



THE FALL LINE

SPRING 2015

PIEDMONT VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

THE FALL LINE

Spring 2015, Volume 7

PIEDMONT VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

The Fall Line, Spring 2015, is the sixth volume selected, edited, and produced by Writers Unite, the PVCC Creative Writing Club.

Ashley Costantini & Lizzie Keatts, Co-Presidents
Jenny Koster, Adviser

Editors:

Annette Cashatt
Gannon Combs
Olivia Cooper
Russell Wright

Lay-out and Design: [TBA!]

Comic Relief- Steven Krenitsky

Special thanks to the PVCC Copy Center for printing The Fall Line and to Aaron Miller and his Communication Design II class for designing this edition.

This year, in addition to our submissions, The Fall Line is publishing the winners of the Writers Unite 3-Minute Horror Story Contest held in Fall 2014, as well as the winners of the college's QEP [Quality Enhancement Plan] Essay Contest.

Jennifer A. Koster
Associate Professor of English/Writing Center Coordinator
Piedmont Virginia Community College
501 College Drive
Charlottesville, VA 22902
434.961.5478 (o)
434.961.5274 (f)
www.pvcc.edu

Table Of Contents

- 1 **Elegia** - Hannah Ho
- 2 **Excerpts From a Book I'll Never Write**- Ashley Costantini
- 5 **Carrying Their Voices**- Annette Cashatt
- 7 **Run**- Joseph Taglavore
- 10 **I'm That Girl**- Eileen Wilcox
- 12 **A Proposal Outline to End War, Hunger, Poverty, and Disease in the World**- James Irving Mann

- 15 **From One to Another**- Veronica Haunani Fitzhugh
- 18 **Nepenthe** - Hannah Ho
- 19 **Squabbling Gods**- Spencer Wood
- 22 **Image in the Mirror**- Michelle Stanislaus
- 24 **Too Busy** - Annette Cashatt
- 25 **The Woman of a Thousand Faces**- R. Lewis Wright
- 32 **In the Absence of You**- Skyler Gunderson
- 33 **Education Transcendence**- Hana Alomar
- 41 **They Live Among Us**- Annette Cashatt
- 43 **Unbarren**- R. Lewis Wright

- 44 Today, Through Her Eyes**- Mary Buck
- 46 Choosing My Future**- Dorcas Yoder
- 48 Pac-man vs. Magikarp** - Annette Cashatt
- 52 Chief Ellowi's Grave**- Joanna Vondrasek

ELEGIA

Hannah Ho

I. Cantabile

In the dusky light
dust-motes dance.

Hints of gold glint in your eyelashes—
I am drawn to them as a moth to flame.
Breath whispers on the surface of my skin.

Fingers brush feathery patterns on my
shoulder blade and the soft
curve where hip meets thigh.

II. Adagio

You heard the whisper
of falling
mist and smiled
at its soft melody,
reverent.

You traced the path of
the moon across the
night, brimming with glow,
each kiss tasting of
cool starlight.

III. Pianissimo

I stare unseeing at the hazy
glints of light reflected
on the surface of my tea,
and imagine for a
moment
that they are fireflies drifting
through a summer night.

IV. Più mosso

The bone-white birches stretch
their limbs in the bitter breeze –
in the ancient swollen hills,
veins of the earth—
where the sky bleeds into the horizon.

V. Doloroso

Stand, defeated
in the rain
the broken curve of your back
a graceless threnody
And I, as sad as a willow tree without any
leaves

Excerpts From a Book I'll Never Write

Ashley Costantini

I'm three, and I'm confused, and I'm pretty sure North Carolina is a made-up state, like Arkan-soowah, or Nevada. They keep talking about moving South, after all, and everyone knows that 'South' is comprised of New Jersey, Texas, and Washington, DC.

I cling on to my grandmother as my uncles help load the moving truck that will carry us exactly 700.5 miles from New York to Charlotte and worry about whether or not they have pizza in such strange, mythical lands. They eat pasta, right? Raw mussels with lemon juice? Coffee with breakfast?

(I will learn that they do not, and I will also learn that you're not really supposed to give toddlers coffee.)

I will be pried, sobbing, from my Papa, and I will crave tricolore cookies that do not exist in places like North Carolina. I will be a product of two cultures, a foreign object in a Southern oyster. I will not become a pearl.

I'm four.

We're sitting in another apartment. I don't remember which one this is, if it's the one with the broken chimney or the one with the beautiful, shining lake that I discover years later was actually more of a drainage pond.

Let's say it's the latter.

Memories could use a bit of romance.

In a thick, Yankee accent, I practice the words I've learnt at preschool like it's a new language.

"Ma, what're you fixin' for din-err?"

My mother laughs so hard she nearly drops the pasta, and calls every relative we have while I dig my toes into the ragged carpet and eat with the arrogant pride of a toddler that knows she's brilliant.

We laugh. We talk. We ignore the empty seats.

Another late night. Another grumbling stomach. Another cracked wall.

I'm five, and I'm wondering why I'm here, and why, if Heaven is so great, I can't be there.

It's only a few days later that I learn I have a new father, one who art not in Heaven.

I take it as a sign.

We're at a Fourth of July parade. I'm eight, nine, ten, and my dad doesn't let us wave the flag. We don't salute. We don't Thank God for Our Troops. The sizzling juice from our neighbor's hot dogs feels like a sin, and I ask again in vain why he hates the military. "We still have your service badge," I complain aimlessly, wriggling my red, white, and blue painted toenails through my old Nikes.

He tells me it's all brainwashing and violence. I don't ask again.

It takes three years, a wooden box, and two broken families for me to understand his hatred. It takes another year and an Iraqi refugee for me to share it.

"Okay, but will your real dad be there?"

The dust pricks my eyes like little bursts of sun, playing hidden amongst the pews. "I dunno. He's not, like... religious. But I think so?" The father frowns down at me, eyes kind and bemused, just barely missing the meaning of my words, like singing a hymn you haven't heard in a while.

"Mr. Costantini will be there, you mean?"

I'm twelve.

It's the first time I have to defend what family means to someone that thinks it begins and ends in blood.

I am a juxtaposition of assorted bones and tendons and joints jutting out at strange angles.

I don't see my mother in my hips, triangles of hard stone sticking out from my form like the handles of a bicycle. I don't see my aunts in the patterns of my ribs, each one standing proudly visible. I am fourteen, sixteen, too old to be taken seriously, the same size now as I was when I was twelve and landing with a sickening crunch on the floor mat, bones cracking where my ass should be.

(You know cheerleaders. If a girl falls in the middle of a stage and nobody's around to notice, can you still hear the retching in the bathroom stalls?)

My mother looks at my legs. "That's just not fair."

I think of the hunger in the pit of my belly. No, it's not.

I am a chorus of sins and the world is listening.

I'm fourteen when I have my first thoughts about a girl, when I can't help it. Which is fine. I've always been okay with.... that kind of thing.

Except it isn't fine. Except it's never been me that was One of Those, except it was never me that they talked about when they said girls can be hormonal. Every word I've said about God and love seems hollow in my throat as I stare at the ceiling, and against everything I believe in, I whisper a desperate prayer. Just in case.

I believe in God, but does He believe in me?

The water in Queens isn't anything like the kind you see in Florida.
I am seventeen, and the Woodstock bead I played with when I was two is now hanging from my neck.
Its previous owner is floating out to sea, ashes flecked against teal water like an oil spill. The sight chokes me, but there's no National Geographic photographer to capture that, no clamouring outrage on behalf of a teenage girl, no petitions to put an end to sudden strokes.
The tears come thick and fast, but understanding doesn't.
Years will pass, and I will still be waiting for my grandfather to burst, larger than life, from the surface of the waves.

Amazing Amy is touted as a villain, a liar, a detriment to feminism. She is the opposite of praxis, an example to be used and discarded.
She wears the blood of her attacker like a turtleneck, flicks it from her golden locks and allows herself a moment of triumph, and where the media sees murderer, I see survivor. I am eighteen, and the tears in my eyes are not for him.
Amy Dunne is not your Cool Girl, she is not your peaceful narrative of the silent victim, and she is not your shining star of a woman that has learnt her place.
If only the rest of us could have such revenge.

I am nineteen, and I am drowning in a city two sizes too small. I am a poor kid, a Yankee, a city dweller, a reluctant patriot, and my last name does not match that of my parents. I am a hungry cheerleader, a raging queer, a survivor and a sinner.
I am ashes adrift in a boundless ocean.
I am standing on a precipice, and all I have to do is fall.

Carrying Their Voices

Annette Cashatt

“Honestly, I don’t think you can make it to a university...a GED is just a good enough diploma...is English even your native language?” – Various people from my life

People are cruel. It’s a non-debatable fact of life; 99% of people will admit to being unkind at least once, and the other 1% are liars.

We often speak of the external battles we face when pursuing our dreams, yet neglect our internal distress—pain that is often caused by other people. I reached a point in my life that every time conflict came knocking on my door, I would lose some of myself and replace that piece of me with someone else’s voice. I even began writing a poem about it that started like this:

The ghosts from years past laugh at you. They nip at your heels then when you look down dissipate into nothing. They caress their fingers over your soul and whisper sweet nothings into your ear. But the ugly, blistered truth reveals itself when you reach out to touch, to grasp, to embrace and find yourself holding nothing more or less than smoke...

And right after that I wrote: I hate my writing. I can almost hear the little voice mocking my writing; it was the voice of someone who once criticized me, and then asked “Is English even your native language?”

But I told the voices to shut-up.

That summer, the water to our house was cut off. The short story is that my dad was dead, my mom and I were not quite making enough to make ends meet, and I was working part time while going to PVCC. I would fill jugs of water from the river and carry them up to the house, go to work, and then go to my evening class.

Fast forward several weeks and we got the water turned back on just in time for the power to be cut. I would now go between two jobs, stay until 10pm at PVCC to complete my ITE119

assignments, and still do homework by candlelight on the weekends. God bless the computer lab and the library.

Around then, I decided to get my GED. I studied every day, and received flying marks on my

test. When one of my friends heard this, he told me in all seriousness that it was really just a "good enough diploma". An echo of another voice began to ring in my head.

