot July too. Not that all Julys in Kentucky aren’t hot, but this one was especially, kid. The kinda hot where a body looks like it’s cryin’ the minute it steps out into the street. My mama woke up to wish me well that morning; she made me a ham and cheese sandwich with mustard and pickles, my favorite. Still is my favorite. Can’t remember the last time I had that heaven sent combo of pig and swiss, darlin’.

“I made it to Graceland in just under five hours. Some might say I’ve got a bit of a lead foot on me. But once I got it in my head that I was gonna see the King, I just couldn’t help but speed a little, ya know? I didn’t run into any trouble, no sir, except at one gas station I got held up for a bit cuz there was just a little mix up.

“I stopped about fifty miles or so outside of Memphis to fill my red baby up. You’ve gotta feed ‘er if you wanna keep ‘er purring, right? Now, you might not believe this, but when I was in my younger years and I still had all my hair, I used to get mistook for Mr. James Dean himself. It was a real problem for awhile, I tell ya. I’d be walkin’ to the five and dime or stopped at a traffic light and women would just go crazy. I hated all that yellin’ and screamin’. Now, some might say it was a blessin’ to look like a movie star, but I tell you, there were so many times I wished God hadn’t given me such a pretty face. I learned to deal with it, by and by, though. Well, anyway, I pulled up to a gas station a ways outside of Memphis, and went inside to get myself a pack of Camels. The cashier was a woman called Maude, I read it on her nametag, and when I came inside, she got a look on her face like she was seeing Jesus Christ himself. I figured she was just another crazy who was thinkin’ I was James – harmless - so I just smiled and gave her my pack of Camels to ring up. She excused herself for a moment and went in the back. Well, she rang up my Camels, but apparently she also rang some photographer from the local paper who came with a camera and was waiting outside for me when I returned to my ‘stang and was waiting for the gas tank to fill up. ‘Mr. Dean! Could I take just one photograph, please?’ The poor guy couldn’t have been anymore than sixteen or seventeen and I figured the shot would get him some good cash money. I didn’t have the heart to tell him heck, I wasn’t James Dean, just Tom McCaine, so I put on my shades and let him snap my picture in front of my ‘stang. I even signed James Dean’s autograph on the back of the kid’s notebook.

“I pulled up to the gates of Graceland about an hour after the James Dean mix up. And, I can’t think of a way to describe the feeling I had when I saw those fourteen acres of glory except that I felt like I was comin’ home. I pulled up and turned off my engine and just sat there for a good hour or so before I pulled my head down from the clouds, kid. It was just around sunset time when I got there, to Graceland, and most people were leaving, probably going to find dinner and such. I couldn’t even think about eatin’, no sir. I saw Graceland and to know the King was probably inside somewhere, so close, it just blew my mind. I finally unbuckled my seat belt and got my gui-tar from the backseat. I sat on the hood of my baby and just started to play, right there

song I hoped would woo Peter to let me in. I played and I played, remembering all the while what my daddy had told me when I was just five years old, 'You've gotta feel it up here, Tom, before you can feel it in your fingers.'

"Now, I should tell you that when I went to Graceland my mama had just found out she was real sick. She was supposed to get surgery, but it was real expensive, just about ten thousand grand to pay for all those special doctors and the hospital stay and everything. They didn't have a whole lot of money, my mama and daddy. I mean, they did just fine and all, but ten thousand dollars was like a million to them. I mean ten thousand! Can you imagine, having ten thousand extra dollars just sittin' around in the bank? I played my gui-tar that first night in Graceland like I was prayin' a prayer. I don't know how long I played for, but when I stopped the sun had long been down and my fingers looked like raw steaks and they were real sore.

"I had such a feelin', being there, I didn't want to leave. And you know what, sweet pea? I didn't. I just got inside my parked car and went to sleep, yards away from where I imagined the King himself was sleeping. I woke up the next morning to authentic Tennessee sunshine streaming through my window. That day, I did the same thing as the day before. I got out my gui-tar and started playing in front of the gates. I played and I played and I sang and a few folks even dropped a dollar or two in my gui-tar case on the hood of my Mustang. I was on top of the world. Well, around 8:30 that night, a security guard came out and told me that Mr. Presley was wonderin' who had spent the night outside his house and who had been singin' his songs all day long. My heart about stopped, I swear on the Bible. The security guard told me Elvis wanted to open up the gates to me, Tom McCain. Elvis wanted to meet *me*.

