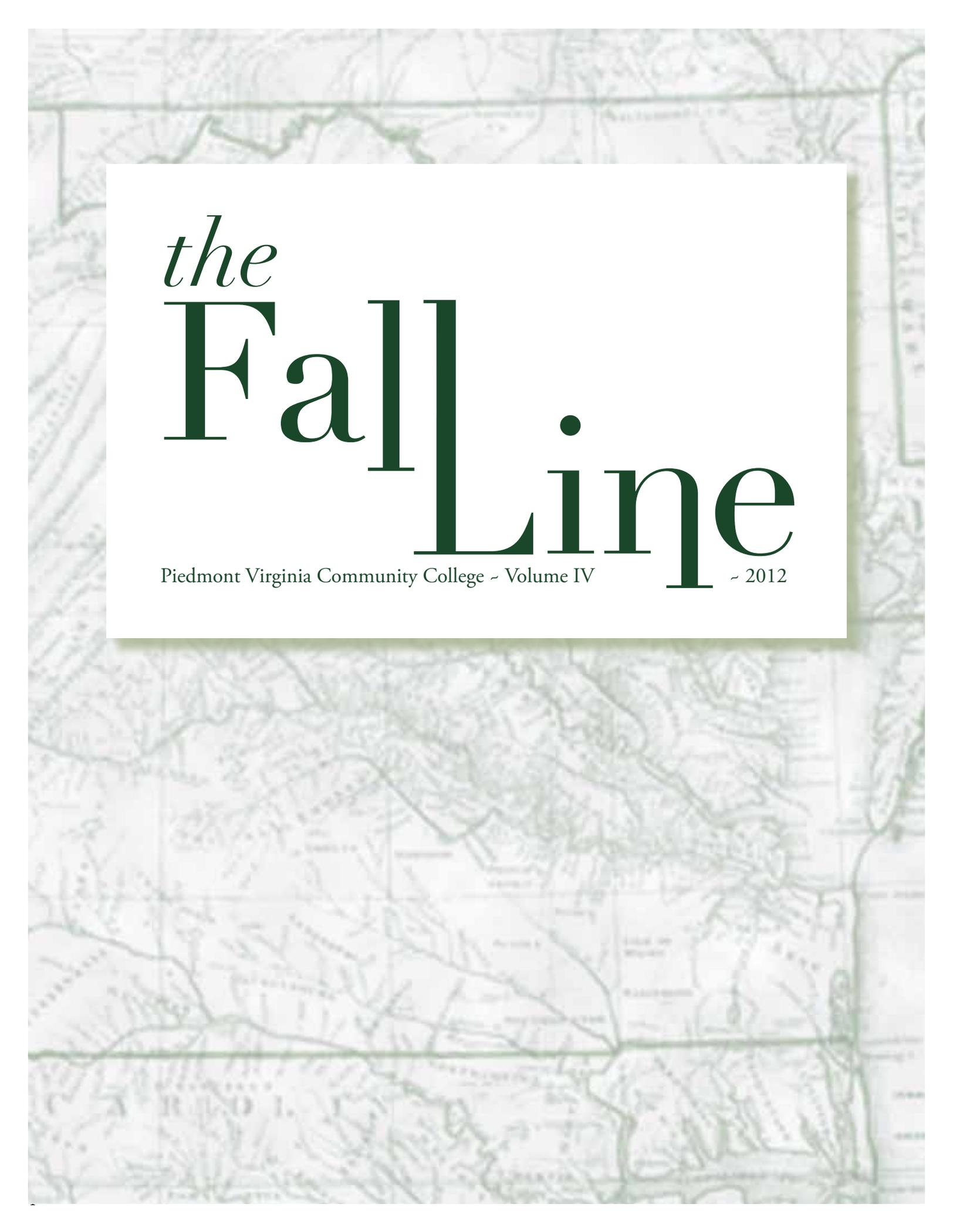
A topographic map of a region, likely in the Southeastern United States, showing contour lines, rivers, and roads. The map is rendered in a light green and grey color scheme. The text 'the Fall Line 2012' is overlaid on the map. 'the' is in a small, italicized serif font. 'Fall' is in a large, bold, serif font. 'Line' is in a large, bold, serif font, with a period following it. '2012' is in a smaller, italicized serif font at the bottom right.

the
Fall.
Line
2012



the
Fall.
Line

Piedmont Virginia Community College ~ Volume IV

~ 2012

fall line (n.) ~

a natural border between the coastal plains
and the mountainous region that spans Virginia

The Fall Line, Spring 2012, is the fourth volume
selected, edited, and produced by the PVCC
Creative Writing Club.

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Special thanks to Danielle Johnson for printing
The Fall Line and to Rob Tarbell and his
Communication Design 2 class for designing this
edition.

This year, in addition to our submissions, The Fall
Line is publishing the three winning essays from
the college's QEP [Quality Enhancement Plan]
Essay Contest. Megan Chada was awarded first
place, Alexandra Peterson was awarded second,
and Jane Harlow was awarded third place.



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saudade (n.) ~

Saudade describes a deep emotional state of nostalgic longing for an absent something or someone that one loves. It often carries a repressed knowledge that the object of longing might never return.

Sound

Crista Norfrey

The piano sleeps,
its keys yearning for conversation with the palms of my hands,
the music rack tired of solitude,
wanting to be joined by the great works of Chopin, Schubert,
Faure, Debussy,
the pedals desiring to hear the shadows of the music,
deep undertones
bright wisps of light
and the ever present middle C,
satisfied with its home in the spotlight.

The alarm sounds.

Oh, to wake up this dormant piano.

*...a world of man
How they talk
In the
While the sea
And the sea
With
Keeping time,*

*In a sort of human rhyme,
to the tintinnulation that is musically well
From the bells, bells, bells, bells, ~~bells~~,
Bells, bells, bells —
From the jingling and the ringing of the bells*



Lali Stams

among the fish...
...much better but I'm
believing this quite as

Rat Boy

Lindsay Bell

I want to take you back to Baldwin road
We will dig up the graves of all your loved ones
We will turn over the loose rock and find our homes obituary
The creek will be filled with fire crackers and GI Joes
The trees will be stashed with 1980's Playboys and cigarette packs
The dogwoods will have grown so high
They are our fortress
My girls will romp through the ivy and collect tadpoles at the creek
They will awe over the graffiti at the bridge and wonder why they can't draw on the
walls
We will snack on Doritos on the back deck, all the while peeling off the paint
Then we'll climb through my window and retrieve our past
It is a heavy load
And as dusk creeps in, the magnolia tree you fell from will open its arms and cradle
us to sleep
And you will remember being loved

*understand the plot,
on which are pouring
v, their ties, I say, provide
it uttered in the hearing
of the names a walk*



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tail is composed of 12 feathers of equal length

James Hilton

Answer Only to the Morning

Alexandra Peterson
QEP Essay Contest Winner

When I am old I will answer only to the morning. I will no longer wake to the sounds of screaming children, city noises, or a lover snoring. When I am old, no alarm clock will shake me into the day and no obligations will make me miss the sunrise. I shall rise on my own time, to birds or perhaps the silence of snow in the winter. I'll touch my feet to the cool hardwood floor and shake out my long gray hair as if shaking the night from my body. Silence will be a welcome companion and empty hours ahead of me will be like friends I haven't seen in a very long while. In the kitchen I'll glance at the empty ashtray. It will have been empty for quite some time and I'll think of finally just throwing it away. When I was younger, I probably would have turned the radio on and started breakfast before acknowledging the gentle hours of a young day.

