



★MIND

MURALS★

MIND★MURALS

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THANK YOU
TO EVERYONE WHO MADE THIS FIRST EDITION OF
MIND★MURALS
POSSIBLE!!

We could not have done this without every
single contributor! Please remember us next
year when we come back
for our second edition!

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Eastern States Regent

★Introduction★

Hi everyone and thanks for checking out Mind Murals!

This is our first edition and what we have here in our pages is written work and artwork from 14 different chapters of Sigma Tau Delta.

Next year when the submission deadline for the second installment of Mind Murals comes around I hope to see even more!

It has been an absolute blessing to have this opportunity and I'd like to thank Sarah Dangelantonio for her support and encouragement as well as Glen Brewster and Elizabeth Starr for theirs. A Very Special thanks also to E. Jayne Forish who rescued me, and convinced me not to throw my computer out the window.

Wishing you all the best, in wordsmithery and in wishes,

Brittany A. Blake
Editor in Chief 2008-2009

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Brittany A. Blake

Alpha Eta Sigma

Pa

Blank pages scare me
If you throw a rock out a window does the glass hear itself shatter?
That's not right...

Like a madwoman blowing in the wind.
Entering this house of pain, entering this house again...
This poem is about nothing...everything...and nothing
Nothing the abstract concept and thought brought to light by an evening spent waiting in vain for the news the NO
the cancer is not eating your grandfather, we were joking.

Yeah this is something time has helped you to ignore;
He's been here forever, he's been here before
Cancer
this poem is not about cancer

Pa built a baby crib for me, three years old bouncing on his knee,
Knee's can't hold me anymore

My Pa loves my Noni and they love us and she loves him but do we love each other because we are family...or
because we are worth it?
Pa makes us do better, he says we're not trying hard enough and his belief springs louder than our doubts and we
become better...because Pa knows that when we are pushed, we are.

this poem is not about cancer

He'll be fine, with a few cuts, it'll all be gone
But he's getting older
Soon he'll be gone and I'm not talking about a vacation
Death is scary when you cannot believe in a heaven or hell
Death to me is IT
the almighty IT
the AMEN IT
And I don't want my grandfather to go there.

So it, you had better turn around and away and stay the hell away because this Irishman ain't going anywhere without
me (and us, 40 people in my family...)

I know how to read, he taught me
I know how to spell my name, he taught me
I know how to swim, we taught each other
I can speak, eat, write, cook, laugh, tell stories, and Breathe
because this man taught me!
this poem is not about cancer

Amy Clark

Alpha Alpha Lambda

Haiku: Snow

Cherry blossom snow
Catch a petal on your tongue
Does it melt as sweet?

Haiku: Night

Diamonds on velvet
Crescent waning cold and clear
Soon there is no light.

The Painting

She strolls alone
mourning the last kiss
of the summer sun.
Grasses brown
as amber light dims.
Storm-grey clouds blow in
bringing autumn chill.
The moor winds
whip her hair
around her face
and obscure her features.
The rose at her waist fades
at the end of the dying day –
and her umbrella
offers little protection.

Angela Whalen

Alpha Delta Lambda

Mamma is a Seamstress Now

My mamma is a busy seamstress now.
She hems old ladies' new designer jeans
for fifteen dollars and a cheerful, "Ciao!"
She rolls her eyes and knots her thick, black brows,
tacks tracks of pins along the *pantaloni*.
My mamma is a busy seamstress now.

Her shop is in the basement, and though
it's cold in winter, Mamma stays *scaldarsi*
for fifteen dollars and a cheerful, "Ciao."
She's warm while working late, and yet somehow
her stitches tie her to *deprimersi*.
My mamma is a busy seamstress now.

While Dad's off with his shovel and his plough,
my mamma pricks herself—*affliggersi*
for fifteen dollars and a cheerful, "Ciao."
She stitches silently and won't allow
herself to be, to be an influence on me
because my mamma is a seamstress now,
for fifteen dollars and a cheerful, "Ciao."

Christina Marie Seymour

Alpha Iota Theta

A Fair Response to the Headline "Bjork Attacks"
For the down looking in my son's eyes.

For four days, a reporter's been stalking me.

She absorbs tidbits like a dumb, bumbling child,
scribbling the critical particulars of my walk
from plane to car:

Bjork just arrived in Bangkok.

*Bjork is wearing a green sweater,
dark wash jeans, tight at her ankles
white socks,*

clear fingernail polish

*(Maybe it's just the natural sheen of her nails;
She must never do dishes if they're that shiny!
Must ...be...nice).*

Bjork's hair is gross and greasy.

Bjork's eyes sag.

Her hands are shaky.

She seems a bit boorish.

Her son shrinks away from the crowd.

He acts ill and scared.

He does not resemble the supposed father.

I feel empty from lack of food and sleep.
Hands shaking, aching for a moment of coolness on a pillow,
for a fruit iced pop-tart, carbs and sugar and
Silence.

I am the breastbone sting of mother's guilt.