"At this point, my fingers were 'bout bleeding from playing so long. But I never felt happier than at that moment when I realized I was goin' to meet the King himself. I drove my 'stang through the gates and a man in a white jacket motioned for me to pull in next to a black beamer. The man then led me to the front door and inside, where I waited in the fanciest hallway I ever saw. When Elvis came down those front stairs, all I could manage to do was grin the goofiest of grins; I'm sure I looked a fool, standin' there. But Elvis, he was the most generous, gentle man you'd ever meet. Not at all like that crap you see on the TV, no sir. Those TV people are always trying to make villains out of heroes. Elvis was royalty, there's no way else to say it.

"He was wearing a long purple jacket and black leather pants with this fringe like stuff comin' from the sides. He had on a pair of bright blue suede shoes and he had a little swagger to his walk, like he was movin' to some sorta radio inside his head. He smiled at me and when he got all the way down the

stairs, and sweetheart, you've never seen stairs so long, he shook my hand just like we was old friends. Me and Elvis, long lost buddies. We had a connection right from the start. He said to me, 'Tom, so good to see you! I hear you've been waiting outside and playing your gui-tar like you trying to play your way out of hell. Let me hear what you've got!'

"Now, you can imagine a body would be nervous if Elvis asked him to play. And this body ain't no different from any other body. I was so nervous I was shakin' like a leaf in the wind. But, I couldn't very well tell Elvis no, could I? So, I grabbed my gui-tar case and followed Elvis down the front hallway and into a practice room. There were too many gui-tars in there for me to count! All different colors, sizes, and I even saw one signed by Chuck Berry! Lordy, lordy, I couldn't believe it. Elvis picked up a gui-tar and began to strum. His fingers moved on the strings like he had held a gui-tar all his living days, I tell you," Tom took a deep breath and once again propped up an imaginary guitar on his knee.

"Love me tender, love me sweet, never let me go. You have made my life complete, and I love you so. Love me tender, love me true, all my dreams fulfilled. For my darlin' I love you, and I always will." Tom's voice carried through the hall and turned the heads of a group of women playing cards.

"Sing it, Tom baby!" A woman with gray hair wearing an old fishing hat called out.

"So, did you jam with Elvis?" Kate glanced at her watch and wondered if Tom would finish his story in time.

"Did I jam with Elvis? Of course I jammed with Elvis? We jammed together for hours that night, me and the King. You know that song, *All Shook Up*? I'm the one who convinced him to change the words from, 'I'm all stirred up,' to, 'I'm all shook up.' I said to him, listen: with all due respect, Mr. Presley, I get a very 007 vibe from you, and I think you'd be one to shake, not stir. Well, he just laughed and said, 'I think you're right, Tom.'

"I'm all shook up, mm mmm, oh, oh, yeah yeah!" Tom smiled. "I can't help but think of that night whenever I hear that song.

"Elvis put me up in a room with my own bed, silk sheets and pee-jamas and all, and the next morning, a lady in a blue dress with a white apron came and knocked on my door. She had a tray of the most delicious scrambled eggs, Canadian bacon, toast, and freshly squeezed orange juice I've ever tasted. There was a note from Elvis, too. He wanted me to meet him in his pool room after I finished my breakfast.

"We shot a few games of pool, that morning, and I heard stories about Elvis's adventures on the road. He tried out some of his new lyrics on me and I

gave him my honest to God opinions. I told him about my life back in Kentucky and how my mama was sick. After our fifth game or so, Elvis said he had to get packing because his bus left that afternoon for a two month concert tour. Before he left, though, he told me he wanted to give me something. Now, I couldn't imagine what it was he wanted to give me, but do you know what? As I was heading out the door that day, shaking Elvis's hand, he gave me a check – grand total of \$10,000. I couldn't believe it. And you know what he said to me? He said, 'Tom, if you ever need anything at all, just come on back to Graceland.' He meant it, too. The King was a man of his word. Real live royalty, I swear on my mama's grave.