When I am old, I will sit on the porch for a while, swinging back and forth on the rickety porch swing. Now, I find myself frightened of being alone, as if solitude is a crushing enemy. I don't want to be forgotten. When I am old, solitude will be the quiet partner I'd always overlooked. I will no longer be afraid of being forgotten, but rather embrace the actions in my previous years by which I always hoped I'd be remembered and take solace in the idea that perhaps they really were worth being remembered. Pictures

from my childhood and adulthood will line the walls and I'll greet each one of them in reverence before taking a cup of hot tea; my only drug being that early morning haze of caffeine. Gone are the empty glass bottles, the clinking of wine glasses, the thick scent of smoke, and the cloud of raucous laughter. Mornings after shall no longer exist, just mornings.

Some days these days, I sleep until far past noon, when I've missed the world waking up and starting again. When I am old, all I may have is just the morning. I will have moved beyond the precariousness of joy and the turbulence of grief. I will be content to allow my scars to stare at me in the cracked mirror. I will not be numb, but content. Mornings have no room for dwelling on the past and that is how I will want to be. Like the morning. These days, I'm much like the night. Tired or alive or both at the exact same time. An up and down of sleep or no sleep, quiet tears or ecstasy that comes with the deliriousness of the evening. I'll shake my head when I remember the days I'd wake up just in time to go to work and rush out the door, forgetting that the day had begged me for recognition. When I am old, nights will hold nothing for me. They are the end, and when I grow old endings only become repetitive. Isn't it strange how near the end, all I'll want is just another beginning? Mornings will call me with purring cats

Expectations

Crista Norfrey

Feeling nothing
but obligation
to feel.

To go through the motions
of emotion
without sincerity.

Invent an expression,
create a reaction,
accept consolation
without needing.

Forgetting
what was never there long enough
to remember.

Remembering
what was already
forgotten.

in a world of marriage

How they tinkle, tinkle,

In the ice,

While the stars that

fill the heavens, and

With a cry

Keeping time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

to the tintinnulation that so musically wells

From the bells, bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells —

From the jingling and the tinging of the bells



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Shamir Brown

Child Whom I Have Loved

Stephanie Morris

It's raining when we reach the airport. There's a woman in tailored slacks watching my friend Paul's weathered pickup from beneath her umbrella.

"That her?" Paul asks.

I say, "Oh my sweet Jesus."

Paul grunts, "That girl's gotten *tall*."

My first thought is that I don't know my niece Felicity anymore. She isn't a girl. She's over six feet in her pumps and she smells like cinnamon, grown-up. She stoops to hug me and says, "Hello, Aunt Winnie," in a smooth, heavy voice. She's all made up of slender muscle and faintly-perfumed clothes; the strength of her embrace feels strange.

She fends off Paul's hug with a handshake. When he says, "Welcome home, girl!" she retorts, "I live in D.C., Mr. Gilbert."

She has to squeeze into the truck between us with her knees spread around the stick shift and her travel bag in her lap. Her umbrella drips rainwater onto my dress. She shuts her eyes on the drive back home, says she's gotten so used to driving these days that riding makes her nauseous. I want to hug her.

But I can't reconcile the woman beside me with the impish smile and chubby face of the little girl I'd been expecting. The cinnamon scent of her skin is drowning out my little Felicity, who

smelled of rosemary and spring grass, who combed my hair as I told her stories.

--

She used to say, "Tell me about when you and Daddy ran into that cottonmouth in the drainage ditch."

Paul's truck lumbers past the Collins Family Farm. The stink of rotting peaches, the sight of that listing fence, with its chicken wire bent shapeless by neglect and its backdrop of an orchard run to seed, makes me think of how Mama used to take my brother Sterling and me peach picking when we were small. It was always hot enough to turn the well water sweet, hot enough to make me and Sterling and the seven Collins kids gasp in rivers of our own sweat as we dashed barefoot through the orchard, our baskets rubbing bruises into our forearms.

I say to her now, chuckling, "You remember that story bout the cottonmouth?"

"Mmhmm." Her face twists. "You said one of the kids beat it to death."

"Sure did. The eldest Collins boy. He was—"

"*Sick*." She shudders. "I don't know who could do that to an animal. That's just cruel."

We're past the farm now, back among the woods and their sunken shadows, their ghosts.

The oldest Collins boy was a hero, once.

--

And she also used to say, "I want peppermints like the ones you and Daddy used to eat."

Her daddy—Sterling—never ate the peppermints our daddy would buy us from the gas station, though. He preferred the orange slices, crystallized in white sugar, heaped up in a paper bag. But I loved the peppermints. They filled my mouth with spice and flame and I'd suck each stick until my tongue was scarlet and my lips were sticky. I remember looking at myself in Mama's compact, once, not quite ready to wipe the stain off my mouth, thinking the red smear made me look grown-up. Beautiful.

I have a bag of peppermints in my purse. They're too sweet these days. They just taste like sugar but that's because I'm getting older and nothing tastes like it did. I remember the spice and flame and the memory makes up for the sugar flavor just fine. I offer her a stick now. She says, "No thanks."

I think, *she's getting old too*.

--

It's the weed-choked remains of the Church of Jesus Christ the Saviour that tells me we're nearly home. They've built a new church across the street, with a big parking lot and a separate building for

the Sunday school. But it's that blistered shell that holds my gaze. It's been there so long that I don't remember anything of the building it used to be. Just the way it burned, one night during a drought.

The old church roof is caved in. Summer's crawled in and spills out through the broken windows: tongues of ivy, stunted trees strangled in the shade. There's a graveyard. I strain in search of a row of seven white crosses. The crosses are where they buried the Collins' kids after they all died in a car crash on their way for Christmas shopping. The oldest boy was eighteen, back from his first year of college. He'd been driving. I'd been in love with him, I think, the way he used to smile as slyly as sin and wear his hat crooked and had once whistled when he saw me walking down the road, skirt knotted at my hip and legs bare in the sunshine. How *grown-up* I'd felt, as I'd tugged the knot out of my skirt and turned, blushing, from his grin, his wink, how *beautiful*.

"We're gonna have a real nice service this Sunday," Paul tells Felicity. "You'll be able to say hello to everyone, catch up. Folks miss you and your Daddy round here."

Felicity snorts. "I don't think anyone'll remember me down here," is all she says.

And again I want to put my arms around her shoulders, to tell her, "Rest your head on my shoulder,

child. Lay down—I'll tell you stories." They're all caught in my mouth, these stories—cottonmouths in drainage ditches, candy made of spice and flame, Andrew Collins whistling at my legs. Jesus Christ the Saviour burning up. I can't get these stories out.

We used to sit on my porch when she was small. She'd comb and oil my hair and say, "Tell me about when you and Daddy were little." I need her to ask me that again. Because I'm grown-up and only my memories are beautiful these days.

I am riding down into the roots of my memory, roots that have gone sour with silence. My mouth aches with not speaking.



Caleb Gritsko

Smoking in the Barn

Elliott Jennings

The metronomic din, as he swings;
Salty rivulets running down his face.
Over the anvil crooked, it rings;
As he makes his hammer chase.
Blackbody, crimson radiation;
The shoe is ready, the shape made.
Steady curls of the hooves cremation;
The rafters creamy with a putrid shade.
Stories of horses brave and grand, no more;
They are playthings of the rich.
The steed, pressured pushed and sore,
Until loss of performance lands it in a ditch.
Repetitions of that metronomic din;
Skills of antiquity are scarred within.