"Welcome to Bangkok"

She squeaks in her smarmy British accent.

Welcome to Bangkok

Welcome to Bangkok

Welcome to Bangkok

Welcome...to...Bangkok

Welcome.

Welcome?

You would have hit her, too.

Jeff Johnston

Alpha Eta Sigma

★Editor's note: Mr. Johnston is the first person to ever submit to Mind Murals!★
Thank you, Jeff!

Mr. Potato Head

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
I don't need your all.
I just need your feet,
For they will quickly take me
to a place with no troubles.

Though I don't need the whole of you,
I could use your height,
For you can reach places I can't find
And see wonders I can't imagine.

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
I don't need everything from you.
But your strength would help,
For you carry many times the weight
That crushes me today.

I don't need every piece of you...
How about your hands?
You build where I tear down.

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
I don't need much from you.
But I will also appreciate your youth,
For my better days are memories of little value
And could use a fresh coat of paint.

I don't need all you have.
But I need a new face, your face,

So others may not recognize me
And will remove me from the shelf of those
"better off forgotten."

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
I could use a new mouth,
For my language is not on speaking terms with
my intent.

Of course I don't need the entire you.
But I would benefit from your mind,
For my thoughts gravitate to foolishness.

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
If it's not too much trouble,
I will also need your heart,
For my ability to care has parted ways with the
desire to do so.

I don't want to be me today.
Will you trade with me?
I may not need all you possess.
But your soul would be a nice fit,
For mine has faded
And has a tear in the sleeve.

I want to be you today.
Will you trade with me?
It's only for a day.

Ashlee Hazeltine

Alumni Epsilon

Boxed In

And that's how it is. You said, though I suppose I was actually the one
who said it because you were drawing those strings too tight.

The days were easier when I had a fresh
start and my history wouldn't repeat itself.

If I could tell you now, I would. But how do I casually
bring up that time three years ago where I didn't act rationally?

Let it slide. *Slide, slide, slide.*

The last time you were "in love"
it ended in a mesh of arms and legs
– none of which were yours.

See, Pandora was a beautiful woman;
she just made bad choices – But I'm not Pandora.

You keep wondering when "The One" *
* *Note the capital T and the capital O*

Is going to come along and I'm wondering
the same because I want what's best for
"The One" you'll eventually choose.
So I'll tell her you're Mormon, when you are anything but.

It's human nature to be envious,
but it's also human nature to move on.

Eve Feldman

Upsilon Phi

Ennui and the Elephant

And then:
All I had left was you, my ascending red balloon.
To my right,
Ha ha ha from the bellies
Of midway drunks.
To every day without you:
May weary eyes know true rest,
May tired hearts always try,
And may you one day get stuck on the pine out
back.

And so:
From rising East to setting West
I wait, I wait, I wait.
Fixed at windows for your ebbing.
Cheers, to a carnival happy
And the days on which
Persistence fills emptiness.
Cheers, to the safe harbor of grey eyes
And the faraway cries
Of boxcar locomotives.

Old Logging Road

I am an old man now
With brittle bones
That split even in the whispering memory of your
voice.
But when the nurses leave,
I go to the old logging road.
The crippling walk brings me close
To being with you again,

And I feel ten years old-
Breathing, in the invincibility of summers spent
Jumping from high rocks
Into a shallow brook
Shouting, "Ana, I can fly!"
As the golden red of your curls brushes across your
face,
You flap your arms.
In my dreams you've shown me to the lightning tree,
one
Out of thousands in these deep woods.
Its story of absolute chance feels like home:
I know alone as I know the earth's weary scent.
I settle at its base
While aching knees mimic
The crackling of leaves
Or is it the other way around?
My limbs are weak these days,
And while gazing upwards,
I have to imagine the tree from halfway
To the sky.
Once again I take out a flattened note and leave
It filling splinters in the bark:

Ana, when I can go no further
will you meet me on the Pine trail?
There we will dodge between
The spaces of evergreen and laugh
about the time you lost your shoes
in the river. And like the lightning
tree, you will know me by my creases

Joseph Michael Nelis

Xi Xi

Potato

Dirt may not be that comfortable
But it appears to be home all the same.
But maybe that is just my perspective,
For I am a root of sorts.
Sure, I get yanked up and transported to
A store shelf somewhere before facing some
Horrible torture because you deem me "edible",
But that shouldn't mean you can just
Rip me out of my home. Give me time.
Did you ever think I'd eventually come out
On my own accord? Did you ever stop to think
Maybe I like the dirt? Well here's a secret:
I don't. It's cold and sometimes wet
And I get harassed by worms. I want out,
But I want the destination to be my choice.
My first sight of the sun shouldn't be bittersweet.