"I miss my mama and my daddy. And I miss Elvis. I used that money to get my mama her surgery and she lived a real long life. She's gone now. And my daddy. And I think I'm dying too. I've got no furniture, but I do have a picture of me and Elvis, swear it on the Bible. Yes sir, just me and the King. Reminds me of the best three days of my life, my days in Graceland.

"Well, you gotta follow that dream wherever that dream may lead. You gotta follow that dream to find the love you need. Keep a-movin, move along, keep a moving. Got to find me someone whose heart is free, someone to look for my dream with me. And when I find her I may find out, just what my dreams are all about." Tom closed his eyes and strummed the air in front of his chest, the L-O-V-E on his fingers moving with the plucking of imaginary strings.

Kate reached out for his hand as his fingers stopped moving and he hung his head. The gray haired lady wearing the fishing hat cried out "Bull shit!" as she slammed down her cards.

"Tom? It's just about 8:00 so we've gotta get ready to close up for the night. And it's twenty-eight degrees tonight, my friend –I'm sorry, you know what that means. Take your time saying goodbye to your friend here and we've got a couple of extra blankets in the back you can take on your way out, buddy." Martin, one of the Catholic Workers, was making the rounds and delivering the bad news to the men and women who had stopped in to seek respite from the always unpredictable Indiana weather. He hated that part of his job.

Tom looked up at him with sad green eyes that Kate noticed were swirled with brown in a pattern like the paisley on the couch. She gave him a hug and walked out to her car. As she watched Tom walk down the street, blankets in hand, she felt guilty as she turned up the heat. Two degrees colder and Tom would've been inside, in a bed somewhere.

Kate switched on the oldies station at the stop light across from her

neighborhood's Stop and Shop. She smiled as she heard the King singing "All Shook Up." She thought about Tom and put on her left blinker.

"Is this all, m'am?" The cashier scanned the last item and put it in a plastic bag. It was after 8:30 by now and there were only a few people wandering the aisles of the grocery store, strangely concentrated in the frozen fish section, Kate noticed.

"Yes ma'm, that's it." Kate handed the cashier a ten dollar bill and waited for her change.

"You have a good night, honey, and keep warm out there."

Kate used the hood of her car as her workstation. She took out the stack of bread and put it on the plastic grocery bag. There in the Stop and Shop parking lot, she made a loaf worth of pig, swiss, mustard, and pickle sandwiches. As she shivered in the cold, she thought of the smell of her freshly laundered sheets and the warmth of her down comforter. And then she went home to bed.

Tom arrived at the Catholic Worker House at 9:15 the next morning. His night had been restless; when it was that cold, he knew he could only sleep a half an hour at a time before the threat of frost bite made it necessary to walk around and stretch his limbs. He headed straight for the green paisley couch to try to get some shut eye. He found a pile of sandwiches in brown paper bags with a note attached to one: "Thanks for taking me to Graceland, Tom. Keep on playing those songs!"

Tom took a bite of the pig and swiss, stretched out his tattooed hands, and began to play his guitar.

Great American Novels

| Laura Fox

When they were nice, they called him the dreamer. When they weren't, well, they called him a retard, freak, or the village idiot. The town wasn't really mean, it was just bored.

Otis Francis Jones had lived there his entire life. Or, to be specific, on a farm 20 minutes outside of town. Before he was born, his parents had moved there from some northeastern state. Their arrival generated the most excitement that the town had experienced in years. A few people said that they saw the two of them arrive at the old Miller farm. Others impressed the few with knowledge gleaned through the tinted windows of the Jones's new Ford: Mr. Jones had long hair and huge sunglasses shaded his face. Everyone talked. They made the Joneses more exciting than they really were. At the general store, Frank the cashier asked each customer his or her opinion on the matter.

Just who were the Joneses? Everyone had a different idea. Frank encouraged speculation. Some thought that Mr. Jones was some kind of hippie-yuppie trying to escape his meaningless fast-paced urban life and get back to his roots, to the slow drawl of country living. Frank nodded. Others mentioned that he must be down on his luck, just staying as long as it took to fix his dot-com business. Frank shook his head at the plight of Mr. Jones. Another believed that Mrs. Jones was pregnant and that the pair of them had eloped when her family found out. Frank sighed. One even said that he must be some kind of government official come to inspect their town. Frank stopped that one.