Soon after, I was practicing driving this same friend's truck late one night. It was an old clunker, with the seat stuffing spilling out, and we had a blast driving it down the rural roads of Nelson County. But when we discussed possible colleges to transfer to, he leaned over and told me that that he did not think I "can make it to a university". That night another badgering voice was hoisted onto my back.

But I told the voices to be quiet.

I stayed with my two part-time jobs. Then added a third job. Then a fourth job. Finding no time
to sleep, I cut it down to two jobs. I was finally finding my rhythm...

Except then mom was diagnosed with stage three cancer last year. She did not have a car, but she had radiation treatments five days a week at UVA. We lived about forty minutes from the hospital, so for months my schedule became a hectic jumble of who-is-picking-up-who and may-I-pretty-please-have-an-extension-on-my-paper? She is now in remission and is doing well, thank God.

Then our dog was diagnosed with cancer. It was surreal. The voices I'd collected over the years opened their mouths and asked why I kept trying when nothing seemed to go right.

Finally, I told the voices to surcease.

And I continued writing my poem:

Then the sun rises. It shatters the quiet night like a modern day bomb. It sweeps the cloth of stars away with a tapestry of colors - pale yellows, piercing blues, burning reds and dancing violets. The stone that has slowly sheathed your skin and encased your mind shy's away from the light. But it can't hide - it breaks, it is destroyed by the warmth and its leftover pebbles are taken away by the wind. Once again, you breathe.

There is an entire cosmos singing to us. If we never quell the voices we carry, we will never hear its beauty. A voice won't drown out my name when it's called on graduation day.

RUN

Joseph Taglavore

The sound of a set of fingers could be heard throughout room 832. Adie breathed a sigh of relief as she stretched back into her chair. "How long have I been at it?" She pondered to herself. She glanced around the once crowded computer lab, her eyes passing over the clock on the wall. "Nine- Fifty!" She quietly exclaimed. Adie stood up from her chair and walked toward the printer. The hum of the fan was the only noise save her feet hitting the cold blue floor. Adie searched the printer for her print job. "Come on, where is it? Where is it!?" She exasperatedly muttered. Her print job was nowhere to be found. She looked around and saw the remains of some poor student's paper left on the desk. Huh? That wasn't there before. Or was it? She pondered this to herself as she crossed room 832 to investigate the abandoned workstation. Her eyes scanned the papers and glowing computer monitor. A word document was open on the screen. "18-21-14 18-21-14," the text read. "What does that mean?" she half wondered.

BURRRRRM!

Adie jumped at the sudden loud noise. Her heart skipped a beat. The printer hummed quietly after its initial outburst. Adie breathed an easy sigh as she realized how silly she was being. "A printer, printing. Yup Adie, definitely a strange occurrence," she thought to herself with a smirk. She once again crossed the blue floor toward the printer. "Finally I can get my paper printed." She picked up the troublemaking document. She quickly looked at the document. It took her a minute to make heads or tails of the thing. It was a black sheet of paper with green text on it. "What kinda freaky class is this kid in?" She asked aloud. She flipped over the document, and was greeted by the same message that was on the computer: 18-21-14 18-21-14. "Is it a phrase? A problem? What is it? And what is with this green blob!?" She asked loudly to no one in particular.

BURRRRRM!

Adie's heart and body collectively jumped for the second time that night. "Freakin' printer!" She angrily spat at the machine. Another document had made itself known. Adie picked up the document and stared, slightly more unnerved than last time, at it. "R21 14 R2114." She read aloud. "What does that me...?"

BURRRRRM!

She was cut off again by the infernal machine. "You know, you're really starting to get on my nerves!" She angrily stated to the machine. It responded with yet another document. She picked up the new document. "R-U-14 R-U-14." Roo14? Rout 14? "What is wrong with this printer!?" She huffed angrily. "All I want is to print my paper!"

BURRRRRM!

As if in response the printer gave her one final document. She dutifully picked it up and looked it. The paper contained the green blob again. Her eyes went wide. On the back of the document, she saw four lines.

18-21-14 18-21-14

R-21-14 R-21-14

R-U-14 R-U-14

R-U-N R-U-N

Her eyes widened. She ran for the door.

SLAM!

The wood door slammed shut. She slipped on the first document. Her head cracked against the ground. The last thing she saw before blacking out was the cold blue floor. She finally knew what the green blob was. A picture of a student. A male student. Rendered in green text on a black background.

BURRRRRM!

The printer printed one more document that night. A picture of a student. A female student rendered in green text on a black background. With the numbers 8-5-12-16 13-5: typed on the back.

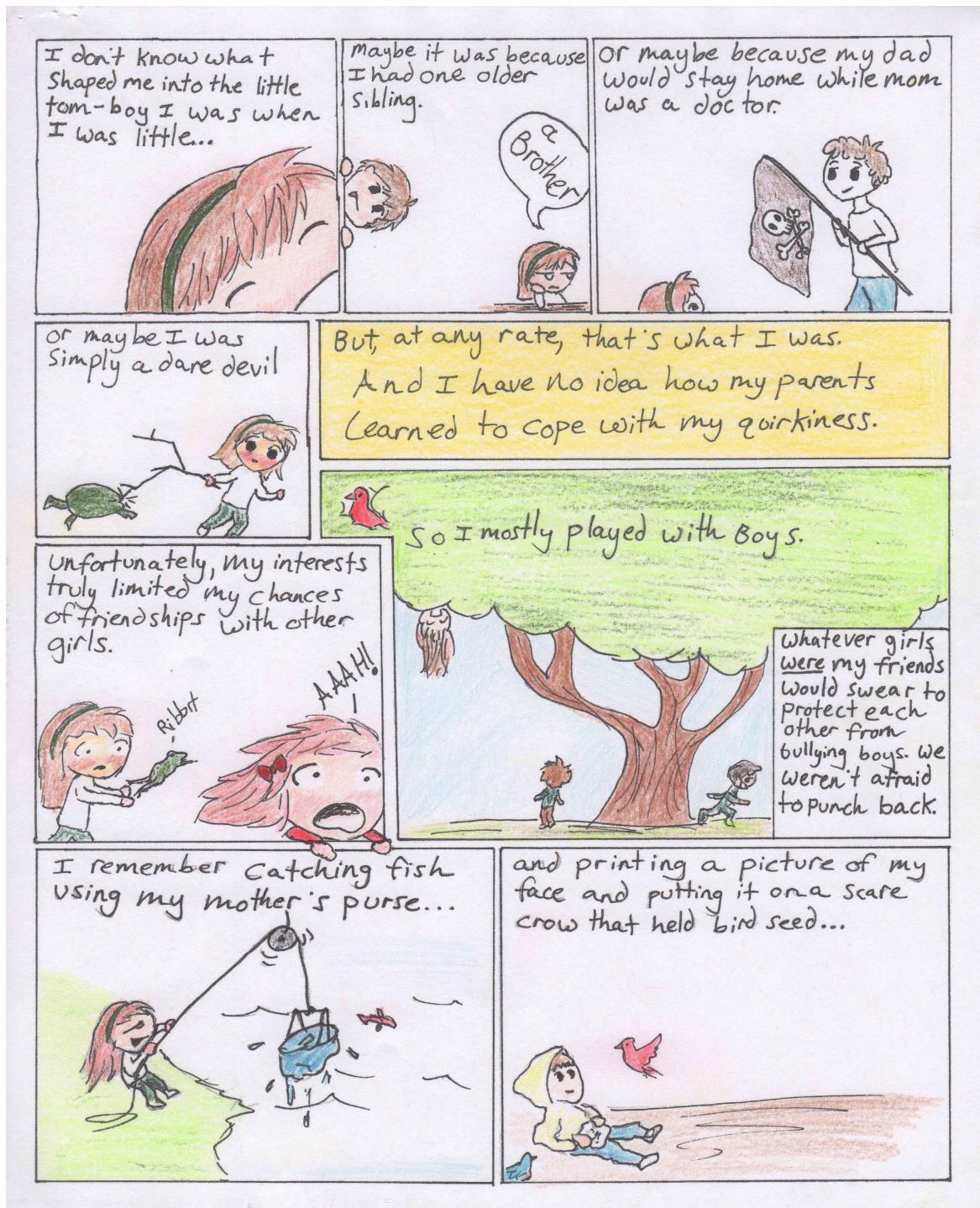
The printer hummed contently.

LOVE TREES



Yu Prue

I'M THAT GIRL



and eventually trading places with the scare crow for hours, watching birds eat from my hands.

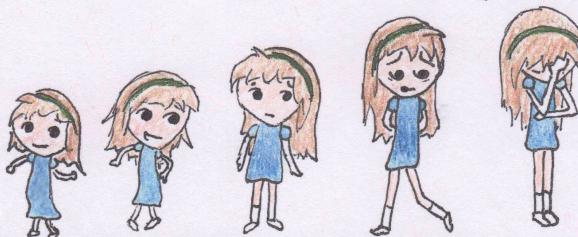


I would wear boy's Sailor Shirts and skirt hybrids, so with a little unfolding I could reveal beautiful pants underneath.



I remember only wearing a dress on Sunday morning and even then I would only consent to my blue, simple dress.

I wore that dress for years. and years.



By the end, it could have passed as a blouse.

Yep. That's who I was.



The girl who dreamed of winning street fights,



and couldn't be bribed to wear a dress more than once a week...

and I was proud of who I was. as a person. as a child. as a girl.



But also the girl who had a "wobbly-baby"

and thought Butterflies were the best animals on earth

Eileen Wilcox

A Proposal Outline to End War, Hunger, Poverty,

James Irving Mann

I. Call for a seven day conference of world leaders in a neutral setting.

- A. Perhaps, Geneva, Switzerland would be a good place to meet.
- B. All leaders would be required to bring: (1) pictures of their children and/or their grandchildren (other family member pictures could be included, if so desired), (2) a three gallon container of their favorite ice cream, (3) a large package of their favorite cookies, and (4) their favorite axiom.

II. On day #1...

- A. The leaders will share their pictures with one another and discuss the dreams and the hopes they have for their children and grandchildren.
- B. The leaders will also share what they feel is the most important gift and/or legacy they can leave their children and grandchildren.

III. On day #2....

- A. The leaders will summarize their discussions from the previous day.

1. They will discover the greatest gift they can leave their children and grandchildren is a world at peace.
 - a. All leaders will then decide to cease hostilities with other countries.
- B. A discussion will also be held on deciding what to do with all the weapons and armaments that each country still has since they no longer have any useful purpose.
 1. It will be decided that a discussion on this matter will come at a later date.