This Could Never Be Your Living Room

Let the scent and the sweat take you
As bodies collide, twisting and shifting,
The mass expanding and converging.
Smiles are not expressive enough here
Amongst the writing populace's energy
Bordering on insanity. Hearts, bodies and minds
Clash, tossed like ragdolls around
This beautifully magnetized open space.
The next note could be sour or sweet
And not a one of us would give a damn,
And others won't notice, bleeding
Or separated from consciousness
The best way you can imagine sober.
In solitude you're a vocal atrocity, but
Here the discord blends into sweet bliss.
Your mind lingers here so long after the fact
That time blends into a mundane blur
Until you live it all again to a different soundtrack.

Mary Stolarik

Alpha Alpha Delta

Laser Envy

A feminine boy,
with blonde hair longer than mine
wants to hear masculine words,
"to infinity and beyond."
So, his grandmother grabbed Buzz Light-year.
Perfect silver spacesuit,
shiny gadgets,
fierce wings,
the smell of thick plastic.
I grab a Phillips, batteries,
make myself comfortable on the floor,
behind the counter,
away from customers.
Toys and feet surround me,
I try to open Buzz's crotch,
dodge cash register drawers with my head.

My hair is brown,
a Mohawk.
I am invisible,
swallowed

They make their way to the bathing suits.
A mess of spandex.

They skim the selection of
pink skulls,
cherries,
azaleas and orchids.

A rusted red Volkswagen pulls up to the door.
A man at the wheel takes a drag of his cigarette,
waiting.

He has a five O' clock shadow,
old lipstick smeared on his cheek,
a black eye.

Mesmerized by their rugged beauty,
hairy arms accented with spaghetti strap tank
tops,

callused hands with red fingernails.
One wears a short black wig,
the other has a buzz cut.
no one notices their plot.

Sprinting,
Their thick, dainty legs flex.
One breaks the heel off their stiletto,
a souvenir for me,
to keep me sane

when some old hag is complaining our sale signs
are too confusing.

Panting,
they plunge into the getaway car,
with three bikinis.

Bikini Bandits

Two guys in drag come into the clothing store.
They wear stilettos and mini-skirts.
They have ruby lips and Adams apples.

Tracy Sarpolis

Alpha Alpha Delta

before God

street puffed
sweet cream
sour fruit
green cherry
popped corn
burst open
jealous God
His hands
iron tablets
pull open
these legs
burning bush
forced silence
before church
ripped sheet
thread bare
skin broken
before God

Edge of insanity

Love knows it's time
pricks at the heart
hairs stand at attention
like the feel of a newborn
sucking on a breast
limited to the leftover space
the last one left behind
perhaps you are the black checker
I am red
and we compete to win

if you cut yourself, bind it
sing the strands of the past
cut the core from the apple
I want it
breath in reality
not far from the edge of insanity.

Winter night

Smoking, chimney slants against cold night air
Dancing, A spidery mulberry tree
Weaving, a crimson-colored wooden house
Dangling , branches like a participle
Leaning, behind statues of stone angels
Sitting, atop long cracking wooden beams
Falling, Behind my tightly woven swing
Silence, Permeating from my brick house
Cranking, Of an engine trying to start
Rocking, ashtray at my side and black tea
Cradled, palms around my frosty white mug
Winter.

Nona Lu

Beta Beta

Architect's Love Song

I want to un-girdle you from this heaviness.
You're no
virgin, and you don't need these walls.
Don't you see
the awkward sadness? Don't you see
adolescent scars of rebar showing?
You were built from the Pantheon of Athens.
Now you melt
into Detroit, Chicago, Freda.
With no compression you just spill
out. After the cladding,
after the marble rubbed itself off,
you were still there. Exposed
as a cold cheek against the brutal touch
of rain.

I want to reforest you.
I want sweetgum stuck on the ground
where you once blew daisy chains of smoke.
I want the smell of travel on you. I am sick of you
and am burning all your letters.
When the bearded Irises spring,
I want you to cede. I want your hair to be
the Purple Martin's estate, your femur a Mason

Bee's model home.

For Falling Asleep

Eight in the morning the grey
edges in, lighting
on cold figures.
Awake by a slice of noise I rise.
We are perched
precariously on the thirty-first floor, and a harshness
of being the only one
not abed leaves.
The high rise laid out
like a slumbering
lover, a bare foot peeking
under the wordless sheets of cloud.
The trees now teetering home, fuzzy headed still
dipping
and swaying under the insistent Western guide
of wind. Where are you, dappled sunlight? Did you
steal
yourself away when you woke,
hours before the day began?
I curl back to bed and imagine
you were the glistening iron city.
I was the figure out in the raw
rain, coming home.

Rachel McGahey

Alpha Upsilon

Shostakovich: Fifth Symphony

In snow, the falling mountainside
Roars like one long drumroll, rock
On rock. The mist soon filters off
Its broken cliffs. A desolate
And bitter riverbed imprints
An open plain somewhere, skimmed
By windy tremolo, and there
Where winter grips the air, a flute
Laments along the loosened scree
Alone, its laden silver sigh
Unburdening an avalanche
Upon the frozen, endless land.
From his mind he hauled this scene
To paper, wrestled it inside
The level lines, beat and sliced
It into measures. On a wide
And empty page, he only inked
The *flauti* solo—every lone
And hollow note-head holding in
The cold. What sorrows lie untold,
Swollen in that wordless song?