For what, Frank asked.

Well, I did hear that Heartland lied by a few thousand on his taxes last year, the observer whispered knowingly.

Frank worried that Heartland had really done in the town this time. Heartland had had declining crops for years now, and the town had rallied funds numerous times to save him from defaulting. If this was how he was going to repay them, though, he could forget about their help in the future.

None of them thought that the Joneses had actually wanted to move there.

The Joneses came to town the following week, the first Sunday of the month. Entering the store, they didn't talk to Frank the cashier or any of the other customers who soon crowded the shop to look at them. Instead, they silently collected a number of supplies: tools, food, and seeds. After gathering

everything in large baskets, they took them to the counter. Frank looked askance of them, hoping that they would speak and reveal who they were, where they were from, how long they planned to stay. They didn't. But, they didn't look away either. Their pale blue eyes stared at Frank. He priced and bagged their goods in discomfort as their gaze seemed to bore down on him. They paid their total in cash, loaded the car, and drove off silently.

Frank added his own idea to the gossip on the Joneses. He decided that they were serial killers who had come to escape a national search. He vowed to take their pictures and send them to the police. The rest of the crowd gathered in the store thought that his idea was as good as the next, and they anticipated the Joneses's next arrival to town.

They were disappointed, however. The Joneses did not return to town until the first Sunday of the following month. Then, they had the same routine. Soundlessly, they collected massive amounts of goods, paid in cash, and left.

Some residents of the town, growing frustrated with the Joneses's secrecy, started driving past the old Miller farm to check on them. Each spy reported a different fact. One had seen Mr. Jones on Miller's old tractor, plowing the plot of land by the left bank of the river. Another had seen a number of trucks pull up and unload cows, pigs, chickens, and a horse. Still others had seen Mrs. Jones putting laundry on clothes lines. They talked about the color of Mr. Jones's boxers, black, and what it might mean.

Every month, the Joneses came into town. The only thing that ever changed about their routine was the clothes that they wore. In the summer, they had shorts and worn tee-shirts. In the winter, quilted coats and blue jeans. During the two other seasons, rain ponchos covered them from head to toe. They still paid in cash.

After about a year, the town noticed that Mrs. Jones was pregnant. Even her pregnancy was secretive. Frank the cashier related that they had stopped buying tampons and that they were now buying at least twice as many groceries to feed Mr. Jones's appetite.

The Joneses headed back to the northeastern state to give birth. The town first saw the baby when they brought him into the general store on the first Sunday. Frank claimed that he had the same pale blue eyes as his parents.

For years, this was the routine. Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones, and the baby would come to town the first Sunday of every month, still silent. The town saw the baby grow in monthly increments. As the baby grew, however, the mother shrunk and her paleness was increased by fits of coughing that drained the blood from her face.

were more dead than usual.

When the boy was six, Mr. Jones allowed him to enter school. Only then did the town learn his name from the school records, Otis Francis Jones. Otis was a slow learner. When the teachers scheduled conferences with Mr. Jones, they complained that Otis never spoke during class or paid attention to them. Instead, he sat listlessly with a small smile on his face, immersed in his own dream world. Mr. Jones said nothing.

When he wasn't sitting in the classroom and daydreaming, Otis was inspecting small pieces of the world around him with his pale blue gaze. As he was staring at a gnat hanging listlessly in front of him, he tripped and split his lip. Later, sitting on his haunches and staring at a flat, round rock in the middle of the playground, Otis was beat up by a gang of four boys repeatedly striking him with the very same stone.

Otis struggled in school. After a few attempts to make him learn, the teachers began to just ignore him and pass him with C's and D's to the next grade level. By the time that he was a senior in high school, Otis was nineteen, having only failed two levels. That fall, he took an English literature class with Ms. Lee, who noticed that Otis always doodled pictures of farm animals in his book instead of taking notes. So, she decided to teach George Orwell's *Animal Farm* to the class and to keep Otis after school for an hour every day to go over the reading with him.