IV. On day #3....

- A. The leaders will spend the day sharing their ice cream and cookies with one another.

V. On day #4....

- A. The leaders will discuss ways hunger can be eliminated in the world.
 1. They will discover that when all countries start sharing their surplus food with other nations, there will be enough food to feed the entire world.
- B. The leaders will also discover that many countries will need newer and better farm machines to help in the planting and harvesting of future crops.
 1. Concerns will be raised that the world may not have enough steel to manufacture such a large number of farm machines.

- a. One of the leaders (perhaps, it will be the King of Norway) will point out since all of the world's weapons and armaments are of no use, they could be melted down and made into tractors, plows, and other farm machines.
- b. A motion will be presented to do so; it will pass by a unanimous decision.

VI. On day #5....

- A. This day will be broken into morning and afternoon sessions.
 - 1. In the morning session, the leaders will talk about their favorite axiom and what it means to them and how it has shaped their lives.
 - a. Many of them will quote the Golden Rule in its various forms, meanings, and structures.
 - 2. In the afternoon session, the leaders will discuss ways that poverty can be eliminated in the world.
 - a. When the discussion turns to the elimination of poverty, it occurs to them that actually living by the Golden Rule would mean nations sharing their resources with each other and making sure all of their brothers and sisters in the world community are taken care of.
 - b. A motion will be made (perhaps, it will be the President of Mozambique) who will say, that since the world has enough 'stuff', we should simply start living by the Golden Rule and begin sharing with our neighbors throughout the world.
 - c. The motion will pass by a unanimous decision.

VII. On Day #6....

- A. The leaders will discuss how disease and illness can be eradicated from the world.
 - 1. The leaders will discover that war, hunger, and poverty are primarily responsible for many of the diseases and illnesses in the world.
 - a. Hence, since these three "Teratogens" will soon be banished from the earth, the nations' leaders will realize that they need to concentrate on their citizens maintaining a healthy life-style in an era of freedom and choice.

VIII. On Day #7....

- A. The leaders will depart from Geneva and return to their homelands.
 - 1. They will leave with peace in their souls, joy in their hearts, and a prayer on their lips as they look toward a future guided by a Divine Principle which states, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

FROM ONE TO ANOTHER

Veronica Haunani Fitzhugh

You spend a lot of time hiding who you really are. You think others will judge you unkindly if they knew the real you. You feel this way, because you judge yourself and others harshly and are overwhelmed with feelings of shame and hostility.

I know you.

I know there are multiple days in a row you cannot sleep. I know the deep phantom voices you begin to hear. I know the murderous plots you begin to believe.

Insomnia, hallucinations, paranoia...

I know what it is to not trust my reality.

I know when you can't get out of bed. I know when you can't do the work of your life. I know when you can't learn anything beyond how much you hate yourself and want to die.

Depression, lethargy, suicide...

I know what it is to be a danger to myself.

I know your impossible highs followed by your crushing lows.

I know how you cheat, lie, and steal to try to make it better if only for the moment. I know your band aid solutions are wearing thin and will soon fall away leaving way for unchecked, unfettered severe mental illness with no coping or healing skills.

I know you very well. I know you feel lost.

Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves.

Henry David Thoreau

This feeling of being lost means a time of growing and learning. Your current confusion has a reason.

I know it feels like it will last forever. I know it gets in the way of your goals and hopes. I know you think no one is capable of understanding. I know it is painful. I know it seems like senseless suffering.

Not all wounds are visible. Some we bury within ourselves creating for ourselves cages of secrecy.

Your secrecy keeps you locked within yourself. Your secrecy keeps you from asking for life affirming help. Your secrecy slowly kills you.

Free yourself from your secrets. Unlock yourself. Come into the light, and truly see yourself for the first time.

To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength.

Criss Jami

There will be an end. It will come with a lot of personal work and responsibility, therapy, medication, truth, and faith. It will take years. It will cost you transitory, illusionary things like wealth, fair weather friends, and prestige. It will also gain you amazing, lasting gifts like patience, compassion, and strength.

Through your new blessings, you will heal the pain and estrangement in your family. You will learn how your mother views you as a woman of Aphrodite and Joan of Arc caliber. You will teach your father how to love without always understanding or agreeing with that loved one.

Trust me.

Our sorrows and wounds are healed only when we touch them with compassion.

Buddha

Your biggest hurdle is not overcoming any shortcomings due to your mental illness, but meeting yourself and others with empathy, acceptance, and kindness. You must learn these lessons for the suffering to subside. Until you put away your prejudices and criticism, the pain will seem insurmountable.

No one is a bum. No one is crazy. No one is stupid. No one is worthless. No one is beyond love.

Not even you.

And learn these lessons you will, in lone padded cells, in baptismal pools, in handcuffs.

Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

Khalil Gibran

And remember to be led by your dreams, not your memories. Remember your creativity in lieu
of remembering your painful history.

Remember the creative force who made you and loves you.

You will find Her, too, in lone padded cells, in baptismal pools, in handcuffs.

Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add color to the sunset sky.

Rabindranath Tugore

You are more than a summation of your past actions, thoughts, moods, and feelings.

You are not your diagnosis. You are not the monster you paint yourself to be. You never were.

Whether in times of personal calm or personal storm, you are always the heavenly sky.

You are victory! You are a miracle! You are spirit! You are life!

I was you. And you will be the best part of me.

Yours Truly,

Veronica Age 36

P.S. Don't be ashamed that I know your story. It inspires me daily.

Your brilliance outshines all but the brightest
of stars. Your face blooms
serenely down at mine, upturned,
luminous.

Nepenthe

Hannah Ho

Planes slice across the constellations,
leaving gossamer trails in their wake.

Whirling thoughts recall
blurred fragments, dissonant loops of sound:

The crunch of frozen leaves beneath boots,
a buttered half-moon, perfectly framed
by inky branches
painted against an inkier sky,

the diaphanous sheen of faint starlight kissing your hair.

Our perception of distance is a measure of heartache and restless
dreams.
From the top of the earth to the bottom of the sky, unbearably vast

your day is my night, and I,
mesmerized
cannot fathom the depths of a single glance,
let alone the infinity of your lips whispering life, life, life.

SQUABBLING GODS

Spencer Wood

This is a story told by the Undrani people, a small, bison-herding culture in the Maha mountains of central Asia.

Right, so.

In your grandmother's grandmother's grandmother's time, when people were wise and pious and respected their elders, and the Mother of Spirits was still smooth-skinned and starry-eyed, there was a god by the name of Koya, who governed malice in its lowest forms, and who was patron of the loud and the cruel, and who was kind of a twit.

Each god ruled a world of their own; the Mother of Spirits plucked new gods from her mind (ahem); the Many-Mouths-Talker spun new stories for their people to tell; the Swallowing Thing ate the world to keep it from getting too big. In Koya's mind, his world was that of laughter and merriment, and his duty was to create as much of it as possible. Even if, more often than not, he was the only one laughing.

Koya's sister was Agga, youngest and fiercest of the spirits, whose task was to protect the order of things; each thing had its place and shape and color, and Agga's job was to guard that order, and keep things as they were. She took her duty perhaps more seriously than any of those around her, not that she aware of that. Agga, naturally, was Koya's favorite target.

Whenever Agga slept, Koya would poke tiny holes in the night sky, letting drops of day leak in. Try as she might, she could never plug them all up. Whenever she blinked, he would pluck each of the planets from their perch in the heavens and juggle them, getting their alignments all mixed up. Whenever she talked, he would switch her words with someone else's, until there were too many for anyone to remember. He was kind of a

twit, is what I'm getting at here.

Eventually, when Agga couldn't take any more, she decided to get back at Koya. Agga, though, was not a trickster, and didn't know how to play Koya at his own game. She was a warrior, fiercest of the spirits, and she decided to make him play hers.

Right, so.

Agga waited for a dark, warm night, when Koya was sleeping under the stars (his stars).

She came upon him in the night, dressed as a wolf (all good hunters dress as wolves), intending to grab him from his campsite. But Koya slept lightly, and heard her approach (Agga was fierce, but perhaps she was not so subtle). Before she could come upon him, he hopped from his bedroll and ran off into the world, Agga giving chase just behind him.

She chased him through forests and over plains, hopping from mountain to mountain, diving beneath the ocean, under and over the houses of humans (who were used to squabbling gods invading their homes in the dead of night by then, unlike the children these days, who rarely have to deal with more than a passing devil or two), tumbling from country to country, eventually world to world, jumping from one earth to the next.

Finally, as day was just relieving night, they landed at the Bottom of Everything, where only one spirit lived. Koya landed first, crashing through the spirit's house with a scream head all the way at the Top; Agga landed just after, nearly crushing her brother beneath her.

The spirit woke with a start, not altogether surprised to see the two in his room at dawn, a fresh hole in the ceiling (this spirit was maybe not so different from humans when it came to dealing with squabbling gods).

The spirit who lived at the Bottom of Everything was named Oyok, oldest of the gods. They (Oyok had no gender, the idea being too newfangled for a cosmic abstraction from the beginning of time) were the God of Curdled Milk, People Who Trip Frequently When Walking in the Forest, and Children Who Interrupt Their Elders Right in the Best Part of the Story (shhh). In the beginning of time, when the gods were making themselves, and choosing what they wished to govern, no one wished to govern any of the worst things; so Oyok, in their kindness, had chosen to govern all of them, so that none of the others had to. So they lived at the Bottom of Everything, all by themselves.

"What exactly," Oyok said, grimacing, "brings the two of you to my hut, at this odd hour?"

Koya and Agga gave each other no time to speak, trying to retell their story at the same time, contradicting each other at every turn.

“He poked holes in-”

“She woke me up-”

“He keeps changing my words-”

“She chased me-”

After a few minutes of patiently listening and trying to decipher their story, Oyok silenced them both with a wave of his hand.

“The two of you have behaved poorly, each to each other, and for that, you must be punished.” He turned first to Koya. “Little Koya, the trickster, you are loud and uncaring, your amusement comes at the suffering of others, and you offer little to the world, less than even the smallest gods. In short, you are a twit, and your jokes are bad.” Next, he turned to Agga. “Fierce Agga, you are serious and quick to anger, and believe you can solve your problems with violence and force. You are fierce, but that is all you are.” The two tried to interrupt, but Oyok silenced them both again. “What you have done is wrong, and you must be punished. But it was also, maybe, a little funny. So, too, shall your punishment.”