Conshohocken

A no-man's land always lurks
Behind Him, muddy purple hills
That murmur on His widespread hands.
Eye-level now, the dropping sun
Pumps sunset through the window dye
And glowers orange on my book.
His foot rides on a scroll: "Suffer
Little children"—trellis knot—
"To come unto me." Rotted walls
Encroach the glass that's dimming, stained
With dusk and dye. The postlude drives

Us to the street. Its droning swell
Relents when we're below the stars.
Outside, the window blackens off
All curiosity: a blurred
And somber sea, no longer blazed
With royal limbs. But higher, pale
In lavender lights, the steeple mounts
The town in pools of cloudy black.
It signals the emerging host
Of slender floodlit spires that rise
Transfigured by the buried sun,
A multitude reminding us
Of vacant sanctuaries, dark
Below their floating belfry lights.
They hover, watching, calm above
The workday's rushing storefront tides
To weekend ripples, chiming in
Our thoughts with Sunday's newborn sun—
But lordling over us at night.

The College All-Nighter

My moon face looms up in the glass, two eyes
Like craters ride this dark side of the night.
It's three o' clock, the unknown watch. I rise
From fields of print glaring the fervent light
Of my desk lamp. That unending, fixed squint
Through vanished hours—here time flows untamed—
Eclipsed all my surroundings but the glint
Out in the window's black. I sit, reclaimed
By text. At eight, I'll need Picasso's blue
And rose and diced pianos; nine, the tone
To top a minor seventh stack; at two,
The essay hanging in my head like stone
Is due—Old English vowels. Through the pane
The stars engulf a sliver, on the wane.

Sarah Rinko

Alpha Upsilon

Whitewashed Light

I remember that winter you learned the word
cancer but didn't tell me. After coffee,
we stood out staring at the frozen lake.

The sharp air always made you so serious,

and you exhaled the phrase:

"We're dying."

I cackled: "Everyone's doing it!"

The pale lake glowed so beautiful,

wider and smoother than the stars

white pinpoints punched into tissue paper.

They knew, and you knew.

I laughed.

Shannon Abad

Alpha Omicron Xi

Dorothy and I

That long and golden brick road
was never too far
to click ruby heels and find the way back.
And as a child I believed
that I could be someone else
and feel safe in those shoes
as the red glitter fell to the floor with each step.
I would look in the mirror
with those braids hanging on my shoulders
as I played pretend, skipping around the house
on my own yellow brick road
of wooden floors and tan carpeting.
How easy it was to imagine,
to see the world through Dorothy's eyes
even though they were still my own.
I see the world with those same two eyes
even now that I am older, my thoughts
take me places where I am never alone.
And though the road may look a little dimmer at times
It gets brighter when it brings me that much closer to home.

Sean Sweeney

Alpha Omicron XI

Life goes on, always forward moving never sideways, So I can't be blind to the day
God will stumble down and take me away, Sipping on steaming coco, wood cackling in front
Of me, wind blowing outside, five corner dwellers, Delving in talk of the world's mourners and sellers
A snowy midst causes reminiscing to Spring time bliss, My mans and I, dreaming of being famous
Gleaming, my earrings, fake the emotion ain't
Blatant

It was hard seeing him leave, pain knowing all my friends came and went
In my years on the globe, I strolled in an endless circle
Essence of adolescence trapping me boldly, The love of my friends felt family
Would it still be there in 10 years, the struggle of the streets holding us freely?

America- the home of the thieves, killers breeding
Every day, the hypocrites stick up kids, strict rules keep young minds sheltered
Stung from lying lectures, little busy bees bumblin' with fickle crap shoots
Since when did we look to rap for leaders, commercial politicians,
Hurts to call 'em vixens, selling the tv watchers poison from out your big speakers
This paper don't matter, traps come with the branded hats, don't stagger as I anoint the figures of life
Church ain't large to sport kings, with wings I travel to help those unraveled by the US of A
Tupac Shakur, blasted away, CIA kept taps on the man to warrant his actions, factions should be more than a last action, the real
leaders get the rug pulled out from under them, loosing traction
Chuck D, full of glory, story of an extra intelligent 40, years in the light, didn't want to
Lead, sun dried him up, stormy weather, media framed him for being right
Country struggling, hot water bubbling, stereotypes frame the devastation of the
Mind on my powerless cousins, my brothers, taught to hate them in schools
Supposed to be color-blind, teach the ignorant teachers preaching to our children
Trapped in the confines, crying out for help
Our leaders place blame on the inner city, people prying the door open, government trying to hide
Money spent on rims and gold grins in the hood, all they get is the cement park with the double rims
Trouble brews, dim the lights go, crews come out, blowing foes
No educational programs to teach about the African or Indian land, stolen by the clan, American-brand, the only country that
crams our point of view into a book and sells it to schools
Who take the loot of little kids roots
Feed them manure
And shoot it back to the president to make his palace look cuter