Spending time with Otis and the novel was laborious, an exercise in patience and good-will that Ms. Lee had not expected. She agonized over their daily sessions, trying to make him really see both the story and its implications. Then, one day, inexplicably, he fixated on the book. While he didn't understand Orwell's satire, he loved the story. He carried around with him every day, tucked in the back pocket of his jeans. Every free moment he had, he studied it. He even used up spent moments, like class time. When he went back to the farm, he stared at the animals suspiciously and tried to decide which pig was the most likely to take over. He mulled how his teacher had told him that it had something to do with Russia, thinking that it must be terrible to live in a country ruled by animals.

Then, Mr. Jones disappeared. The town thought that he was finally called back to yuppiedom, his dot com business, or other secret government business. The general store was again the wheel of knowledge, or at least supposed knowledge, and Frank the cashier acted as the spoke, retelling and relating all of the rumors that the town generated.

But, Otis Francis Jones knew better. He knew that the animals, beginning their revolt, had run his father off of the land. He worried that he would

next. He decided which of the pigs was Napoleon. He killed him, eating the bacon with satisfaction.

He tried to breed discontent among the animals with their new-found unity. He spoke. He separated each animal for questioning and, when they didn't respond to his queries, repeated slowly, painstakingly, *Two Legs Good, Four Legs Bad*. He dropped out of school to devote more time to his brainwashing activities. He read more, trying to learn everything that he could to defeat the animals in their eventual uprising.

Otis knew that his father would come back again to help him defeat the animals. When he returned, though, he would need help. So, Otis started going to the neighboring farmers, asking each one for help against this fierce Animalism and suggesting that, if it were not contained, it would spread to their farms and animals too. Knowingly, they smiled and agreed, Sure Otis, whenever they attack we'll be there for you, just don't take 'em all yourself, leave a few for the rest of us.

On his monthly trip to town, he handed Frank the cashier a flier in exchange for his receipt. Upon the paper, he had scratched, *Stop Animalism Now*, and listed a few warning signs that animals might be taking over the farm. *Gathering in Clandestine Groups, Singing Odd Songs, Wiskey Mysteriously Disappearing from Cabinets, Horses Who Want to Work Harder*. Otis's own animals had been more secretive than those obvious indicators, but he thought that everyone should at least know the basics anyway. Frank thought that the message was written in blood. He posted it beneath the counter.

The town talked. They called Otis crazy, and wondered if they should call child services. As Otis was nineteen, however, they discounted that idea. Some said that they should try to find the relatives in that northeastern state. Frank nodded. Others suggested that they let Otis stay with a townsperson and take over the farm communally. Frank shook his head at the socialist notion. The same one who thought that Mr. Jones was a government agent, now associated with top secret matters rather than taxes, furtively said that they should raid the farm house for plans for covert operations. Frank the cashier stopped him.

What kind of operations, he said.

You know, the secret government kind, the one responded.

Then, Frank the cashier died. The town didn't know what to do without him. How would they convey news? How would they know everything about the town? For a few days, the store remained closed. When it reopened, they discovered a new worker there, a girl recently from Italy of all places. She was the great niece of the assistant regional manager. The general store was

part of a massive chain. The town has lost its transmitter and hub of news and its illusions towards small independent businesses in one day.

She admired America and its literature. She wanted to become a great novelist or poet of the unexplored.

The town buzzed. They tried going to the general store, but the girl cashier was no Frank. She sat behind the counter immersed in what she called, *The Great American Novels*. She read passionately. Her whole body became involved in the process as she swooned and swayed to the cadence of the texts.

When the town tried to engage her in gossip, her face mirrored her interest. None. Some wondered if Frank had a heart attack. Blank. Others said that he had just pushed himself too hard by working those long hours at his age. Nothing. One blamed himself for the death of Frank because he said that he had revealed Mr. Jones's covert mission to Frank the Cashier and that now anyone in the town could be the next victim of such a deranged madman who was probably outside right now in fact, waiting and watching for an opportunity to pounce. Blank. With no outlet for relief, their frustrated humming soon drowned the entire town in vibrations, shaking its very foundations.