Right, so.

Oyok raised their arms and began chanting the ancient language of creation, from which all things sprang (though they didn’t remember all of it, so they had to make a few words up). To their horror, Koya and Agga lost their place and their shape and their color, swirling together, their thoughts and feelings and bones and blood and memories and skin falling into each other like two waves crashing against each other, and soon enough neither could remember which was which.

Oyok smiled, and looked at the single god standing where, soon before, there had been two. Koya-and-Agga was- were staring at their body in confusion, unsure of who they were and weren’t. “Perhaps, little ones, you may now find harmony, between the fierceness and merriment, or duty and... Well, being kind of a twit.”

And so it was that Koya-and-Agga returned to the earth they’d come from, unable to tell themselves apart, and taught the spirits around them the new thing Oyok had taught them, called balance.

IMAGE IN THE MIRROR

Michelle Stanislaus

As I sat at my desk on that cool summer evening, I found myself doodling my bucket list.

It consisted of the basic things any person would write when they are looking at the second half of their life. Things like traveling to Paris, learning to play piano, and learning to speak Italian. Things that were all fun to consider. Then there was the big one, the one that was underlined, the one that had the stars around it: Go to college. I sat and thought hard about that one. "I can do this," I thought. I knew there would be obstacles- money, time, and family- but I knew I could overcome those obstacles. However, I had one obstacle I did not know if I could overcome. That obstacle was the image in the mirror. It was me.

Money was not an issue. I worked for a company that would pay for my education. Time, time was always an issue, but I knew if I thought hard and planned carefully I could find the time. My family was so supportive that I knew I could not use them as a reason not to go, so what was left? Why was I so afraid to go to college? It was me, it was that image in the mirror. I never felt that I was important enough to go. I was married at one time to a man that always told me, "College was a waste of time." He would say things like, "How stupid could you be to want to go to college at your age?" He would ask, "What will I get out of you going to college?" Once those thoughts were in my head they just did not go away no matter how ridiculous I knew they were. I would hear his voice every time I looked at that image in the mirror.

For many years other things needed to come first before I could ever consider going to college. I had three kids, which I was essentially raising alone. They were young; they needed an education way more than I did. The time I would need to spend on school was needed for things much more important like taking kids to sports after school, helping them with homework, making sure everyone had what they needed for the next day, running errands. I was a wife, a mother, and surely not a student.

Now my kids are grown and out on their own. The husband is now an ex-husband. The obstacle are all gone with one exception, the image in the mirror. Now what was stopping me, nothing? I can do this, I thought. I needed to look at that image and realize I was deserving of a college education, and fifty three years old is only a number. I needed to take the voices in my head and put them out with the ex. "I can do this, I can do this," I repeat-

ed time and time again. I replaced all the negative thoughts with images of me walking the lawn in a cap and gown. I needed to change the image in the mirror.

I began with reorganizing my day. I took my wasted time and turned it into study time. I made my school schedule fit into my work day. I have learned to be flexible, and there are times when life just throws a wrench into my perfectly planned day. I have mastered the art of dusting myself off and getting right back on track. I am embracing the art of surprise in my new and wild adventure.

After one semester of college under my belt the image in the mirror has a wonderful new look. It has the image of a woman, a mother, and a passionate student. Today, I love the image in the mirror.

I was so busy, see

So busy that Death couldn't be with me

He tried to make an appointment

(But my mom canceled it for me)

Then he tried to surprise me

(But my car had just burst into flames and I couldn't pay him
any attention)

A might bit exasperated now, he sent a doe to speak with me

(But I had to swerve around her because I was running late and
had no time to stop)

What about me could it be?

Death, my love, it just was never meant to be between thee and
me

TOO BUSY

Annette Cashatt

THE WOMAN OF A THOUSAND FACES

R. Lewis Wright

There it was again, that annoying buzzing sound, pulling Katelyn out of the best sleep she'd had in a month. She twisted and turned in the pale satin sheets, trying to avoid waking up, but the sound of her phone vibrating against the dresser began again. Reluctantly she threw the top sheet to the side and sat up in bed. She snatched the offending phone off the dresser and answered it.

"Speak," she demanded.

A light, young, male voice on the other end said, "Hi Katie. It's Max." "I thought I told you and the agency that I was on vacation for the rest of the month. I also told you never to call me before 9 A.M." "I'm sorry if I woke you, but it would help if you told me which time zone you were in." "Cut the baloney. We both know you've tracked this phone and know I'm staying at a resort in Saint Lucia. Now I am going back to bed and after that, I'm going to continue my vacation."

"Well, I hope you already took time to see the Pitons, because I need you, Katie; I need the woman of a thousand faces." She looked out the open window of her bungalow framed by the pale, gossamer curtains stirring in the warm early morning breeze. "I told you to stop calling me that, and I'm not taking another job right now." "I'll make you a deal. Double your usual fee, and I promise to stop calling you the woman of a thousand faces."

Max might be the closest thing she had to a friend. Being a private intelligence contractor was a lonely business, never knowing who to trust. The roaming lifestyle provided an ever changing array of scenery, but companionship, even having a pet, was an unaffordable luxury. "Don't make promises you can't keep. I'll do it." He chuckled and said, "Thanks, Tiger. I owe you one. The mission pack with pocket cash, details, and plane tickets will be delivered to your bungalow within the hour." She shrugged, hung up the phone, and headed for the shower. Twenty minutes later, while sitting in front of the mirror in her blue bath robe brushing her long, straight, naturally black hair, a manila envelope was shoved under the bungalow door. She walked over

and picked it up. Inside were all the usual little bits. She opened the passport to the photo page. "Predictable," she said to herself. Max liked blondes and had put her picture on the passport with long blonde hair and generous candy apple red lipstick. Then she saw the name on the passport, Woatf, Willow E., and choked back a laugh. She shook her head and said to herself, "Woatf, woman of a thousand faces, that joker."

She pulled her two bags from the closet, and threw them open on the bed. The slightly smaller bag was filled with her wigs, makeup, latex facial appliances, and the other tools of her trade. She pulled on her red and orange sundress decorated with tropical flowers, blonde wig, and then packed the remaining contents of the closet into the larger suitcase.

Two hours later she took the resort bus to the airport and boarded the first of two flights that would take her to London via Miami. The ticket, security, and border agents spent more time looking at her dress than at her passport. In the back corner seat of the first class cabin, she pulled the mission brief from the envelope and began looking over the details while the jet took to the air.

It was a two part mission, surveillance and infiltration. The target was just your usual scumbag arms merchant, code named Scorpio, originally from some corner of Russia, and graduating to dealing in nuclear materials. The agency wanted her to watch his movements, listen in on his conversations, and get close enough to intercept his phone communications. Ultimately, she would break into his office and use the included USB drive to search his computer. She shuffled the contents back into the manila envelope as the stewardess arrived.

"Can I get you anything, ma'am?" she asked.

"Just a glass of chardonnay, please."

When Katelyn landed at Heathrow airport, she took a taxi to Piccadilly Circus. The plethora of shops, cafes, and neon signs around this traffic circle reminded her of New York's Times Square. She stopped the taxi and walked the remaining few blocks along Coventry Street, rolling her suitcases behind her until she reached the hotel Thistle Piccadilly, where her contact had reserved a room for her. The room was beautiful, more luxurious than she needed for this short-term assignment, with a separate seating area, and, as an added touch, Max had ordered up fruit and flowers whose beautiful fragrance greeted her when she opened the door. The bellman set down her suitcases on the stand near the closet and after she tipped him quietly exited. She unpacked a few dresses and hung them up in the closet, but left everything else in her bags. She was only scheduled to be here for five days, and preferred to remain prepared to leave in a hurry.

"First things first," she said to herself. She walked into the bedroom, slipped off the long blonde wig, and pulled the sundress over her head. She quickly changed into a pair of jeans, a gray t-shirt, and tucked her hair up under a black baseball cap. "Time to survey the territory," she said out loud. Before leaving the room she grabbed her bailout packet from the hidden pouch in the lining of the smaller suitcase. It contained another passport in a fake name, two

thousand Euros, and a lock box key. If the job went sideways and she couldn't get back to the hotel, she would have an escape plan.

First, she walked casually around the area at least a block from her hotel. When she found a suitable place on a barely used side street and no one was watching, she slid the bail-out packet into a small space at the meeting of two walls. Comfortable that no casual passer-by would accidentally discover it, she turned her attention to the job. Her target had rented an office right on Piccadilly Circus, and she scoped out the entrance, taking careful note of all the restaurants and cafes she could use for cover before returning to her hotel.

The next day she tied her hair up at the back of her neck and wore a gray running suit. She spent most of the day bored, sitting in a coffee shop, staking-out the front of his building, trying to deduce the habits of her quarry. He typically wore dress shirts with black or gray slacks, and a medium length black leather coat. Usually, he left for lunch around noon, dinner around six, and returned after dinner. The surprisingly short Russian man with dark hair and several days of beard growth seemed to be staying in his office overnight, and always traveled with at least one oversized bodyguard.

On the second day, Katelyn wore a simple black dress and conservative black heels. She had on a blonde bob wig and full makeup. It took at least an hour in front of the mirror each day for her to apply the makeup, along with any additional latex appliances. In her experience, minor facial changes were the key to a good disguise. It wasn't like being in the movies; no amount of foundation could cover excessive use of latex. A small modification to the bridge of her nose or airbrushed shadows to accentuate her cheek bones usually did the trick. Anyone could stakeout a target with a huge telephoto lens and a parabolic microphone. Working a target this closely required subtle and believable changes in appearance.

She trailed Scorpio more closely, following him to one of his usual lunch spots. She looked so different each day that neither he nor his bodyguard gave her a second glance. Sitting at a nearby table, she watched him in her peripheral vision as he ordered a steak for lunch and drank a carafe of vodka. She nibbled at her plate of grilled chicken breast with buttered peas, ginger carrots, and steamed broccoli, while pulling out her tablet computer and inserting the special USB dongle which allowed her to intercept cellular phone communication. The target's phone, even though it was sitting silently in his pocket, updated itself on the network every ten minutes, and while he sat eating, he received several text messages.