The Ant's Throat

Nickolas Xavier Urpí

Everything that surrounded him was a thick blackness that pained him to look at. He could not tell whether his eyes were open or closed. Everything was the same to him anyhow, and in that respect, it mattered not, though perhaps he would have preferred to know. Nevertheless, it was too late for him. He could feel a thin layer of cataracts settling on his eyes, as though it were snowing, daintily, the white crystals like dust, creating that thin film that only slightly injured him. Pain was more potent when he was younger. He could feel pain as though it were an avoidable entity which chose to plague him on several occasions, usually when he made some error that that resulted in his acquiring that ticklish but unpleasant sensation. It used to send chills up his spine to think of pain, and yet he would brave it with the constancy of a valiant conqueror, fancying himself to be, to that effect, a hero. If he were ever to feel his body express agony, he'd subdue his outward countenance to that of indifference. It increased his self-confidence and sensations of dignity. Pride would intensify in him, exceeding the swelling of any of his body's recently acquired detriments. But he felt old and weary. The enigmatic desire for pride wilted within him, a flower that knew its winter had come, and had sulked with melancholy, a flower who knew its last summer had passed, and its bud would bloom no more. So much time spent in this blackness, the blackness that seemed cold and yet warmed him now that he had dwelt so many years in it. He wondered what it would have been like to

have been outside the blackness—he could not remember. He did reminisce that he had hated the perpetual blackness—once—when he would count numbers and rabbits and partake in all sorts of pathetic excursions of the mind to remove his thoughts from his current predicament—his imprisonment. He would pace the room and memorize how many steps it took to cross it—a fruitless task, a vain attempt to secure his hopes that he would be free yet again. The walls were black too, simply because he could not see them. In his youth, this disturbed him. Those years—those eternal years before him—when he first was put in the seemingly wall-less room—he felt tortured by the cemented blocks that invisibly surrounded him. Yet now, they gave him a sense of comfort, that the black was finite. He did not feel trapped by the energy of the universe's expanse, only freed by the closing of a small area, which he had grown old getting used to. It was as though the infinite blackness around him were the throat of an ant, and he was slipping forever into its stomach. He was ready for the fall to terminate. His bones were weak and thin. His skin was thin as well—sallow—so he believed. He could pull at it more easily than he could in his youth; it showed no effort to resist pulling and tugging. His breathing whimpered wheezily in his weary state, his lungs moist with the dew he had inhaled those long years. He almost choked on the air. He touched his face, trying to imagine what it had been like once. He could not. But he felt the wrinkles and drags that had formulated

over the course of the years. All those eternal years haunted his memory. His memory was as dark as that immortal ant's throat, and its silvery-black flesh. There were red ants, and yellow ants, but he could not picture colors like he used to. Colors—he had seen them once—a very long while ago, when he was young, young and free—not trapped in a prison that had become his home, sans furniture, sans warmth, except the warmth of the unchanging which old men in particular prefer to hold dear. Men, especially of his age, prefer life not to change, though it may be unpleasant. If one thing may change, the pains in his back, the dampness of the air, the infinite blackness that surrounded him, what else could change? Everything—and perhaps nothing. Yet it was an unanswerable question which did not do justice to his comfort. There was warmth in the familiar and that which one has settled into, which one found comfort in, over a certain period of existence. He once poked at his eyes because he did not know that they were open. That was many years ago—since then he had not attempted to feel his eye lids. He felt around his body, plucking at the remaining hairs on his legs and thighs and arms. He could neither imagine nor remember a sense other than the sense of touch. He could hardly hear himself—his hearing had worn out like the rags that elegantly adorned his invisible body. His ears had fallen asleep—their vigilance waned with the lack of noise in the blackness. He felt no heroic power at his invisibility, but rather a sad desire that he should be

something rather than nothing. He wondered if anyone—anything—remembered him, except the walls. He could remember nothing as far back as those vast and limitless years which stretched on into the night sky—stars glittering in the distance. But he could not remember the stars—he knew they were bright, but brightness itself had lost its luster after such an extensive period of lingering in the extended nothing that enclosed him. He felt the walls sometimes, to assure himself that they were there, still black—like the infinitely black throat of an ant. He sighed with self-pity, and because there was naught else to do. He ceased to engage in activities that would occupy his mind and body—they were futile. Counting, thinking, imagining—the imaginative element of his soul had waned away in the wilderness with the life of spring, into the death of winter; he felt invisible. His memory—his thoughts—his mind—he himself—were as black as the walls that surrounded him. There was no light. It was dark. Time continued indefinitely.

Suddenly there was a crack of something that pained his head. His head throbbed with drums and thunderstorms that crashed in his fleshly brain—though he remembered neither the sound nor excitement of drums or storms. When he finally realized his eyes were open and had settled slowly to the blinding crack that gradually opened into the cell, he remembered light. A sudden thrill swept over him and washed his weak and fragile consistency with the

new energy of an enlightened man. A frail and pathetic figure, he approached the door. There was another man, with a tartar hat and black beard staring at him with murky eyes, as endless as the ant that had swallowed him in his dreams—a dream he dreamed once, a very long eternity ago, when tunnels were long and trees were taller than the clouds, though he remembered not that either—He delighted in the light, a white blaring beam that liberated his soul and his spirit. He was free from that cell—

“How long have you been there?” asked the guard with the tartar hat and beard, indifferently.

“An infinite number of years,” he replied. “So long—that my bones have grown infirm and feeble, and can hardly hold my flesh to them. I have aged beyond the years of my father and my father’s father. Cataracts have taken root in my eyes. The disease hinders my sight. I can hardly perceive that which lies around me. My fingernails do not grow. My hair is thin, as I am. I can feel my bones through my brittle flesh—and my brain is tired of thinking and living, my heart tired of beating. It has been a very long time.”

“You lie,” said the guard with the tartar hat and beard, indifferently. “The sun has only completed one revolution since you have been here.”

The truth froze the prisoner in the winters of trauma. Those sudden revelations that were both impossible

and true—his mind was weeping with the thought. Those countless years became a single second, a solitary day of memory. He became a single grain of sand in the vast, infinite desert of the guard’s hourglass.

No in Flight Movie?

Clint Birckhead

Somewhere over foreign soil, in the dead of night, I was onboard an airplane getting ready to jump into the unknown. As I was yet again sitting there waiting for the green light signaling the go ahead, fear raced through my head and my body trembled, until I pulled out my challenge coin, which helps me overcome my fear of heights.

I can remember the first time I jumped out, actually, was pushed out of an airplane. That whole experience was terrifying, and truthfully, I did not want to have to do it ever again. Nevertheless, to be expected to pass training we jumped repeatedly. Finally, after getting pushed out repeatedly, I was finally pulled aside by one of my instructors. He told me that he too was afraid of heights when he first joined, but over time, he got over the fear when his instructor taught him a method to overcome it. My instructor said that it is not the height I was scared of but the fear of letting go of any kind of control. It was not the impact you fear; it is the falling without control.

After he told me of his experiences, he pulled out his wallet and started to rummage through it when he seemed to find what he was looking for. He

extended his hand. He stated that what he was giving me was a challenge coin, and he was challenging me to push myself to do the very best, push through any challenge that I may encounter. However, in exchange I had to pass the coin on to the next person that I saw struggling that has a lot more to offer.

The sound of the alarm echoing through the cargo bay pulled me back to the task. It was time to go to work, and instead of having the feeling of fear and dread, I had the feeling of anticipation and excitement flowing throughout my body. Instead of hesitating as I once did, I ran to the opened ramp and leaped into the unknown darkness, feeling the joy of the ride.

Looking back now, I often laugh at myself for not only having to get pushed out an airplane, but also having to get pushed out more than once. We try to control where we are going in life and forget to sit back and enjoy the ride. I know now that the truth is the ride is the easy part; the hard part is trying to convince yourself to take the ride in the first place, and when you do, it's not as bad as you thought it was.