Meanwhile, Otis worked diligently. On the side of his barn, he painted the bold letters declaring his defiance against the animals, *All Animals Are Equal, But Some Animals Are More Equal Than Others, And Otis Francis Jones is More Equal Than All Animals*. He erected a flag pole with a flag of his face for the animals to admire and gain respect for him. He constructed elaborate cages so that every time he left the farm, he could secure the animals and know that they couldn't be misbehaving. He didn't want to come home and find one of the pigs curled up in his bed.

On the first Sunday of the month, Otis drove to town for his monthly pick-up. He was too busy preparing himself for the future attack by reading his favorite passages of *Animal Farm* to notice that Frank was no longer a fixture. After he pulled his items to the counter, he slowly put the book away so that he might bring out cash to pay for the supplies. His dreamy smile played across his lips. She thought that it was for her. She saw the book, she desired. She read the lines of his body. Her face became full of many things.

She quickly jotted a note on the inside cover of the book that she had just finished, *The Grapes of Wrath*. She looked up at him, studying him as her eyes raced across the broad surface of his face. She met the blue gaze, mistook its steadiness as pragmatic. She slowly put his groceries in bags. With a smirk on her face, she said, *The twentieth customer today gets a free prize – this book. Realists like you might like it.*

He felt her press the book in his hand. He liked the feel of it. He hefted

it, felt its weight. Decided to read it. It might, after all, help his cause against the animals.

When he got home, he opened the book, saw her note: *Why do you read British Literature when there are so many Great American Novels? I mean, really, they're all about YOU, your country, your life. Here's one. Lose Yourself in it. Lucia.*

He needed no encouragement to lose himself. He was already far lost. That month, he read the entire book while he continued to minutely observe the actions of his animals. As he turned each page, he peered at them to ensure that they hadn't moved from their cages. He felt himself a dangerous man, a Tom Joad just having returned from prison for manslaughter. No matter if he committed the crime or not, prison made a man tough. And, boy was he. Those animals had better watch out if they tried anything now. He had been to prison.

He began to obsessively water his crops, testing the ground daily for any cracking soil or parched expanses. His hands moved nimbly across the earth, probing for flaws. He eyed the animals suspiciously when they seemed to be drinking too much, mindful of their subversive plots. He tied a handkerchief around his mouth and nose. He became hyper-aware of any tractor cats trying to take over his property. He misunderstood. He began to hate cats. Now not only was he wary of pigs, horses, and dogs, but cats too. After putting all his cats in cages, he began to have a rat problem. Even when he awoke to find his hair severed unevenly and his bed full of droppings, he considered the inconveniences minor compared to that of the cats taking over his farm.

His tastes changed. Whenever he ate out of a bowl, all he tasted was dust. He blamed the work of the horse in plowing his fields. He made box houses in the back of the farm called "Hooverville" as a fortress against the possible animal attacks. When driving to town the next month, gritty dust filled his mouth, and he felt hot and crowded. His car hit more bumps than usual and got a flat time.

At the store, he was in awe over the diverse array of food and greedily took everything that he could hold in his truck. He felt much hungrier than he ever had before.

The Italian girl marveled at the number of goods that he was purchasing, and wondered out loud if he really hungered for the physical nourishment of food. She tried to entice him with her words, *I bet that you really want something else, something greater.* He didn't reply, he was too busy imagining his next meal. His soft smile entranced her, though, and she pulled another book from her supply below the counter. *Twentieth customer again. You ARE a very lucky man. And this time, On the Road. Kerouac's a genius.* She sighed as he exited the

He was no longer Otis Francis Jones. He was Sal Paradise. He was depressed and bored. He became obsessed with realness. He engaged in endless dialogue with himself in a manner very particular to character-driver plots. He no longer needed to actually speak to the animals. He just conducted philosophical debates with himself in their presence on the country at large and their responsibility to it. He removed the cages, he no longer need them. He had a gentler means of punishment, shame, for their revolutionary thoughts.