Once she had captured the unique identifier of his mobile device, she uploaded all the information she had gathered to the agency. They operated a sophisticated network of electronic listening stations, and with his mobile device I.D. would be able to record and decipher all his communications. When Scorpio got up to leave the restaurant from his table in the back, she made her way to the bathroom and, passing by him, took the opportunity to slip an audio bug, disguised as a one Pound coin, into the pocket of his coat.

Day three, she opted for her silver business suit, white shell, square rimless glasses, and a medium length red haired wig. When she looked in the mirror, she didn't even recognize herself. She spent the day listening to the audio from the bug, and following him to lunch and dinner. He took several meetings with a variety of men and one woman, and as Katelyn watched them, she diligently but discreetly took pictures of everyone using cameras hidden in her ink pen, watch, and makeup compact. As usual, she uploaded everything to Max. Scorpio took the last gulp of his after dinner aperitif, wiped his mouth with his napkin, and headed for door. Walking past Katelyn, he took a second glance at the redhead in the business suit. Silently, she cursed herself. She had gotten sloppy, wearing the same disguise for lunch and dinner. If he had recognized her, she might have blown the whole operation.

On the fourth day, she took more care. For the lunch game, she wore her jeans and gray t-shirt with the black baseball cap, but for dinner, she contacted an old resource to pose as her male companion. He had a narrow face, a pointy jaw, and looked good in his black jacket and tie. Hiding in plain sight while being the center of attention was one of her specialties. She looked stunning in a red oriental style satin dress with her long blonde wig. She and her tall dark-haired friend laughed and pretended to be on a date to deflect any suspicion. She dutifully took over fifty pictures and sent them all back to headquarters where teams of analysts would identify all of Scorpio's contacts.

Finally, the last day of her mission dawned. Dressed in a simple white shirt and black slacks paired with a shiny purple collarless jacket, she followed him at lunch. When he went to dinner, it was time to infiltrate the man's office. She was waiting, leaning against a wall half a block away, dressed in her jeans, a black t-shirt, and her long black parka. As soon as he was out of sight, she approached the door to the office.

The door had a high quality electronic keypad lock, difficult to defeat directly, but the metal and glass door was too well used. There was a very slight gap between the door and the frame, into which she slipped a flat flexible piece of metal. In a second, the door unlatched, and she entered the building. Up two flights of narrow stairs and she was standing at the door to his office. She deftly picked the deadbolt lock and stepped inside checking the corners for video cameras.

There was no desk in the office, which looked more like a lounge. White fabric overstuffed chairs and couches, along with numerous coffee and end tables, ringed the room. On the coffee table farthest from the door next to the large bay windows she spotted his laptop computer. She strode confidently across the room, opened the laptop, and inserted the USB drive, which broke past his password and began decoding his files.

The infiltration program took a couple of minutes to run, and she used the time to poke through the target's email. She sat in stunned silence when she noticed a third of the man's communications were to or from the internet domain woodandtrail.com. She knew from experience

that it was a cover for homeland security contacts, and opened a few of the recent emails. One in particular included photos of her walking in Piccadilly Circus wearing her blonde wig with the text "Thanks for sending your agent. She's been very helpful and agreed to work for us."

The infiltration program had finished its work and shutdown the computer. "They were running counter intelligence surveillance on me the whole time. Did someone at the agency tip them off?" Katelyn asked herself in wonder. "I need to get out of here, now!" She pulled the USB drive and shut the lid on the laptop before running for the door. She leapt down the stairs two at a time, making a mad dash for the exit. Just when she reached the front door of the building, she met the target and his bodyguard coming back in.

The bodyguard lunged at her and tried to get his massive arms around her. She ducked under his grasp and kicked him in the back of the knee while grabbing and pulling his shoulders from behind. His leg collapsed and he fell backward hitting his head hard on the unforgiving tile floor. When she turned to face Scorpio, he had a six inch flip-out locking knife in his hand and made a wild swipe at her with it. She felt the hot burning sensation as it cut her left arm from shoulder to elbow.

She grabbed his knife hand and twisted it in a wrist lock, which forced him to drop the weapon. He went berserk, lifted her injured left arm, and began punching her over and over in her left side. What his attack lacked in finesse, it made up for in sheer ferocity. She jabbed the thumb of her right fist into the side of his neck, which stunned him long enough for her to get free, swivel around behind him, and put him in a choke hold.

He finally went limp and dropped to the floor, just as his bodyguard was staggering to his feet. She didn't hesitate. There was no one now between her and the exit, and she made a run for it. She flew out the door and dashed down the street, away from the circus, in search of a secluded area to hide. After taking several turns, she found a deserted alley and dove into an open dumpster, pulling the lid closed over herself. She lay there in silence, leaning against the bags of smelly refuse, waiting. After a few moments, she heard the heavy, hurried footfalls of her pursuers run past.

Katelyn stayed there for ten minutes to make sure they didn't double back before she pushed the lid open with her one good arm and dragged herself out of the dumpster. She flopped onto the ground like a fish, gasping for breath, and clutching her broken ribs with her injured left arm. The pain caused her to take halting breaths, but it was bearable. She lay there looking up at the clear starry night sky and took a moment to thank those stars she was still alive. She had evaded capture, but laying there she couldn't ignore the facts of her situation. The mark had escaped, and due to the information he had sent them, the agency now believed she was a turncoat. She sat up and climbed the side of the dumpster to help her stand, shakily. She searched around until she found some fairly clean napkins and used them to wipe the blood and grime from her face, arms, and legs. Then she straightened her hair and pulled her coat tightly around her slender frame.

Exiting the alley, she walked a block and a half on the dark and deserted street before she spotted an open coffee shop. She slipped through the door and picked her way around the dozen patrons some standing and some sitting in booths with red velvet benches, making her way straight to the ladies toilet. Once inside, she locked the door behind herself and pulled her coat off to take stock of her situation.

Her left arm had stopped bleeding from the long gash and didn't appear to be broken. She touched her left side and winced at her painful ribs, but they would heal. From the looks of her injuries she could avoid going to the hospital, although tomorrow she would be covered with dark bruises, impossible to ignore. From the pocket of her coat, she retrieved her compact and began applying her makeup again. She tied her hair up in a bun at the back of her head just as someone began knocking on the bathroom door. "Just a minute," she replied.

She braced herself for anything as she opened the door, but it was only another woman, waiting to use the facilities. Katelyn checked the dining area and the street outside for any signs of her enemies and, when she was sure it was safe, slipped out into the moonless night. She thought it doubtful they had traced her back to the hotel, so she retrieved her bailout packet from its hiding place and decided to carefully work her way back to her room.

She was able to get through the lobby without anyone noticing her wounded condition. Once in her room she took a few minutes to scrub out the gash in her arm, apply alcohol, and bandage it with gauze and medical tape. Then she switched into a clean pair of jeans and a long sleeved black shirt, that would hide the bandage on her arm, and was ready to leave the room in less than fifteen minutes. On her way out, she stopped at the front desk, just long enough to drop off the key and told the stunned clerk, "I'm sorry. I'm in a hurry, just bill the card on file."

She stepped into the waiting cab, and then noticed a man emerge from the dark alley across the street. He was smoking a cigarette, watching her. Max didn't smoke, but this guy seemed familiar. Then she recognized him; his name was Martin. He was a washed up field agent, assigned to a desk after a series of dubious failures. Her phone beeped. Martin disappeared, walking along the street as she looked down to check her phone. The message from Max read, "Major blowback from operation. Ghost until I contact you by alternate method." She flipped the phone over, popped off the back, pulled out the SIM card, and snapped it in half. She wanted to ensure she wasn't followed, so she asked the driver, "I'm leaving London tonight, would you mind driving me past a few sites?" He was only too happy to run up the fare. She directed him to drive by Trafalgar Square and the Millennium Wheel before finally going to St. Pancras station. She arrived only moments before the last departure and boarded the high speed train heading through the Chunnel to Brussels.

She kept a small crappy apartment there, stocked with an assortment of non-perishable food and a shelf full of books, on the third floor above a little pastry shop. The tiny flat barely accommodated a bed, mini-fridge, microwave, and a bathroom. The walls and door were painted with an ancient black lacquer, which looked strange in the modern compact florescent lighting.

On her way from the rail station she stopped in a grocery and, while ensuring her trail was still clean, grabbed the essentials.

When she arrived, she plugged the mini-fridge into the electrical socket, and stored the groceries inside. She would need to stay here and keep out of sight for a couple of weeks until Max posted the prearranged phrase on the internet forum. The agency might not trust her right now, but she knew she could count on Max. He would signal her when the coast was clear and she could resume her normal routine.

She pulled her copy of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* from the shelf and eased her aching body down on the bed. She couldn't relax as she continued to seethe over the betrayal. Martin had, almost certainly, sold her out. Her next task would be to track him down, beat some answers out of him, and settle the score with Scorpio. Wistfully she looked around the tiny cell and lamented, "What a way to spend the rest of my vacation. This time last week I was enjoying a beautiful bungalow in paradise, and now look at me..."

In the absence of sound
we bled into each other.

Dividing
The cells in our bodies
rubbed raw

Rubbed out

Gone.

In the absence of you
I bled into the ether.

I
me
you
alone

In the absence of ether
(which never existed,
you know.)

I bled into me.

and inside of me

I found you.

IN THE ABSENCE OF YOU

Skyler Gunderson

EDUCATION TRANSCENDENCE

Hana Alomar

Thinking back, my life seems like a dreary made-for-television movie; surreal and packed with nightmares and clichéd violence. So many people hear my story and comment on my ability to overcome situations. However, I do not feel exceptional or like a heroine. I feel my actions were (and continue to be) the ones of a woman with something to live for, with something to prove, and with something to accomplish. Wouldn't everybody persevere through these horrors to get what they wanted?

Ever since I could walk and talk, all I ever wanted was to learn. I asked for a lunch box, backpack, and notebooks for my 3rd birthday so my mother and I could play school. My mother, an elementary school teacher taking time off to raise her family, and my father, an instructor in the U.S. Air Force, were thrilled about my interest in education. They continued to nurture this academic curiosity into my teens. Despite my interests and their promotion, as a teen I was only an average student. However, I never let my lack of excellence stifle my desire to continue learning.