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Danielle Rice Alpha Eta Sigma

In Memory: Joshua Welsh

I don't know when you heard. I was camping with my mother and brothers. We had just woken up. We were making breakfast; eggs and toast. The eggs were perfect, seasoned well and the right amount of milk added to give texture. The bright yellow color reflected the orb in the sky, promising a great beginning. We were all sitting on the picnic bench, laughing, when my cousins pulled into the camping site. I hadn't seen Amy in a few weeks and I was pleasantly surprised. Her dirty blond hair was pulled back in a tangled pony tail, as if she hadn't thought to comb it. She wasn't smiling. Neither was Seth. I didn't worry about their frowns. I was laughing when I asked. I know I was. I know what I said too. "Who died?" I laughed, using the common expression. They didn't laugh back. "Josh and Holly". The laughter stopped. Students in our school, my friends, our friends. Suddenly summer was over. Insufficient explanations were given, a ride home offered. I walked to the bathroom and numbly put my contacts in. I couldn't feel my fingers. We drove home, silent. I unlocked the door, made nods to meet later. Time alone they thought. I walked to the phone, dialed the number by heart. The moment my best friend answered I broke. Every laugh, every hug, every joke--gone--came out in the two words I spoke before dropping the phone. "It's Josh". I curled up on the cold kitchen tiles. That's where she found me twenty minutes later.

Ari Choquette Alpha Eta Sigma

Upper-Middle Class Prison

Amelia stared out the window at the bare trees and sighed. She should vacuum; George would be home soon for lunch. She idly ran her finger over the windowsill as she watched the women in the neighborhood walking up and down the street with toddlers, dogs on leashes, strollers. From the inside, it looked like the day was unseasonably warm. Melting snow ran in rivulets along the gutters, dripping to the ground and making dirt into mud. Dammit! She looked down at the path her finger had traced and noticed a nearly invisible trail where it was a shade of lighter white. The dust from the basement must've settled when she brought up more of George's blankets. Amelia sighed and checked the clock on the wall. She'd have to dust as well.

A wedding—over 200 people there to witness as the perfect couple announced their love in the face of God. She had looked so pretty that day, George mused to himself as he stared at the photo on the mantle. Her perfect smile as she walked towards him, slow step by painful slow step. He couldn't even wait to have her beside him, holding hands at the altar. And now? Now he could barely get her to enjoy being his wife. She sat around all day, sullen; he was sure of it. He'd gotten them everything. Anything she could possibly want was in their enormous house. He drew a careful finger along the length of the mantle, double checking it closely. A swell of anger rose in his chest and it took an effort to push it back down. It was only lunch time, after all.

A wrinkled face with bright eyes staring into the camera.

She noiselessly prepared a grilled ham and cheese and set it on a plate with a pickle and some chips, placing it on the dining room table. It would probably be cold by the time he got home.

Amelia mused over a dozen albums. Family reunions, picnics, weddings, Christmases. She noticed her

grandmother always looked straight into the camera, despite her wrinkly, sun-damaged face. Her blue eyes, the same ones Amelia had inherited from her mother, were always lit with happiness. Amelia flipped through more photos enviously, finding herself in them and noticing how her blue never seemed so nice.

"Hi, you've reached the Kellen household. Please leave a brief message with your name and number and we'll get back to you shortly. Have a nice day!" Her voice on the answering machine message sounded happier than she thought it had a right to. She kicked the button to start the vacuum cleaner. Only 20 minutes.

Amelia poked her head out of the guest bedroom. She could hear him stomping around downstairs. Then a shattering—the plate, no doubt. He was such a baby when he didn't get what he wanted. Just add sweeping to the list.

Photos on the bed, ripped haphazardly out of albums and strewn on the beige comforter.

She raised the knife to cut the sandwich in half, bringing it down hard and watching the melted cheese ooze out of the middle.

George shivered as he walked from the parking garage back into the office. He'd have to remember to tell Amelia to take out the heavy blankets. He pulled his jacket tighter around him and stepped faster until he reached the front doors of the building. The office was bustling, as usual. People running around as if urgency somehow made them more important. He walked at a relaxed pace, passing what seemed like millions of cubicles containing people clicking away on their keyboards. George chuckled to himself as he entered his office. He could already hear his phone ringing. As he contemplated whether he should answer it or let his secretary take the message, he closed the heavy wooden door with a resounding thud.

Dirt trailing across the otherwise perfect crème colored carpet. Panic.

A lone sandwich sat on a plate on the dining room table.

George raised his hand and brought it down hard. A red splotch appeared almost instantly where his knuckles had hit skin. She let out a low whimper and scurried off to the guest bedroom to get the vacuum cleaner.

Every time she looked in the mirror these days her reflection surprised her. Her face surrounded by the bulbs of the vanity mirror in her bathroom, smooth alabaster skin, dull blue eyes looking back and expecting to see something so much worse.