He laid in his corn-stacks and traveled to Chicago, Iowa, and Denver in a painstaking afternoon. He did not finish the book, he couldn't get beyond the first six chapters, it wearied him to travel so much. He soaked his feet in the tub and wrapped them carefully to alleviate the pain. Beginning to yawn from sheer exhaustion, he stopped himself. Instead, he consoled himself with phrases that were certainly not commonplace.

When his feet had healed, Otis tried again. This time, he had dreams about a shrouded Arabian figure pursuing him in the desert and stopping him before he reached the protective city. He woke up in a cold sweat. The place seemed strange. His traveling had disoriented him. He didn't know who or where he was. He felt deprived of something but couldn't define it. He didn't continue the book after that. He blamed the horse for not running fast enough to get to the city in time.

The next first Sunday, he decided to hitchhike into town rather than to drive. Before leaving, he gave a rousing dialogue about America to the animals. Reassured that a farm would exist when he returned, he headed to the dusty side of the road. He had difficulty getting picked up. One car eventually pulled over, but he discovered that he was headed in the wrong direction. He got out, retraced his steps, got picked up, eventually arrived in town.

He only collected enough items to carry home with him. When he reached the cash register, the Italian girl was ready for him. This week, instead of slipping him one of her treasured novels, she gave him an envelope. *This one is different*, she murmured. Her eyes were downcast, refusing to read his face.

He didn't wait until he got home to open it. He tore it open on the dusty road, his thumb out towards traffic.

There was only one sheet of paper. On the top, she had written, *This one was written not just about you, but for you. I hope that a different kind of beat moves you.*

Below it was definitely not one of the Great American Novels.

*Che cosa, in a heart,
Allows us to retrieve that part*

*That, from our own land once had been given,
Fallen, that which once had risen,
And now, once more, will share its light?
Che luce è amidst this night
That, stripped as we were of our way
Had bent to find another day?
The sun, like us, once in elipse,
Its path once spiraled upward, dips
To shatter, mindless, on the floor,
Its broken past to pulse no more,
Yet, given, and in giving, pounds,
The beat of love at once resounds,
Ma cosa dentro a these breasts,
These chest, become each other's drum,
The one, of which we two become.*

It certainly wasn't about him at all. How could it be especially for him but not about him? He thought of the animals. He tried to imagine, dream possibilities, couldn't. What did all of the words even mean? How did chests become drums? He shuddered as he looked at the sun, saw it wavering, threatening its mindless path. He turned away. Ignored the note. He couldn't imagine this reality.

A car approached. He lost these words in his agony to jump into the vehicle, which had slowed but not entirely stopped for his entry. It fell to the ground, did not rise. The dust enveloped it. The driver was his neighbor. Otis began speaking about the need for solidarity against the animals, those pigs. His pulse quickened, beating relentlessly with his ardent fervor.

Contributors' Notes

Michael Bogacz is a senior Marketing and Mathematics major from Omaha, Nebraska. He enjoys the song "Sleep" by Godspeed You! Black Emperor, and thought he would try to write a story to go along with it.

Laura Fox is a junior English major from the city of Chicago. Sometimes, she thinks she is David Bowie. Other times, she knows.

Matthew Pavlov is a senior English major with minors in Medieval Studies and Anthropology. He hails from the Gulf Coast of the greatest state in the Union, Mississippi.

Megan E. Pohl is a senior, graduating magna cum laude in the spring with a BA in English. She hails from Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.

Barbara Sloan is a senior Theology and Philosophy major. She is originally from Indianapolis, IN. Next year, she will be teaching middle school math, science, and religion with the Alliance for Catholic Education.

Patrick Wall is a senior Film major from Columbus, Ohio. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and will be graduating Magna Cum Laude. He is currently at work on a documentary film regarding the working conditions and wages of Notre Dame employees and the ways in which Notre Dame students are involved in this situation.

Emily Weisbecker is a senior majoring in English and Anthropology. Her story "Continuity" was published in *Re:Visions* in 2006. As a Mendota Heights, Minnesota native, she enjoys peach fuzz and freckles. She plans to pursue an MFA after she has had enough unusual experiences to fill a novel or seven.

Meghan Wons is a senior from Fallston, Maryland. She has had poetry published in Notre Dame's *The Juggler* and has previously been published in *Re:Visions*.