I attended a local college my first year out of high school. Although my grades from high school were enough to get me accepted into a few universities, I was undecided as to a course of study (major). While my family was considered “middle class”, I had to take two jobs to help pay for school

(my grades did not earn me any academic scholarships, nor did any other special talent or ability). The first semester was a disaster and I landed myself on academic probation. I could not juggle work and school with the social life I was desperately trying to hold onto. The second semester I performed much better and barely brought my G.P.A. up high enough to transfer to Virginia Commonwealth University i Richmond, where I was going to study Mass Communications.

My first year at VCU was a customary experience. I lived in the on-campus dormitory and worked two jobs as a student assistant in the English Department and as a mail room assistant for the upper-class dorm. However, I felt a huge disconnect from my peers - something in my life was still missing. I felt socially stunted - an infant amidst young adults. At 20 years old, I still had never had a boyfriend (or anything even close to one) while all of my new college classmates and old high school friends were past their adolescent interactions and were committed in serious relationships. It made me feel inadequate, abnormal, and estranged from society.

During my second year at VCU, I met an Arabic man through my best friend (who was dating the man's cousin). He was intriguing and charming with stories from places around the world - places I had always dreamed of seeing. The best part was that he was interested in me! I was enthralled. Finally I could participate in the same lifestyle my friends and peers were - a lifestyle that was expected of me as a young woman from my own family, friends, and society itself. i Literally grabbed onto the first man to come along and was determined

to make the relationship work.

School, family, and all other aspects of my social life suffered as a consequence of the importance and attention I gave this man and this relationship. Two months after meeting him, we moved in together, and four months after that we were married. The marriage was a private (and secretive) affair as my family was opposed to the rapid succession of events, the difference in age (I was 21 and he was 35), and the cultural disparities. Unbeknownst to me at the time of our marriage, I was pregnant. This fact alone solidified my resolve to make this relationship work, putting ALL else aside to ensure its success.

I tried to finish out that academic semester, however, the pregnancy and my new husband proved too much for me to handle. My husband began showing extreme control, suspicion and jealousy, becoming threatening and forceful if he felt I stayed after class too long and questioning library visits or other meetings to work on group projects. I withdrew from all classes, intending to return after the birth of my baby. Instead, within 6 months of my first child's birth, I was pregnant again and my husband's violence paranoia and suspicion were beyond control. Life became very scary.

As the years passed, I continued to try to make my husband happy, to create a loving household and to be the woman both society and my husband expected me to be. I was beginning to realize the contradiction between the two could never be reconciled. At this point, I remained in the horrors and violence of my everyday life for the sake of my children (or so I thought). I sacrificed any ideas of ever returning to college to earn my degree so that I could keep my family together

as a unit, no matter how dysfunctional.

Unfortunately, the violence, humiliation, shame, abuse and terror continued to escalate. After six children, complete social and familial isolation, and five years of a bruised, broken and shattered existence, my husband finally cracked. At approximately 4:00 P.M. on January 9, 2003, my husband attacked me more violently than ever before, threatening and assaulting me with a gun. After putting the gun down to continue assaulting me with his hands, I acquired the weapon myself. The long-story-short version of events is that I shot my husband, called the police to report my actions and surrendered myself to jail. The jail officers informed me immediately that my six children were dispersed into four different foster homes.

The threat of a trial and life imprisonment loomed over me for over a year. Upon entering the jail, I met several women familiar with the Virginia Department of Corrections and women's prison facilities. The question of whether or not I would serve time in such an institution was never an issue. The real question was how much time I would have to serve. I was handed down a sentence of 35 years with 21 of those suspended, which I quickly learned meant that I would be "going away" for 14 years.

I immediately formed alliances with other females who were also on their way to (or back) to prison. I tried to learn as much about what lay ahead of me as possible - what the facility was like, the officers, available employment, programs and classes. I learned I could earn my college degree from behind bars if I could finance it through correspondence courses. I made goals for myself - number one on that list

was to leave prison with a college degree.

When I reached Fluvanna Correctional Center for women late in 2004, I immediately inquired about taking correspondence courses and earning a degree through such classes. The costs were astronomical! I immediately was disheartened. Financial assistance was only available to offenders under age 25 - a "youthful offender's" grant. Traditional forms of financial aid were inaccessible to me because of my incarceration and offender status. My family was taking care of my six children after being isolated from me for five years preceding my arrest - there was no way I could ask them to sacrifice anymore or to reallocate monies to me that were intended to be used in raising my children. I resigned myself to the situation and realized a degree was not in my immediate future.

However, I also realized that many educational opportunities lay before me at the institution. I refused to sit idly by, marking my time off a calendar and wasting time away. I longed to be productive - to learn. More importantly, I was free to learn - free from the demands and restrictions of my husband and free from so many so many of the responsibilities faced by my un-incarcerated peers. The vocational programs offered at Fluvanna caught my interest, particularly the ones requiring higher minimum requirements. I began with the Optical Lens Technology class - an all day class that taught ophthalmology and the craft of making eyeglasses. I found the math very challenging, however, felt something inside me awaken. It was a hunger, a deep yearning for knowledge and learning. Upon completing Optical, I enrolled in Computer Aided Drafting and learned how to draw up schematics and floor plans using computer

software. I explored the advanced aspect of CAD learning 3-D drafting. During the CAD class, the institution began accepting applications for participation in a new Braille program. Those selected would learn how to read and produce Braille, transcribing books for visually challenged public school students in Virginia. I applied and was selected as one of the 12 offenders to participate in the Braille program. Within 2 years, I submitted a Braille manuscript for evaluation and received my Braille Transcriptionist Certification from the U.S. Library of Congress... but I still didn't have my degree.

I enrolled in Electrical classes while learning Braille, ensuring busy days and a plethora of information to keep my mind active. During this time, a new program was introduced to FCCW - Ms. Doris Buffet, sister of Wall Street magnate Warren Buffet, was to offer college scholarships to 25 offenders through her Sunshine Foundation. I submitted my application minutes after learning of this program. I was selected as a Sunshine Scholar to earn my Associate's Degree through Piedmont Virginia Community College. At this time, I still had seven years left on my sentence - my goal to earn my degree before my release was rejuvenated!

I submersed myself in my studies while maintaining employment and participation in other programs and vocational classes. My children began to see me as a role-model of perseverance and determination. I used my situation and hard work to illustrate to them that regardless of circumstance, great things are possible. I taught to avoid a defeatist attitude and to always look for the opportunities that abound in any given situation. I completed my Associate's Degree and am now working towards my

Bachelor's in Sociology through correspondence courses. My church, upon hearing of my continued drive and tenacity regarding education, is sponsoring me, paying for the courses and course materials. Included in the furthering of my education, I have continued to take classes at PVCC that interest me and/or will be useful towards my B.A.

Education saved my life. Education salvaged the lives of my children.

Observing me in my circumstances and my actions and attitudes regarding education instilled a desire for learning in my children. My oldest daughter graduates from High School just after my release. She is a National Honor student and will be attending college on an academic scholarship. My other children (aged 12 to 17) are all honor roll students as well, and each have plans to pursue a higher education. My children beat the statistical odds prescribed to them by society and created by those who came before me. They were able to do so because of the opportunities I took advantage of as a survivor of domestic abuse and a convicted, incarcerated felon. Education saved more than just my life - it saved my family!

MY MESSY ROOM ALPHABET



Yu Prue

THEY LIVE AMONG US

Annette Cashatt

He eats the shadows, one by one by one. They always squeak such as rats are prone to do when you douse them in kerosene and violate their noses with phosphorus. Not that his elegant claws have ever done such a grotesque thing; he leaves that sordid business for the calloused help.

Sometimes though

There are times

(When he's not filling his misshapen belly with the souls of the unfortunate, whistling a perfectly pleasant howl that would raise the hair on anyone's skin)

That he perches on the slants of roofs and stares down at the abyss of humanity. He watches the swarms scuttle by as the roaches they are. They crawl over each other, clambering to the top, sliding back down under a stampede of kicks, knuckles, thrusts; they look quite orderly though. They never actually press flesh, but they all know what they're doing every single day.

Except...except they're always oblivious to the unseen and while they scrape their knees every day to their owners, they actually believe they are free.

And he simply must filth his hands with the Homo sapiens. How can you not?

Some among the circle of brethren argue he has a choice. Why be amid them at all, they say.

Because, he tells them, humans are art in motion. To ignore them would be to sip the finest wine ever tasted, but sully it with rotten meat, and decaying flowers. Of course he must be among them.

He drifts to the pavement now. Old glass crunches underfoot and a tin can rattles as something scurries away from him. It's sundown and the city's odor shifts from putrid pollution to the

spices of a restaurant's barbecue and sautéed mushrooms. His lungs take in a deep inhalation of air and another scent: the delicious aroma of human.

Humans have intense scents; exquisite and varied fragrances. Fear gives off a sharp taste, while anger is a bitter and musky thing. Happiness is faint, but sweet, and nervousness seems sour. Everything in between merges into a blend of fine eating, and he can smell it all wafting by the alley.

He falls in behind a young couple. They're holding hands and walking their ridiculous little lapdog. To the world they seem Quaint and happy. To him, he smells the truth; the woman is wafting off bitterness, anger, resentment; the man is slightly angry, but mostly nervous. "So, where were you last night?" she asks suddenly.

The man shrugs and mutters something about just being out with a friend. And why did she have to be so nosy?

That sets her off. He'd love to stay and listen to the couple fight, but he just spotted supper.

It's an old woman sitting alone on a bench, tucked away in an alley. She wears a too-large coat, probably a rescue find from the Goodwill. Her hair is frazzled and thin. She's the lady children often stop to stare at, or talk to, before their parents whisk them away.

He lands just beside her, eyeing the ragtag coat's hem. It reveals a sliver of still unwrinkled flesh...

"Oh there is my baby, oooh? You cutie, have you been naughty, hiding from mama?" she asks. She throws a handful of crumbs to the ground and he, as well as a dozen other pigeons, begins pecking away.

(He can wait. What species ever reveals itself right away?)

UNBARREN

R. Lewis Wright

Parched ground, smooth cracked clay,
thirsty earth absorbs the first droplets of rain.

Welcome bits of joy on desolate plain.