... hath created the mind free; that all attempts to influence it by temporal punishments,
... and measure, and any departure from the plan of the holy author of our religion, will
... mightily power to do, that the insidious presumption of



Ryan Compton

The Art of the Messy Bun

Jane Harlow

QEP Essay Contest Winner

When I am old, I will wear my hair in a messy bun. My hair is naturally wild. My mother, descendent of Medusa, has coarse hair that is as beautiful as it is impossible to tame. It flows around her head like a lion's mane, refusing to be corralled by any hair product known to man, or more aptly, known to woman. My father, though balding now, has straight hair that sits upon his head like a crown. My locks are a combination of the two. The savage and the civilized have merged upon my head to create straight hair that flies around me like a Broadway curtain proudly being opened.

I wear my hair in a messy bun for many reasons. The number one reason being I lack the skill to pull my hair into a chic chignon or a detailed French braid. I've never been able to pull off an updo or luscious curls. Fishtail braids, top-knots, ballerina buns, sophisticated pony-tail? Not a chance. I was left to find an easier solution. Thus, the messy bun was born. I was "rocking" this style before it became cool and I can already tell I will be "rocking" it in a rocking chair.

What's the solution to five pages of AP Calculus AB homework? The messy bun. Painting after school? The messy

bun. Anatomy Midterm? The messy bun. I break out the black elastic hair-tie and put my hair up when I need to work. I know that with the messy bun, I won't be worried about anything but getting the job done. I push myself to be the best I can be in all areas of my life. I serve as FCCLA Vice President, BETA Treasurer, volunteer at the Greene County Historical Society, and design homes for clients in my drafting class. With all this going on, I don't need my hair to get in the way. This is why, every day like clockwork, I come home, slam my books on my desk and pull my hair atop my head, twirling pieces here and there until it's contained and I'm ready to start my homework.

After graduating from William Monroe High School, I plan to attend a four year university, where I wish to major in Art History. From a career standpoint, my dream is to work in this field, giving knowledge about the subject I love to others. I want to share my adoration of the use of color in Henri Matisse's "Harmony in Red" or comment of the psychological intrigue of Kay Sage's "The Passage". To do this I need, wait for it, the messy bun. I need

this simple, Kindergartener-can-do-it hairstyle to accomplish my goal. I will need it when I'm staying up until three in the morning cramming for a midterm on all artists since the Renaissance. I will need it when I'm the curator, in charge of organizing exhibits or the educator, in charge of planning next week's exciting lessons. Because of the messy bun, I know I'll be able to make it through whatever the art world throws at me.

I also know, because of my dear friend the messy bun, that whatever cards the world in general deals me will also be handled with the utmost grace and ease. My dreams, from a personal standpoint, are simple. I want to move to Maine with my best friend and the love of my life. Eventually I want to raise children, and teach them to appreciate both their beauty and the beauty of the earth around them. I want my children to know what love is, to be able to recognize constellations, to grow up believing in the good in people. By wearing my hair in a messy bun, I'll be able to chase after my kids when they, invariably, paint all over the wall as their mother did in her youth. I won't have to worry about my hair stopping me as we traverse Disney World

and skip stones. The messy bun will let me dodge whatever my own messes, literally and figuratively, throw at me.

I will wear my hair in a messy bun when I am old, because I don't plan to ever stop living. I don't plan to ever stop working to achieve my goals, or "give up", becoming resigned to a life without meaning. That way of life is not me. That way of life is not the messy bun.



Elaine Waksmunski

The Aloe Plant

Andrew Neil Maternick

Seeing sharp green swords
With shark like teeth
Though the inside affords
Healing relief

under a world of marionettes

How they tinkle, tinkle,

In the ice,

While the stars that

fill the Heavens, and

With a cry

Keeping time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

to the tintinnabulation that is musically wells

From the bells, bells, bells, bells, ~~bells,~~

Bells, bells, bells —

From the jingling and the tinging of the bells



Kim Powers

H. of the neck $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches; do. of body exclusive of
 tail 13 inches; do. of leg
 the eye
 - iris of
 - purple
 black and occupies
 the diameter of the
 is a part of the
 mes 1-2. is uncovered
 pt. that portion of it represented by dots (see
 - tail is composed of 12 feathers of equal length





Marshall Camden

A Story by Guy de Maupassant

Alexander Urpí

When the nurses first informed Dr. Lewis of the patient's desire to be called only by the name of Carmichael, the doctor was convinced that this piece of information would impart to him some means of determining the source of the patient's condition. As the weeks wore on, however, he came to the horrific conclusion that this was not the case. It was not so much that Carmichael—a scrawny man with wide-rimmed glasses and a razor-thin mustache—was not suffering; the man had a most terrible delusion that he insisted upon confiding to everyone who would lend him their ears. No, it was rather the difficulty of countering the delusion and determining just how and why Carmichael was insane that ruined Dr. Lewis.

The sanitarium at Happy Vale was especially suited to those poor souls who had suffered from nervous breakdowns, and Dr. Lewis' usual treatments were simple rearrangements of lifestyle and confidence talks designed to prove to young spinsters, rejected siblings and the sort that they were, despite all evidence to the contrary, invaluable to society. This was debatable psychiatric work, but it was easy psychiatric work, and it was paying psychiatric work; thus, it hardly concerned Dr. Lewis whether there was any irony in such talented

men as Dr. Bradford and himself resigning themselves to this type of work.

The patient, Carmichael, however, was obsessed with irony. He managed to see irony everywhere, in every action, reaction, object, coincidence and chance. He pointed out the irony of the situation when he was served a French meal, when he spotted a piece of string on the floor, or when a female nurse mentioned a necklace. When he entered Dr. Lewis' office after several weeks and saw that Lewis was reading a book of tales by the French author Guy de Maupassant, he gasped and whispered, "I knew it."

"Knew what, Carmichael?" asked Lewis, attempting once more to glean some speck of dust from the patient's well-polished brain. Try as he had, Lewis had heretofore been unable to reach the bottom of Carmichael's illness. Most patients, when their delusions were challenged, became testy or went into fits, outrageously attempting to disprove reality; Carmichael, however, would only smile and then logically—his rationality was startling, actually, in its cleverness—set about proving his points. He seemed to be engaging in a mind game with Lewis, attempting to convince the doctor that he was correct and that the rest of the world was not.

Carmichael seated himself comfortably on a chair and asked for a cigarette as if he were in a black-and-white picture, which his doctor categorically denied him without the grace of a movie star. With his hooked nose and whitish hair, it is doubtful Lewis could have acted the part if he had tried, but his refusal to attempt it seemed to displease Carmichael, who gave him a disappointed look.

“Oh, Doctor,” the patient said, putting the tips of his fingers together. “Must we go into this again? I have told you countless times that I am not insane, nor is this some silly delusion. Do you not find it ironic that you are reading a book of tales by Guy de Maupassant?”

Carmichael had returned once more to his sticking point, the assertion that had dominated his thoughts since his arrival at the sanitarium and that had plagued Dr. Lewis since that same day. The doctor could remember quite clearly how Carmichael, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, had said to him at their first meeting, “Doctor, I will be frank with you. We are the both of us characters in a story by Guy de Maupassant.”

The idea was preposterous, as clear a delusion as Lewis had ever confronted in his practice, and yet Carmichael would not be rid of it. The patient’s past was

ordinary, without mystery or trauma in it, and in the probing sessions, Carmichael made no effort to hide any skeletons in his closet. He was candid and open about his feelings, his perceptions, his history, and so forth. When challenged, he responded rationally; when debated, he was calm. When Lewis, lost, suggested to Carmichael a myriad of psychological problems he might have—an obsession for his mother, a hatred of his father—the patient had only laughed and said that he had read enough of Freud to know that he was a fraud.

Their banter had gone on for weeks, but so powerful was Carmichael’s reasoning and his intellect, so open his mind, that Dr. Lewis could no longer fight what had been his initial impression: Carmichael was not mad. His delusion was not a delusion, at least not in the sense that Dr. Lewis had previously encountered the mental disease. How, then, was he to deal with a man whose faculties had convinced him of a universal theory that could not be possible? The doctor had turned to logic to satisfy this question—he had intended to reason Carmichael out of his impression.