Crimson blossomed on the crème colored carpet, a piece of abstract art.

In the midst of being transferred from one prison to another, Amelia smiled at all of the cameras around her, blue eyes sparkling.

Ashlee Hazeltine Alumni Epsilon

Case of the Flurries

The tourist turned on the television to local news while visiting in the south to find a case of the "flurries". Snow, covering the We-Don't-Get-Snow-City of Southern State, was quite the mood killer as it shut down everything in the area. Reporter One's voice droned on about the snow, how not to sand the roads because "the plows, they'll take it away!" and "it doesn't matter, it will melt anyways." Then a voice

boomed: "We'll go to Reporter Two in We-Don't-Get-Snow-City, Southern State, for the weather *breaking news*."

The tourist watched carefully, leaning forward in her hotel bed, still groggy from the night's sleep, her blue eyes focusing on the television screen. This whole thing is absurd, she thought, it's just a little snow! Reporter Two appeared on the screen, and was standing in the snow next to her leg, ready to give her report.

"Thank you, Reporter One. I'm currently standing up to my knees in snow." Reporter Two brushed the long brown hair out of her eyes and leaned forward towards the camera drastically. In the hotel, the tourist found she was leaning towards the screen, waiting for the silence to end.

Reporter Two took a deep breath in. This was her big moment. "That is all. *Back to you*."

Back in the hotel, the tourist fell back into the bed laughing. This kind of thing never happens in New England.

The Wake

The waiting line had surpassed its original length ten-fold by the end of the night, at one point it went out the door, around the block and had a two hour wait. We didn't know how many people knew my grandmother. We were surprised at the outcome. The line of people continued to give their condolences to the family in black until it was just us and my Nana lying peacefully in her off-white fabric open casket. It had been a five hour long day that felt like forty eight, but there was still one more person to see her, and this was going to be the hardest one.

Marilyn was my grandmother's best friend for all the seventy three years that she lived. They shared the same first name, and people would refer to them as "The Marilyn's." It was cute in a way, simply because they were two peas in a pod. My grandmother once told my cousin Megan and I that we reminded her of them; always together, a bond so strong that nothing could break it, and that we would do anything to protect the other person. Nana always spoke fondly of Marilyn, and I always pictured the two of them dressed as the infamous Marilyn Monroe, my grandmother in the white dress from *The Seven Year Itch* and her best friend in the pink dress from *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. While the image is not really a realistic one, it was the only image that popped into my head when Marilyn, my grandmother's faithful friend for seventy three years, walked into the room.

The image of a bright Marilyn walking into the room was shattered and in walked a fragile old woman who looked like she would break into a million little pieces at the drop of a hat. She was shaking like a leaf and was holding tightly onto her son's hand, who had helped her walk in. The moment her eyes fell onto her best friend long and gone, she broke into tears. It was while I was watching in amazement at her reaction towards my grandmother that I felt a hand grasp onto mine tightly. I turned to look at Megan, who was holding my hand tightly as the sounds of Marilyn sobbing was the only thing we could hear.

Once everyone left, Megan and I took a break from the rest of the family and walked out of the funeral home, leaning against the balcony banister and taking in the cool summer breeze that was unusual for the end of July. "You know," she started, "That's us." She paused, letting her hand run through her shoulder length brown hair, "If you go before me, I don't know what I'll do."

"We could go together," I stated. It was the idea of a pact, an unrealistic pact that would never logically

work. The beginning of a pact that would solidify Megan and me as the new Thelma and Louise, promising to go out in a blaze of glory together. It was unrealistic, but we knew, watching how our grandmother's best friend reacted, that we could not be like that – we did not want to put the other person through that feeling.

"Yeah. I guess we could go out like that." Megan smiled, squeezing my hand before we walked back inside to join the rest of our family. I nodded, and the pact was done and set in stone.

As we walked in, Marilyn walked out and our eyes met. She softly nodded before giving me a hug and let her self out of the funeral home. In some weird way, I'd like to think she was listening to our conversation. Somehow, that made it seem better.

Sean Sweeney/Alpha Omicron Xi

Untitled

Suddenly, the place was full with fans, lined all around the court, making it feel like a gladiator pit. You couldn't move or breathe and the gym was as hot as a sauna– body heat blended together with the dry warmth shooting from the building's corners. It masked the frigid air outside. The undeniable center of attention, everyone was staring at him, waiting to pounce if he slipped up. He could turn behind his bench and find entire rows of men in two-piece suits, rubbing perspiration from off their foreheads and scribbling furiously with their pens. The only people in the place who put off an aroma of nice cars and big backyards, you couldn't mistake them. College coaches, here in the middle of east Baltimore, and trying to convince the next great talents that they could help them.

His team was different then too. Not just the players, but the way they played. There was no fighting, no swearing, no *he went at me, so now I gotta get mine*. The team just played; they just won.