Teardrops from heaven become a deluge.
Craving moisture, unable to consume the onslaught,
relief turns to death, destruction, and chaos.

Life reborn from rushing water and earth.
Famine survivors now feast.
Days beyond count, escaping all memory.

trekking in the desert, forgotten in one moment.
Granted the essential element,
the invisible host offers up its cherished bounty.

TODAY, THROUGH HER EYES

Mary Buck

Things are different today. I don't know why. Nothing smells strange. I see you and you are here. But things are different today. You call me to you and you smile. I come. I always come when called. You pet me and you tell me things. Good girl. Sweet girl. Baby girl. I wag my tail and I smile. I smile. But you can't see my smile. Happy. Glad. You rescued me. I'll never forget that. I lick your hand and then I go lay down on my bed and blanket. But things are different today.

I'm running today and we are playing. The sun is warm and the breeze is cool. You throw my toy and I take it and run. You yell at me but you are just playing. You chase me but you are just playing. I'm running today. You follow me and you take my toy. You throw it for me. You tell me to get it and bring it to you. I always do. Today is a good day. I'm running today.

You have to leave today. I'm not sure what you mean. You leave and come back every day. I'm at a different house today. But my bed and blanket and toys are here. Things are different today. You smell of sadness. You have wetness around your eyes. You tell me that you love me. You pet me and tell me things. Good girl. Sweet girl. Baby girl. I lick your eyes and I smile. But you don't know that I'm smiling. It's okay. I love you. You rescued me and I'll never forget that. You have to leave today.

You are gone today. You have been gone. You said you had to leave. But you always come back. I don't know where you are. I sleep. I eat. I bark. I play. But you are gone today. I catch your smell on the woman and the man. But they are not you. They put a thing to my face and tell me to say hello to mommy. I don't smell you. I don't feel you. I don't hear you. You are gone today.

I am running today. I see chickens. I smell trees. The sun is warm and the breeze is cool. I see a squirrel and I chase it. The woman yells at me to come. I am running today. I sit at a tree. The squirrel is there. I lay down. He will come down. Today is a good day. The man yells at me to come. The man pets me. The woman pets me. I wag my tail and I lick their hands. They are nice to me. They sometimes smell of you. I am running today.

You are here today! You say it's only for a little while. The woman hugs you and there is wetness around her eyes. You smell different today. I follow you. You pet me. You sleep and I lay next to you. You are here today. We play. We laugh. I am happy. I love you. You rescued me. I remember. Today is a good day. You are here today.

I am tired today. I get up. I lay down. I eat. I sleep. I go outside. I don't smell you today and I am so tired. The woman talks to me. The man pets me. I don't wag my tail. I don't take the treat. I lay on my bed. I lay on my blanket. I get up. I sniff my toy. I lay on my bed. I am tired today.

I hurt today. Something feels painful and different. You are not here today. The woman takes me in the car. A man looks at me. In my ears. In my mouth. In my nose. He presses on my belly and sticks something in my rear. I don't like him. I hurt today. He pets me but I do not lick

him. He smells different. He doesn't smell right. He smells of death. He gives me a treat but I don't eat it. The woman talks to the man and then looks at me. There is wetness around her eyes. She smells of sadness. I hurt today.

Today. Tired. Hurt. Sleep. No eat. Too hard. Go outside. Hard to breathe. Lay down. Sleep. Hurt. Tired. Today. You tell me goodbye today. You give me chicken nuggets and French fries. You carry me. I lick your face. There is wetness there. Your eyes. Your nose. You tell me things. Good girl. Sweet girl. Baby girl. You pet me and kiss my head. We are in a room today. There are two woman. They smell different. They don't smell right. They smell of death. The tall woman pets me. You look at the tall woman and she talks to you. The other woman puts her arms around you. She smiles and she pets me. There is wetness around her eyes. The two women leave... You look at me. You smile. I smile but you can't see my smile. You see my eyes today. You see me today. I hear you today. I feel you today. I see you today. "I love you, my dear, sweet Mandi." I hear my name. I lift my ears. I wag my tail. You put your arms around me. You squeeze me. I feel happy. I hurt. I'm tired. But you are here today. "You are going to feel better, baby girl. I promise. No more pain." You kiss my nose. I lick your nose. Your eyes are different today. Things are different today. You are here today...

The two woman are in the room again today. The tall woman talks to you. The other woman puts her arms around me. She holds my paw today. You kiss me. You tell me things. Good girl. Sweet girl. Baby girl. The tall woman puts something into my arm...

You tell me goodbye today. My pain is gone. My weariness is gone. You promised no more pain. I feel no more pain. You never lie to me. You rescued me. I'll never forget that. You took my pain away. I'll never forget that. I smile but you can't see me smile. I wag my tail but you can't see me wag my tail. I lick your face but you can't feel me lick your face. Happy. Glad. My pain is gone today. You took my pain today. You tell me goodbye today and I am free today.

In loving memory of Mandi
July 1996-April 2012

CHOOSING MY FUTURE

Dorcas Yoder

The cold wind stung my tear-stained face. My feet grew numb as I trudged through the snow in my worn-out tennis shoes. Crying, cold, and hungry, I had spent all day wandering the frozen fields and woods behind my home. Without any food, a coat, or a phone, I felt as lost as a three year-old wandering the Rocky Mountains. I sat down beside a fence post and hoped it would shield me from the wind. I thought about my high school classmates and wondered if they had missed me. I considered my options and wondered what would happen if I stayed here in the woods. I wanted desperately to escape my life, but I knew that was impossible. I had left the house earlier that morning after an argument with my parents about whether I should go to school or work. My parents needed money. They wanted me to get a job and give them my paycheck. I didn't want a job. I wanted to finish high school and go on to college. My future looked as promising as a dead end street. Even if I finished high school, I knew my parents would want me to get a job and help them pay off their bills. College wasn't a part of their plan for me. They didn't understand why I wanted to go to school. For them, working at Food Lion was a perfectly acceptable career. For me, a life as a cashier looked as depressing as a life in prison. I wanted options, and I wanted an education. What I didn't realize then was that my winter morning spent wandering through frozen fields would prove to be a day that shaped my life. It was a day when I decided that my circumstances would not determine my future. Although they looked overwhelming, I realized that I could choose to fight my circumstances.

Like Liz Murray, when she was waiting for her letter from Harvard, I realized that "...my life could never be the sum of one circumstance. It would be determined, as it always had been, by my willingness to put one foot in front of the other, moving forward, come what may" (321).

Like Liz Murray, who chose to finish high school against all odds, I chose to go to college even though it seemed impossible. As a teenager wandering through snow-covered

fields, crying because my parents wanted me to quit high school and work, I chose to disrespect their wishes and finish school instead. Two years later, I chose to move out of my parents' house, support myself, and start taking classes. For my first semester, I worked all day and took classes during the evening. I was broke, and I was barely surviving; but I was happy because I was pursuing my dream. I had chosen to finish my education, but it was a choice I would have to make over and over. At the end of my first semester, when final exams were looming over me and I was still working nearly full time, I chose to use every spare moment I had for studying. During the summer, when it was 95°F outside and I wanted nothing more than to jump into the pool and then lay in the hot sun while looking at the Blue

Ridge Mountains, I chose instead to use my summer as a chance to take extra classes. I missed my summer vacation, but I knew I'd never regret taking classes to get a jumpstart on the fall semester.

A year after I first started taking classes at PVCC, I'm still a busy student, and I choose every day to reach my goal of finishing college. When the late nights of studying get exhausting, when balancing the schedules of work and classes seems overwhelming, I remind myself of the choice I made as a teenager. Wandering outside in the cold that day, I chose to not let my circumstances keep me from pursuing my dreams. It was a choice that I would have to make over and over, but it was a choice that I would never regret.

PAC-MAN VS. MAGIKARP

Annette Cashatt

Ye days ere old, ye birth of that which we do not say came to be...and conquer

In the latter part of President Carter's office, in the midst of the assassination of John Lennon, the Chinese year of the Monkey, 'twas the year 1980. Comrades of company Namco ventured into the new and seething, twisting territory of "video games". Programmers wept with carpal tunnel syndrome night after night, searching for a new game to pour into their magic computer screens and befuddle their children. Namco vowed to respond to the demand for a new instrument of mind torture.

Born of their terrific yet highly disturbing imaginations, the one doom-slayer was born. They called him Pac-Man.

Mortals knew not of Pac-Man's inner-most nature. He was presented, with much fervor, as a hero to all, a champion of all that is good and comely. Meanwhile, his adversaries were cast as vengeful antagonists of a most hateful nature.

This unbalanced divide between Pac-Man and his foes was even seen in their appearances. Pac-Man was the color of fresh corn on a hot summer's day and was perfectly round and pleasing to the eye. His foes, however, were crafted like crude picket fences. Jagged and of an assortment of odd colors, with demented eyes that rolled in their sockets like marbles in a jar, they were clearly neglected and abused in their period of creation.

His foes were hence called Pinky, Blinky, Inky, and Clyde or collectively "the ghosts" For many years these two groups—the so-called protagonist and antagonists—made war with one another. As ever many a battle was fought, the object of glory was nourishment. Pac-Man was rapacious, gluttonous and heinous, however. The main staple—dots—were coveted by his mammoth of a mouth and the special treats—strawberries, cherries, bananas, and such things.—were especially tantalizing to him. The ghosts necessities of life meant nothing to him and indeed he would as soon see them starve into the void. Indeed, he conjured spheres that allow him to decimate the ghosts. Once he cast his voodoo over the spheres, the ghosts became vulnerable to Pac-Man and he would leap upon them in a fury fearful to behold and swallow them whole! They would reappear after a time, in a box so tiny it was unsuitable for bread, with their egos and mental states reduced to a fragile crisp of their former selves, and all the while Pac-Man continued his slaughter. Eventually they would escape their minuscule prison, but frightened and distraught.¹

For a quarter of a century they fought, with Pac-Man always seizing the upper hand.. Through the trumpet calls, falling banners and blinking GAME OVER, the ghosts hung on by a thread, their sanity long past devoured by the spacious jaws of Pac-Man.

That was until the year of the Rat, during President Clinton's office, the time where Walkmans, Fresh Prince of Bel-Air and Nirvana reigned. It 'twas the year 1996. In yonder year the birth of a magnificent game came. Its songs were sung across the lands like a phoenix's praises. It was Pokémon for the Gameboy.