Their strategy sessions, however, usually went awry. Dr. Lewis was not a philosopher, nor was he a logician, whereas Carmichael seemed to be both,

twisting Lewis' every conception like Socrates, and then thrusting at him a myriad of meaningless A and B phrases like—well, Lewis did not know any logicians, so he could not have named one. He had abandoned many weeks before any idea of suggesting to Carmichael the impossibility of his claim because the patient chided him for making that assertion without evidence. Yet what evidence was necessary? The world he knew—no more than a story by some dead French writer? It was absurd.

Yet the more he thought on it, the less Dr. Lewis believed he could prove that it was absurd. In reality, it was not impossible—it was no more impossible than believing that the world was created by a primary cause, God or some nameless entity. If he believed that, why could Carmichael not substitute the name of Guy for that of God? Who was to say that—but no, it was ridiculous. If only it had been ridiculous enough to prevent the sleepless nights that accompanied the doctor's muddled musings.

Then, of course, there was *The Irony*. Carmichael had suggested it would arrive eventually: a moment of truth in which Dr. Lewis would experience an event so ironic that it would convince him that only Guy de Maupassant could have thought it up. Lewis had adamantly denied the possibility of this event and had even reprimanded Carmichael for

stooping to that childish literary technique of capitalizing the first letter of each word in the phrase to suggest that there was some mystical quality to it. Yet *The Irony* had arrived, and it had arrived, oddly enough, in a brown paper package tied up with a simple piece of string. Inside the package was a book of stories by Guy de Maupassant. Lewis had heard of this Guy de Maupassant, a writer of such tales as "The Necklace" and "The Piece of String," stories ripe with irony, but he had never read anything by him. Still, the arrival of this book, sent by an old friend even as Carmichael's insinuations dug into his mind like the malevolent mole that molested the sanitarium grounds was too much for Dr. Lewis. He knew that his resolve was breaking.

Carmichael must have seen this in his own perverted way, for upon his arrival in the office that day, he leaned over and placed a parcel on the doctor's desk. Lewis glared at it and frowned.

"That is the manuscript of a short story I have written," said Carmichael. "I need you to drive to the postal office in town, Doctor, and mail it to a friend of mine who has agreed to have it published."

"Congratulations, Carmichael," Lewis said benevolently. Then the severity of what Carmichael had said struck him and he continued, "But why must I mail this at the office in town? You can send parcels from Happy Vale."

Now Carmichael's small eyes narrowed, and he seemed to glance upwards as if someone were watching them from

a nonexistent skylight. When his gaze returned to his doctor, he said, "That is exactly what he wants me to do. If I mail it from here, by some irony it will never arrive. If I have myself driven to the postal office, by some tragic irony I will never arrive. No, Doctor, you do not believe what I have told you, so he will never suspect you. You must do this."

"Carmichael," said Dr. Lewis, rubbing his forehead as the premonition of his future headache began to induce in him a headache of its own, "please tell me this has nothing to do with that absurd theory of yours."

"Perhaps you would like to know the plot of my story," said the patient quickly. "It tells a day in the life of Guy de Maupassant, from a pleasant beginning to a most unpleasant end. You see, Guy de Maupassant dies in a carriage accident."

"What a morbid tale," Dr. Lewis commented, attempting not to appear overly concerned with the dramatic turn for the worse that his patient's condition had taken.

"It is the only way to free us, Doctor," the patient pleaded, and for the first time in their interviews, he began to appear distraught. "I have worked on this tirelessly, perfecting every word so that I am as much a writer as that malevolent Frenchman. You must mail this so that the cycle will be complete—I have written that Maupassant dies, and when published, that will cause his death, and we will be free of his tyranny."

"Let us presume for a moment this

were true,” said Dr. Lewis, a glimmer of hope burgeoning forth as he imagined an opportunity to break at last his patient’s obstinacy. “If you kill off the writer of this story, you would cease to exist. How do you explain that away?”

“That may be, that may be,” said Carmichael, “but it is a risk we must take. I refuse to live any longer in this morbid universe. If it were any other author, perhaps I could endure it, but not the dirty Frenchman, not Maupassant—no, not he. You have read his works—you have seen the monstrous fates he assigns to his characters, the horrific irony he employs. I could walk across the street, trip on a child’s skateboard and be hit by a bus filled with old hags, and that would not begin to compare with the terrible fates that Maupassant could dream up for me! No, Doctor, you must do this—please.”

“I most certainly will not do this,” Dr. Lewis answered, rising to his feet. “Look, Carmichael, surely you must see the absurdity of what you claim? You are not a madman; of that, I am convinced. Listen to what you are saying, man!”

“Tell me that it is impossible, Doctor,” said the patient.

“Don’t be—”

“Tell me that it is impossible,” the patient repeated, his beady eyes unexcited.

“I refuse to be handled in this manner,” Dr. Lewis said, shaking. “I am the doctor here.”

“Then tell your patient that his delusion is impossible,” Carmichael said one

last time.

Dr. Lewis fell back onto his chair, a stricken look flashing onto his face. “I can’t,” he whispered oddly, and then he buried his face in his hands.

When he lifted his head, he found that he was in Dr. Bradford’s office, Carmichael to his right and his fellow doctor seated at the edge of a desk. Bradford began asking him a great deal of questions, few of which made sense, and finally Dr. Lewis decided he had no choice but to tell his young friend the truth. Therefore, he lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper and said, “Listen to me, Bradford. I know this sounds absurd, but we are nothing more than characters in a story by Guy de Maupassant.”

When the nurses had informed Dr. Bradford that his fellow doctor had suffered a nervous breakdown, the young man could hardly believe his ears. He immediately set about to treat his one-time mentor, to reach the root of the nervous breakdown and return the good Dr. Lewis to a happy life, even if he could never administer psychiatric advice again. The task had soon proved itself absurdly difficult. It was terrible enough that Lewis was convinced that he was living in a story by some Frenchman, but Dr. Bradford soon came to the recognition that Dr. Lewis believed in the existence of an imaginary patient by the name of Carmichael. A quick check in the records showed that no patient by that name had ever been admitted to Happy Vale. Even stranger was the fact that, with the exception of these two

delusions, Dr. Lewis appeared normal in all other respects. His faculties were strong, he was as logical and scientific as ever, and he remembered every event and conversation he and Bradford had shared.

There also existed two physical pieces of evidence that Bradford could not ignore. The first was a book of stories by this same author, Guy de Maupassant, which Dr. Lewis had received, and which he called *The Irony*. The second was a parcel that Dr. Lewis insisted Bradford had to take down to the postal office in town and mail to a certain publisher. Bradford, for the sake of the case, had opened the parcel and found inside the manuscript of a story that purposefully killed off Guy de Maupassant as a character. The name of the author was that of Lewis’ imaginary patient: Carmichael. Dr. Bradford pondered on these ironies—no, coincidences—for weeks on end, but he could develop no rational explanation for them. His meandering musings produced only sleepless nights.

He began to read one of Maupassant’s stories in Dr. Lewis’ book, something about a woman who lost a necklace and suffered gravely for it. This would have had no effect on Bradford had it not been for *The Irony*. His own young wife called him one morning to say that she had lost a priceless pearl necklace belonging to a

friend. After that, of course, poor Dr. Bradford had nothing left with which to fight his former mentor. Determined to mail the parcel and thus be rid of the possibility that tortured his mind and Lewis', he dressed himself and set out for the sanitarium entrance. He did not make it far, as one of the nurses had noted his strange behavior and had immediately summoned the head doctor.

The head doctor was a large, middle-aged man with a full brown beard and a pleasant but stern face. He accosted Bradford in one of the white-walled hallways of Happy Vale, complete with sunny pictures of flowers and rainbows with pots of gold at the end, and he puffed up his chest so that Dr. Bradford could not step around him.