Brown bought himself back to reality. The court was dimmer; a lone bulb illuminated a cluttered office to the side. He was alone except for a custodian picking up some empty water bottles while his lips moved up and down, muttering in a hushed voice to himself. And there definitely weren't any men in suits waiting for him by the doors with hands extended. But, the banner still hung, like a disappointed parent poised to scold a naughty child. And it still read 4-Time Baltimore City Champs: Jefferson High School. With a quick glance at his watch, Brown gathered up some papers and scurried out of the gym.

The frigid water hit his face, spraying down on his sticky body like a hail storm. Jason sighed as his body relaxed and his frustrations washed away. He loved cold showers. All of the stress and anxiety accumulated from the day seemed to just evaporate, run into the drain at his feet, probably his only option for a quiet place to think. Everywhere he went, there was always someone in his face.

I love you, Jay. I love you.

Hook me up with some money. I know you got 'sum.

When we chillin' man? When you helpin' me with my game?

No matter whom it was, even people Jason had never even seen before, they all wanted something. Everyone had a story that they wanted to tell. Everyone was somebody, a pre-school classmate, an AAU teammate, an old neighbor. He often gnawed his nails down to their stump.

Just go away he would think to himself. *I'm just a regular guy.* It wasn't convincing. He *knew* he

wasn't. A regular kid doesn't have grown men fawning over him at every opportunity as if he were the block's one beauty. A regular kid doesn't get followed into toilet stalls or make it through school without ever showing up.

Sarah Rinko Alpha Upsilon

Continuing to Thirst

The Jesus thing sounds simple and straightforward at first. Jesus stands offering a glass of water. "You've got to try this stuff," he says. "You'll never thirst again!" A suspicious advertisement, but we gulp it down anyway. Perhaps we smack our lips in satisfaction, agree to the 10% a year payment plan, and then walk off on our merry way. But what we forget, or what we overlook, is that Jesus carries a cup of bitter suffering. The communion cup overflows with Christ's blood, the blood of a wrongfully murdered man. When we accept that cup, we do not drink ambrosia of immortality, but instead crucify ourselves. We forsake our lives in the pursuit of God.

We expect a magical antidote to cure our sin. We expect our imperfections and dissatisfaction to evaporate. Communion serves as a casual snack. We treat baptismal water as a spiritual power wash and the phrase *I accept Jesus as Savior and Lord* as an incantation.

I swallowed that promise at summer camp. My counselor, Heather, told us how she'd accepted Jesus as a child. While she sat beside a waterfall after her parents' divorce, she heard bells ringing and the voice of an angel. Her life, she said, was never the same after that. As I lay in my bunk that night in the heavy summer heat, I considered how that all sounded like a great adventure. As I drifted off to sleep, with the buzzing mosquitoes as witnesses, I signed on board for that thing called Christianity. At the time I felt so happy that I could not stop smiling, but when I woke the next morning, I felt like the same ten-year-old kid that had fallen asleep.

Perhaps God intended more than religion. Perhaps when God puffed life into that mud pie named Adam, he cradled him in his arms and then, with a sweeping arm, presented him with the world. God did not sit infant humanity down and instruct him in the manner of genuflection or crossing oneself. He never said, "Come to me and bow." Simply, God placed a hand on Adam's shoulder and said, "Live in this garden."

That first chapter of Genesis does not read:

So God created humankind in his image,

in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them,

"Be fruitful and join the worship band;

bake apple pies with the women's group on Mondays."

When I told Heather that I had accepted Christ, she shot me a high-five and shrieked, "Welcome to Heaven!" Even at the time, I felt speechless. "All right, guys," she beamed. "Let's hurry up or we'll be late for grilled cheese and tomato soup day." As we walked across the grassy ball field toward the camp cafeteria, I stood a bit more upright and I watched my fellow campers bobbing alongside me in their sneakers and jeans. *So this is what it looks like to be heaven bound*, I thought to myself.

We expect our conversion to be a radical conversion. In medieval times, people believed that the baptismal sprinkling literally washed away a lead-like barrier separating infants from God. But Christians did not invent the ritual of baptism; it's a Jewish custom, and the Jews saw the rite differently. Yes, purification served as one reason for baptism, and since we sin often, those sorts of cleansings also occurred often. But a certain kind of baptism only ever occurred once in a person's lifetime: the rite of submitting oneself to the teachings of a certain Rabbi. The Rabbi baptized the believer and the act formed a covenant between the two: the student shall follow the teacher, learn the teachings, and live as instructed. While the medieval Christian understanding of baptism expects God to change us, the Jewish understanding expects us to change in response to God's actions. Such a baptism enlists us as still imperfect humans hoping and struggling for a more righteous life.

Perhaps I am on the fast track to heaven, but it looks the same to me as any other road. I still thirst and I wonder if perhaps I have been tricked or that the drink handed to me by the church has failed to take effect. Because I have not yet achieved righteousness, I thirst for a changed life. Because of the church, I have changed, but I now I yearn for something beyond its sterile walls and predictable services.