¹This experience is especially distressing to Pinky, who is claustrophobic.

Meanwhile, the leader of the ghosts, Pinky, was plotting. She was a simple being, not unlike her friends, except she had developed a wily cunning streak bred of sheer experience fighting the monster. It was a desperate ploy, dangerous and unheard of. It had to work though, for all other options had run out.

Pinky had to burst forth from the confines of her world and into another world. From there she would entice a fellow creature to come into their world and with utmost haste dispatch Pac-Man forever.

October 23rd dawned as bright as any other. Everything was as per usual, with no more extraordinary events occurring than were usual in the world. There had been one little odd thing, though. All who had a network connection and turned on their Pac-Man game discovered a malfunction: Pinky was completely absent.

Our small heroine, Pinky, was barreling through cyberspace. She thrust her way past, between, over and even through streams of nonsensical code. Pinky slivered between hundreds of gateways, doorways to hundreds—thousands!—of games. She knew not what she was seeking.

Then she stopped dead, hovering just outside one gateway. It towered out from the abyss, golden light seeping out of its edges.

This was it. Pinky cracked the seal of Pokémon: Blue and dived in.

She landed in the pixelated cyan water of Lake Eriwin. She, a non-mortal creature, felt, smelt and touched nothing, though saw everything. Like a stone on sea, she sank into the water. The lake was almost deserted, save for a few tiny fishes darting about. Disappointed, she rose to the surface. Wait! At the shore was a disturbance. She drew closer, curious...

Where the water mated with land was an elephant of a man. He had barbarian muscles and a thick neck and wore nothing but a thin muscle shirt and jeans. He pointed one ham-sized finger at a creature in front of him and laughed. The creature he laughed at would have fit neatly into his massive palm. It was shaped like a fish, but with the whiskers of a lion. Its scales were smooth and shiny, an elegant combination of scarlet and gold.

The fish began to thrash about in the shallow water, splashing water onto the barbarian's boots. Pinky floated a little closer, hovering just behind the fish now. The man stopped laughing. He started screaming. He could not give the ground under his feet away fast enough. As he ran off into the distance, he yelled something that escaped Pinky's ears. It was just one word: Ghost.

Pinky was more than impressed: she was stricken with the fish. What type of beast could strike such terror into a big man's heart? There was no doubt. She had found their defender. "Friend," she bellowed. "What's your name?"

The fish flopped around until it stared up at her with one of its massive eyes. Its eye was yellow and glassy and rolled back and forth with wild abandonment. Pinky's respect was deepened. What a monster!

"What's your name?" Pinky asked.

It croaked, and then screeched...

"MAGIKARP!"

[An ode to Magikarp]

Flail! Thrash! Splash!

One, two, three!
Be all you can be!
Glitter and gold and honey of old
Pac-Man is all glitter and gold and honey of old.
Red and gold and crown of old.
and the crown of old for old nobility.
Yet under the glitter is dust;
Under the gold is mold;
and the honey is far too old.

Flail! Thrash! Splash!
One, two, three!
Be all you can be!
Red for blood!
gold, pure and lovely;
MAGIKARP!

The arena was set. The curtains opened. The stage prepared. The time had come. They all gathered in Level 1, huddled in an unseen corner. 'Twas October 24th and Pac-Man was deep in slumber. Without Pinky, he had relished a particularly boorish day of consumption and desired an intense rest.

Magikarp barely spoke, but this fact only embellished upon them a sense of its deep royalty. Clyde drifted into the room. It was their own room, invisible to humans and inaccessible to Pac-Man. If the ghosts' wishes were to become true, they would never venture from their room. However, they had an obligation to go forth and battle with Pac-Man over the dots for food. The room was a cozy hideaway, built from their own imagination and grasp of programming. A bowl of orange tulips floating in water, shag rugs, and sleek metal tabletops filled the space. It expanded and shrank to each ghost's desires and not one ghost saw the room quite the same as the others.

What did Magikarp see? Mayhap we shall never know. Perhaps it saw as humans did the visible Level 1, a sea of blackness lit only by the ghosts auras and neon borders. Perhaps it swam at the bottom of an ocean or an ice-cold lake. Or maybe all it saw was a gurgling, seething splatter of colors and twisting shapes.

"It's time," Pinky, Blinky, Inky and Clyde chorused.

The room began to shrink, giving everyone the intense feeling of being pushed through the cork of a bottle. Magikarp rolled its eyes back in its head and flopped left to right. A burst of white and they materialized in a small neon box on a black screen.

na-na-tee-dee-dum. The arcade music began.

GAME START!

READY!

nom nom nom. That was Pac-Man chewing through the dots.

The ghosts slid out from the narrow entrance of the box with Magikarp in tow. They circled to the right and up and to the right again. There was Pac-Man, at the end of one long onyx corridor. Magikarp was at the other end now.

Pacman gazed at Magikarp, his mouth opening and closing like a ridiculous plastic flamingo

at a mini-golf course. Magikarp simply stared back.

Now Pac-Man thundered down the corridor. His eyes were blazing like the fires of Dante and his roar was akin to a thousand packs of wolverines.

Magikarp was a credit to its ancestors. It floated, steady and true, with an unerring grace and an unflinching nature of pure steel. It merely swished its tail and screeched “SPLASH!”² The ghosts were tight on Pac-Man’s tail, determined to prevent any cowardly escapes. Truth dawned ‘o the moment. Pac-Man fell upon Magikarp. He unhinged his mighty jaws and his cavernous hole stretched to its fullest extent and then, in the flash of an eyelash, he swallowed Magikarp whole. Glop!

The ghosts froze where they were, horror etched into their features. Pac-Man twirled about, smug as a little yellow bug could be. Pinky stopped where she was, as if permanently paused. A long, low whimper escaped Inky’s mouth.

Then another cry, and another, until the Ghost’s Wail was born. Low and mournful, echoing with a haunted sorrow, it drowned out the dee-dee-bop arcade music.

Pac-Man flinched. Then shuddered. Then his eyes bulged like a googly-doll. The ghosts stopped and stared as the events unfolded.

Pac-Man’s movements became jerky and twisted. His skin protruded out in little bumps like some creature was in his mouth with a BB-Gun and a case ‘o pellets.

“HARR-AEICH!” The shrill scream came from Pac-Man. Never had he made a sound before and never would he again. “Magikarp!” cried Pinky.

“SPLASH! SPLASH!” bellowed Magikarp. Its head now stuck out from Pac-Man’s mouth. Pac-Man made gurgling noises and frantically shook himself. Nothing happened, though Pac-Man became more panicked as he fought to dislodge the obstruction in his throat. It was to no avail.

Pac-Man gave one last heave, sputtered and then fell. As his body hit the black screen, it dissolved into tiny wisps of gold.

“He’ll be back,” Pinky said, right away.

2 Splash is an unknown command; we hypothesize it is a powerful tribal chant from Magikarp’s home land.

“Sure, but I bet he won’t be so friggin’ greedy,” replied Blinky “Thank you! You are one cool cat, Magikarp.” The praise and thanks were echoed by all the ghosts.

Magikarp blinked, looked at its audience and then croaked one word: “Splash...”

So thus concludes the legend of Magikarp and its entrance into the arcade world and its valiant battle with Pac-Man. Pac-Man did come back, but he nere’ dared to cross paths with Magikarp again.

CHIEF ELLOWI'S GRAVE

Joanna Vondrasek

We, the fifth grade campers, decided to scare the fourth graders. We sat roasting marshmallows and scheming outside of our cabin. We had already taken the little kids to the grave – a simple cairn on a wooded hill, adorned with multicolored god's eyes. In the waning hours of daylight, we had told them the tragic story of Chief Ellowi's beloved daughter, her untimely death, and the Chief's continued haunting of the camp, which could be countered only by squawking like a chicken and walking backwards after visiting the grave. The counselors were already irritated with us because a few of the first graders had returned to camp crying. We collected the fourth graders and began walking toward the grave, spinning tales and singing the mournful "Chief Ellowi" song. It was moonless and dark by the time we reached the gravesite. We'd sent two girls ahead to hide in the bushes near the cairn to jump out at the appropriate moment in the story, which they'd accomplished with aplomb. This had the unexpected effect of sending two of the fourth graders, Traci and Amber, sprinting and shrieking back down the trail toward camp. We were startled by their sudden exit and decided to take the remaining fourth graders and our accomplices calmly, but quickly, down the trail, skipping the backwards chicken walk.

We arrived back in camp and saw the counselors casually sitting around the fire. We asked if Traci and Amber were okay, and they looked at us blankly and asked us what we were talking about... weren't Amber and Traci with us? The panic began to rise in my throat. The adults mobilized and began a search of the woods. A few other fifth graders and I were sent along the path toward the main lodge to search. Ten minutes, fifteen minutes ... fruitless, empty calls of "Amber! Traci!" We returned to camp, unsuccessful and scared. The fire was out and it was dark. The counselors had returned, unsuccessful as well. The camp director suddenly turned to us. "Did you do the chicken walk when you came back to camp?" No -- we'd been too concerned about Traci and Amber's sudden flight to go complete the ritual. "Well," said the camp director, "you had better go back and do it right this time."

We inched our way to the gravesite, whisper-singing, dutifully circling the grave, and beginning the chicken walk retreat. As we descended the trail, someone saw something move in the bushes. We all clumped together, grasping each other, whimpering, and shuffling as a single unit toward the safety of camp. We heard another noise from the other side of the trail and turned to look. There was

nothing there. Suddenly, with an explosion of leaves, a specterlike figure leapt out behind us. A second, moaning figure followed close behind. Never before has a group of ten-year-old girls moved as quickly as we did. We barreled into camp to find the fire relit and the adults doubled over with laughter in their camp chairs. One counselor even fell out of her chair. Adrenaline coursing through our bodies, we stopped and stood, lungs on fire, dumbfounded. As a unit we turned to investigate the trail behind us -- the terrible truth dawning on us -- and saw Amber and Traci, sleeping bags wrapped around their shoulders, rolling on the ground, laughing.



Yu Prue

The Fall Line: A narrow zone that marks the geological boundary between an upland region and a plain, distinguished by the occurrence of falls and rapids where rivers and streams cross it.