"I have to mail this, Sir," said Dr. Bradford. "I have to do it immediately. Perhaps, if there is something the matter, we can discuss it over lunch?"

"Bradford," said the head doctor, stretching to his full height, a good four inches over his subordinate, "what in God's name is the meaning of this? You have been seen walking the halls at night and uttering strange, meaningless phrases. Now you have completely forgotten your duties for today, and I find you with a parcel in your hand. What is it?"

Dr. Bradford, shaking at the knees, motioned for the head doctor to lean down, and when the latter did, he said in a conspiratorial whisper, "Sir, what would you say if I told you that we were only characters in a story by Guy de Maupassant?"

"Not you!" the head doctor exclaimed. "Is this some joke, Bradford?"

The young doctor, pale, only shook his head. "I felt as you did, Sir, but then I started to ask myself why it was impossible, and, well, I couldn't think of a reason why. It is monstrous, I know, but what could I do?"

The head doctor sighed and pressed his large hand to his forehead. "Bradford, there is absolutely no reason to believe that some Frenchman has written this, so why even entertain the notion?"

"Well, you believe in God, don't you?" asked Bradford. "If God is everywhere and everything, who is to say we aren't characters in a story by God?"

"All right, then, so God is writing the world," the head doctor repeated, exasperated. "All I can say, then, is that he has a poor sense of humor. What does that have to do with anything?"

"Well," said Bradford, and he seemed to grow some sense of confidence, for he lifted his head and tried to stand

taller, "well, then, Thomas Aquinas talked about the primary cause, and who is to say God is really the primary cause? What if someone is writing about God?"

"This argument has gone on forever," said the head doctor. "So someone is writing about God—or perhaps no one is writing about anyone. They're all as likely as the other."

"Who is to say it isn't God at all?" asked Bradford, fidgeting, but with a stronger tone in his voice. "For all we know, some irksome college kid is typing everything we are saying on a laptop, or reading it aloud to a gathering of his obnoxious peers."

"Somehow," said the head doctor in a sarcastic tone, "I doubt some random person would have the brains to think up this very ironic—" He stopped himself short and one of his large eyes focused intently on Bradford. The young subordinate doctor might have said nothing, but he could no longer help himself, and he whispered in a frightened voice:

"What if someone is telling the kid what to write—you know what I mean, Sir." He looked down at the parcel in his hand and held it out. "You know what this is, Doctor. I have to mail it, if only to prove to ourselves that it isn't necessary."

"Give me that!" the head doctor said in

a voice like a lion's roar, and he snatched the parcel from Bradford's hands. "Now, Bradford, you are going to get back to your duties, save that you will do no advising today. I want to hear no more of this folly." Then the head doctor turned away in a brusque motion and began to march his way back down the hall.

"What about my parcel, Sir?" asked Bradford, calling after his superior.

"I'll mail it myself."

The head doctor traveled into town and parked his car across the street from the postal office. As he stepped towards the curb to cross the street, he tripped on a child's skateboard, stumbled into the street, and was run over by a bus.

It had to be done, you see. There really was no choice. Of course the idea was absurd, but if there were the slightest possibility that Carmichael could have murdered Guy de Maupassant by killing him off in a story—If only it were more impossible, then perhaps I might have ignored it, but it was not impossible enough to ignore. I couldn't let the head doctor mail the parcel, so I jotted down the first thought that came into my head, and it killed off the poor soul. I suppose I am no more of a murderer than any other writer, and while it is ironic to think of a writer as a murderer, I

suppose it is that very irony which made it impossible for me to take the chance that, by some longwinded and ridiculous reasoning, we are no more than characters in a story by Guy de Maupassant.

Uncle Maury
little enough to pay for a fine round



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Jessica Ritenour

Lost Souls

Aerial Perkins-Goode

Could we ever be more
than locked locks and broken keys
more than scraped knees and black eyes
is there any room for compassion

is there a way that love could be put behind us
no more broken heart tears
no more courage over fear
sometimes its ok to be afraid

and we never dared to look one another in the eye
because beauty doesn't lie there
and we're never so sure we know what we are looking for
but just remember
you saw me first

yet anything and everything goes
you were the first to go and the last to be gone
I didn't say anything
When my soul was never your bible
and my mind was always hanging
noose style from a broken tree limb
I guess some things don't last forever

We inhale lonely nights
when not even the moon is around to comfort our silent souls
Darkness became my lover
Passion became my enemy
Everything became silent

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The hustle and bustle of busy streets was evident as Amir and I walked the wintered and crowded sidewalks of Dushanbe, Tajikistan. It was the beginning of spring semester where I'd be studying the Persian language. My mind was fresh and ready to embark on the study abroad experience. My new friend Amir, who was from Florida, had just spent his month long winter break with no classmates. Alone in Dushanbe with no English speaking friends had to be rough, and I could understand his excitement as students were finally returning from the long break. Amir had much to say and introduced himself to me as if I were his favorite celebrity. I appreciated his enthusiasm, and we quickly became friends.

A sea of people on the sidewalks moved from every direction. People hurried to cross the streets so they wouldn't get clipped by cars speeding by. In this part of the world, cars definitely had the right of way. Tajiks were going along with their everyday lives the same as we would back home. With Amir doing most of the talking, I casually noticed a little neuroticism in his voice. After he tried to convince

me that his teeth were falling out due to the drinking water and that his hair was taking the shape of a horse's mane, I felt that I had judged him correctly.

Amir quickly pointed to a distant dog prowling the sidewalk. The dog was small in stature with stubby legs and a roundish body. It was sidestepping everyone in its path as its nose tracked the icy sidewalk with a frantic pace. "You see that dog, you see that dog?" Amir said with a panic. "Watch that dog. It's coming for me."

I couldn't help but think that Amir was going a little crazy and had been away from home a little too long. I humored him and watched as fear drifted into the dog's path, the kind of fear that only a dog could sense. Sure enough, the dog spotted Amir from far across the busy streets and sidewalks. Its nose slowly lifted from the icy sidewalk among the crowd. Amir's fearful scent immediately deterred the dog from whatever it was tracking, and it looked straight towards him. A slow walk quickly became an all-out run. The strides were quite impressive for a stubby legged dog.

From across the street, the dog bobbed and weaved through the traffic

of cars and the clutter of people. Stress and fear poured out of my new friend as the aggressor approached. I was stunned by how the dog relentlessly tormented my new friend, but more so that Amir's prediction was right. Apparently he had been dealing with this bully for months now. Maybe his teeth were falling out. Maybe his hair was taking a different shape. Was there something I needed to know about this place? Out of all the people walking through this busy part of town, how in the world could this dog pick out my new friend and know that it could unleash its hounding fury on him with no consequence? I summed up in one word what I had just witnessed: fear.

All Tajik households have dogs. They are not pets, nor are they loved, kissed, or even petted. These dogs serve one purpose and that is to defend. These aren't your stereotypical American mean dogs. No Rottweilers or shepherds. No pit bulls or Dobermans. These dogs were from the streets of Dushanbe. Living outside through sweltering summers and sub-freezing winters, these dogs were tough.

The dogs played a factor in the neighborhood where I lived. My host family's house sat at the end of a rectangular

Rulers of Tajikistan

Stephen Goodell

shaped neighborhood. The two longer roads made it easy to find my way into town. It was a typical neighborhood in the city. The rows of houses along and in-between the streets were lined with trees. As directed by teachers and fellow students, I was only to take one of these roads when returning home, especially at night. Not due to crime or random people, but “because of the dogs,” they all explained. “Only take the road to the right, especially at night.”

I didn't pay much attention, but was sure to stay to the right. Needless to say, my sense of adventure got the best of me. I started thinking about that left road. Weeks had passed as I became more comfortable walking freely around town. I was getting better at the balancing act of walking on ice-filled sidewalks; I would only fall occasionally. A routine was somewhat in place.

As I walked home one evening I randomly thought about what happened to Amir, and how his fear gave that mangy street dog every reason to torment him. I gathered my thoughts to make a final decision as to which road to take; yes, the old fork in the road. Take the same mundane route, or go left

into the unknown? In honor of showing my friend that he could face his fears with a single dog, I decided to take on this challenge not with one, but many.

It was time. The less traveled poorly lit street had a length of approximately one hundred and fifty yards. The recent snowfall caused the sidewalks and street to form a layer of ice thick enough to skate on. This made any route home sketchy, as one wrong move would have you on your backside struggling to get up. I had learned this from experience. My last thought before walking into the unknown was to stay in the neutral zone. Dead center in the middle of the street farthest away from either row of houses was my strategy. “OK, steady pace, not too fast,” I said to myself as I let out a deep breath.

All was quiet along the road as I entered. It was the kind of silence that only a recent snowfall could make. The rows of houses were all made of concrete, a constant reminder of Russian influence during the Soviet Union. Surrounding each house was a fifteen foot wall with a gate protecting the courtyard, or what we would call the front yard.

“There are no dogs out,” I said to myself. One by one they came charging. It was the moment they lived for. I could only see them out of the corner of my eye as they merged onto the street from each and every house. What began as a quiet walk home soon became a heavy metal band of dogs making snarls, barks and growls in ways I had never heard before. I was simply outnumbered and in their territory. “Walk tall,” I said to myself. “Show no fear,” I repeated in my head.

More and more dogs rushed up behind me as the band became louder and louder. “Steady pace,” I thought as I focused on taking the right steps through the icy street. More dogs flooded the street behind me. The sound of my boots cracked over the ice as I was overcome by the pack's alarm. Every balanced step had to be negotiated precisely onto the ice to keep from falling into the jaws of the pack.

“Confidence,” I yelled in my head. “Show no fear.”

It must have been the Alpha I felt taking a quick nip at my boot to remind me they were there. I was being tested. "Don't look back," I said to myself. "Show them nothing."

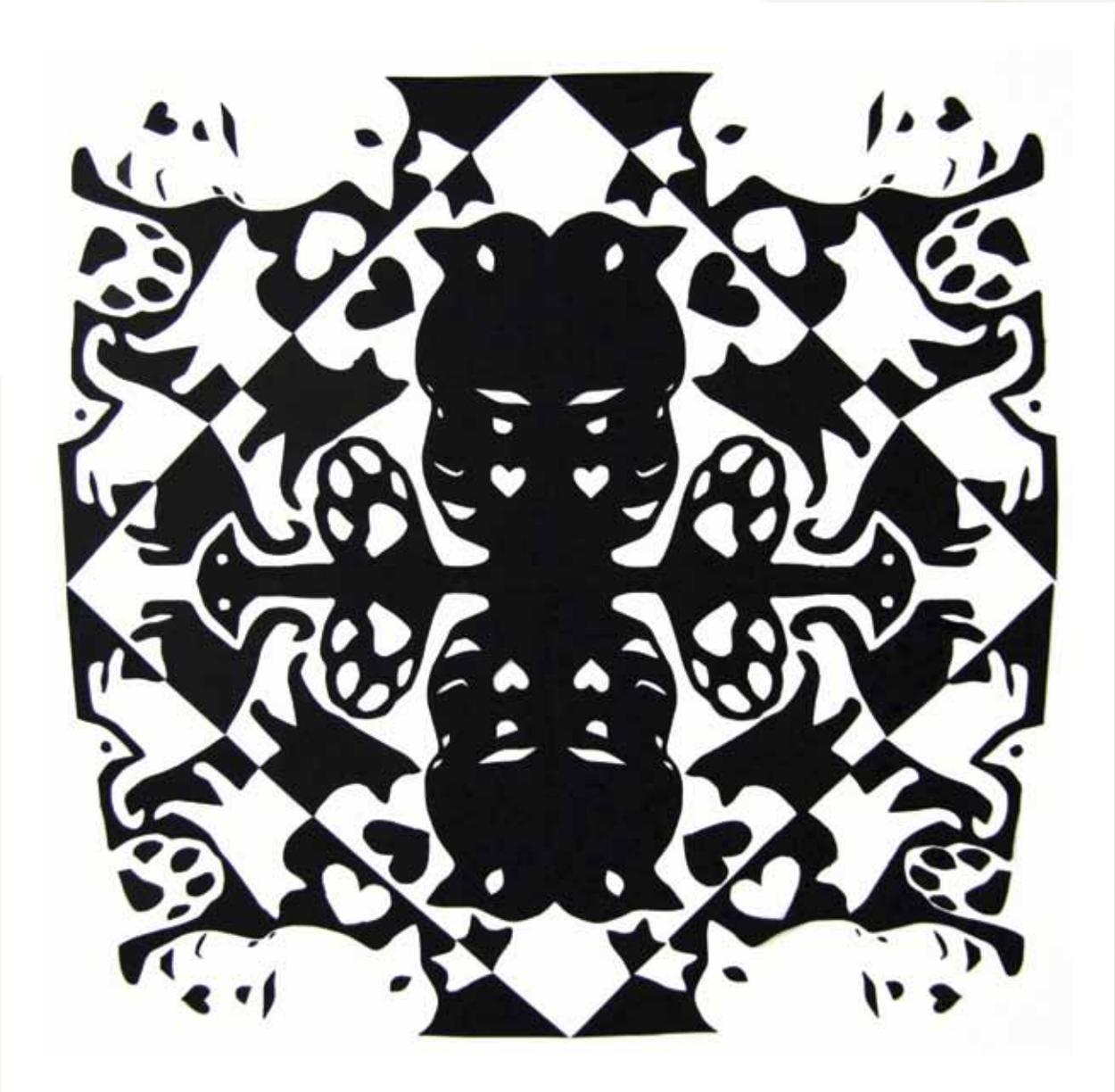
My natural instincts told me to run but I knew that if I showed the slightest sign of fear, I'd be finished. "Don't run," I thought.

I kept my head straight, staring at the end of the road, which seemed forever away. How much longer would I have to endure the thought of being ripped to shreds by these wild beasts? My hands were shaking in my pockets, only I wasn't cold. "Show no fear," I reminded myself as sweat filled my palms. It was hard to walk on the ice with my hands in my pockets, but this kept my limbs protected from the dogs.

The sound of the pack became even louder as I steadied my pace in a robotic fashion. Closer with every step, I was almost to the end. I had crossed a line which activated the neighborhood alarm system of dogs and steadily approached the line to deactivate it. As I neared the turn all became silent. Scattered barks throughout the pack sounded out, warning me not to come back. As I turned the corner, I looked back with poise to

see a pack of dogs so big that I couldn't see the street below their feet. The defensive alliance was extraordinary. The dogs disbanded and returned to their kingdoms. As soon as it began, it was over.

I entered the courtyard of my host family where I was greeted by an old guard dog too battered to get involved with the dog gangs of Dushanbe. He greeted me with a quick sniff and a lick to identify me, simple guard dog protocol. He returned to his slumber on a concrete slab of a throne coated with ice. I too went to my room and jumped in my bed to reflect on my honorable accomplishment. I couldn't sleep that night. I was too busy going over what I had just experienced. My head continued to swell with pride as I had conquered my self-proclaimed walk of fame. It wasn't until my mind settled into autopilot that the word best used to describe my evening walk crept into my head: stupidity.



Ji Min Sun

inanimate objects

Kyla Crowley

you could have me if i did not contain so much human frailty.
if i were that twig outside, for instance, you could use me to stir your coffee and tea.
if you broke me in half i would multiply and get to lead two lives in your presence.
things wouldn't be complicated if i were a burnt red autumn leaf you laminated
and stuck in the book you are reading to mark your place.
you know that i would hold all of time for you if i had the strength.
and perfection could be found if i were your bathroom mirror,
reflecting your truth, beauty, and lies.
and if it ever got to be too much you could stomp on me and hide
all those pieces of your soul.
but instead of being inanimate, i am far too animated in your presence
and too alive to be of any practical use.
i show up and whisper about the cuts, and i remember
when you told me i could do better.
i know, but i was losing my mind.
sometimes-sometimes i do still go a bit sideways when i realize that i am not, in fact,
living between the strings of the cello in the song that saved my life.
that's been my purpose, all this time, to live in between the strings of that instrument
instead of being the girl who sits in her room, kvetching, and writing poetry for everyone
who breathes.
i could do better, yes, if i were inanimate.
here and now, i cannot multiply, hold your place, reflect truth, or crawl behind your ear and
make you tingle at the melody.
rather, i set my watch by how much i try to love yet fail to assemble the pieces correctly.
for being human is exhausting, and so is loving without cure.

Planting Footprints

Meghan Chada

QEP Essay Contest Winner

When I am old, I will still drink tea-not-coffee, and still love the smell of freshly-baked bread more than any other smell in this world. I will still love country music and not care if people stare when I dance in public. I will know when to walk away from heartache and when to triumph over it. I will have longer fingernails, hearing aids, false teeth, laugh lines and scars that ache in winter. One of my bad habits is that I am always biting my nails. Maybe they'll be longer when I have false teeth and can no longer bite them. I am always dancing until my feet ache, iPod turned as high as it will go, blasting my eardrums, so I know I will need those hearing aids down the road, but the rush of the music and dancing drowning out every worry and care seems worth it to me right now. Scars that ache now will ache even more as I age, signaling the longer winters ahead of me. I will still be the same independent spirit who loves to laugh and questions everything. I expect to have lost some friends and gained others. I hope I will have fallen in love, because that would be a terrible thing to live life without knowing. Perhaps I will have soft, folded skin and long, pure white hair—my head has already gifted me with a few warning strands to prove it—but I plan to earn each wrinkle and white hair in my life by surmounting my fears and going after my dreams.

I will have photos of my trips to every country in Europe and to both

the North and South Poles. I will have the pet cat 'Stelli' I can't have now because of Momma's allergies. I will have phone calls and visits and mountains of letters from my siblings, children, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great, great-grandchildren. After all, I won't consider myself old until I have a member of each of the next four generations sitting on my living room couch waiting for the chocolate chip banana bread to come out of the oven. When I am old, I will intimately understand both what it means to have nothing and what it means to have all my needs met. When I am old, I will have published my poems, novels, and short stories, in spite of every inner fear. Everyone will know I am a writer among dreamers, from my most avid fans to my most obdurate critics. All my personal words and worlds will become a book, read by and shared with the world.

I will live in a cottage up in the lovely mountains, next door to my best friend Jenn. Our children will have grown up together, and maybe have fallen in love. Wouldn't that be romantic? We will meet each morning by the clothesline, and sit side by side as we write for hours, just sharing our loving silence. I will have attended all of her clarinet concerts, and we will have been the second most devoted fan at each other's book signings (no one tops Momma), cheering enthusiastically for the book we collaborated on as it was born.

My husband and I will walk by the river on our beloved mountain and tell each other stories, some true and others less so, as we gather moss and stones for my garden. He will brush my hair as I knit his socks, and I will write of him as he holds me. We will smile at each other and kiss every morning and each night. He will be the friend I cannot wait to talk to first thing in the morning and right before I go to sleep. We will tell our children and grandchildren and their children and grandchildren of the day we met, and of our courtship. He will tell them how I told him he had to be willing to serve seven years for me, and I will tell them how he did.

When I have spent enough time on this earth to have planted my footprints in three centuries, I will talk about all I have seen, from sitting in the orthodontist's chair during the September 11th attacks, and times when Pluto was a planet, to the discovery of time travel, and the elimination of all genocides. I will have lived a life I can look back on with pride, and I will be able to honestly say that I have lived well enough to have chased my dreams, instead of waiting for them to have fallen into my lap.



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Stephen Quinn

Second Time (Before the Ban)

Edwin Oak

Down on 29, past Rio Rd.
In Waffle House again,
4 am, hash browns.
They're going to ban smoking
Soon. We won't have any place
To have breakfast and smoke in peace.

I light my last cigarette,
menthol, while overhearing
two men next to me
talk about getting away
with avoiding state inspection.

The man behind the counter
shakes his head as he fries
tomatoes and eggs
for the two men
who will only pay \$2.99

each, without tipping
because it's 4 am
I'm drunk,
or hungover,
and I can't remember how I got here.

But I'm with friends
and we decided
it was a good idea
to go to Waffle House
at four o'clock in the morning.
The only place to be,
when you're hungry,
and you have nothing else
to do, but to eat and feel
like you're getting your money's

worth while having conversations
that you'll forget by the morning
when you go to work
and fry someone else's food
for them as you make 8 dollars

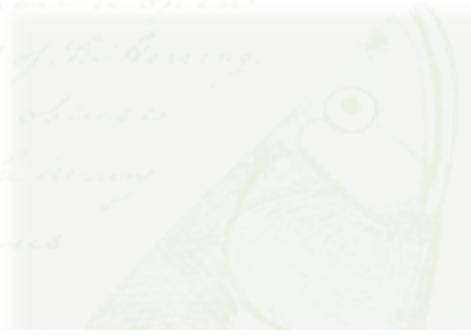
an hour, less than what you need
but just enough to go to Waffle House
when you're hungry and tired
and your friends are trying to forget the
day
and move on

and talk about the good life
while we listen to music we choose
playing from the jukebox.
Eagles. Sure. No Doubt. Why not.
This is the second time
this week. Won't be the last time
I spread my sticky sugary syrup
Because it's not real syrup
You never get real syrup
And I squeeze the plastic bottle
All over my pancakes and
Sausages and then soak them
with margarine and swallow
the cup full of milky watered coffee
that keeps getting refilled
about every five to ten minutes
what do they get paid to do that?
I wouldn't do it if I were them
But I don't work for tips
I'm up there with the Sears guys
Getting paid to sell things and
sometimes get a commission

if I'm lucky I'll be in the home
appliances or tools section
Fuck I got to get out of here.
Talk with my mouth full
Don't even know what
I'm saying, it's half-chewed
over in my mind before swallow-
ing
barely will have time to digest it.
Where are my menthols? Thanks.
Maybe I'll get one of those e-cigs.
Nah, I'll just quit. Or maybe not.

We usually come here
Every other week
because you can still smoke
indoors but not for long
and then where will we go,
where will we be
at 4 am on a weekday?

...of the bearing
...of the bearing
...of the bearing
...of the bearing



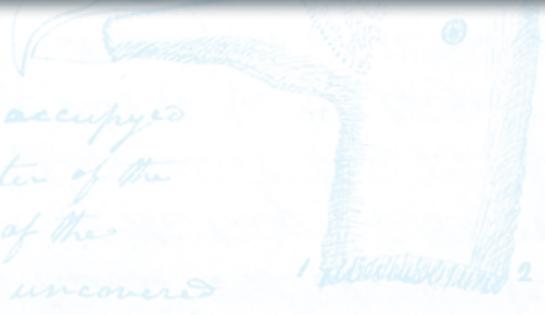
Marshall Camden

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...even more...
...white fish of the...
...artifacts formed by the...
...among the fishes. I have...
...very much... but I do...
...believing this quite...



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Robert Merkel