In church, one Sunday morning, Pastor Jim handed all us kids a slip of paper that had "Ticket to Heaven" printed on it. He sat on the steps to the altar and said to us, "Now, everyone, how did you get these tickets?" We were shocked that our pastor had to ask us how to get to heaven. "By being good," said Tyler incredulously.

"Nope that's not it," Pastor Jim shook his head. Confused, we looked around at each other and back at the blank stares of our parents sitting in the pews.

"Being good doesn't get you to heaven," repeated Pastor Jim. "Only Jesus does. Jesus gave you that ticket. Now you don't have to do anything at all. Just know that Jesus loves you."

Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so. But the Bible also says that Jesus did a lot more than love me. The Bible shows that Jesus has set the table. As we slouch in our sanctuaries and clutch our tickets to heaven thinking we've arrived, Jesus sits there with a loaf of bread in his hand. He glances at his watch and wonders when we're going to show up. As he waits, he plays with his cup by turning water to wine and back again. And that thirst nags at the back of my throat. It pulls me up and out of the church doors, away from the camp. Perhaps the thirst draws me closer to the well of the living God.

Cooperstown

James Fenimore Cooper called the lake "Glimmerglass." And long before resort cottages sprung up, before the Baseball Hall of Fame, he put Natty Bumppo at the edge of the water and nudged him into the wilderness. The Catskill Mountains roll not far to the southeast. I imagine Rip Van Winkle as he tucked into them and fell into his famous sleep.

The peaks around Cooper's lake can't lift a paw to the Catskills. Perhaps that's why he—the Sleeping Lion, the name they call the hills—has given up and sprawls green around the water. From the dock, with finger out-stretched, you can trace his back, the bump of his shoulder blade, and his round head as it flops on its side to face away from you.

It is in this land for a brief stint every summer that I find myself. I come to this place and wait, surrounded by the American ghosts that haunt the hills though their literary creators have longed died. I hear them rolling the ten pin ball like thunder and padding barefoot over brush. As I walk across the dock

over Cooper's lake, the wind hits me in a new way. The musty scent of fermenting seaweed and lily pads mingles with the smell of wet wood. I believe for a moment that I've caught the scent of an ancient world. Seagulls cry out their own language overhead: a distant, airy sound that's benign itself but scrapes rudely against the unexpected flutter of wings. In this place, alone, I cease to exist.

Night brings me back to the end of the dock. Ignoring the little plastic bench, I lay down there and listen to the lake. Water slapping wood. Smack. Smack. I call it "the sound of an octopus kissing." The late night sounds of vacationers drift across the water and softly murmur to me. It's gibberish, and I pretend I hear the voices of spirits as they stoop to share their secrets. Far from street lights and bright signs, the night feels deeper and wider, as if the dark water and sky could swallow me up. The black landscape casts me, a shadow, invisible. I examine my hand in the moonlight. It is a brightly outlined silhouette.

For how many countless centuries has that moon risen? Does this matter?

My thoughts lead me out of my body and beyond myself. I feel still. My limbs weigh heavy against the wet wood. Each breath swells my lungs and deflates silently. I feel out of time but have never been so aware of time changing. *July, already.* This is my last summer here, and I watch it slip through the moss-soaked boards and drift, carried away into the dark by small and steady waves.

My parents first came here on their honeymoon: two blissful lovers. They cuddled up on their motel bed and gazed out across the lake and excitedly imagined their new life together. For me, this place has become a familiar home. I always anticipate our vacation, our stalling time, at my home away from home. Dad taught me how to fish here and how to row a boat. But this summer marks the end.

I wish I heard the voice of God. My mind stretches wide enough to catch the black silence shifting through me. Who I am and who I have been slips away, and the universe shifts through the void. I am like some sieve for the night. As it moves, I feel emptier. Dock lights dot the distant shore. They wink. Quick flashes are headlights racing down the hills.

Steady. Steady. Stars don't move. The earth moves. Does the air move? I breathe. The butterfly effect claims that as a tiny butterfly flits its wings, it causes tornadoes at the other end of the globe. I consider the implications of each one of my breaths. What does it mean to be alive? If now, as I lay in darkness, I am just a shadow, am I invisible? The tassel has turned and in a moment erased all of who I was: athlete, musician, student. If the old definition no longer works, who writes the new one? Who declares what my name means? The future lies uncertain. *College.* I cannot see myself in it. I do not know who I am there. Who am I? Does this small question even matter?

Shannon Abad Alpha Omicron Xi

9 Innings with My Father

Aaron sat staring as the cursor flashed on his blank computer screen. He adjusted his hat and tucked his brown hair behind his ears. A slight headache had been hovering over his eyes as he brought his hands to his face. It was unlike him to experience the numbing feeling of writer's block, but tonight it had hit him harder than ever. Why were the words just not pouring onto the page, he wondered.

There was a sound of shuffling coming from downstairs. His father had been going through the cabinets, preparing for dinner. Aaron came down from his room and took a seat at the kitchen table. He

watched as his dad cooked chicken over a skillet at the stove. His father's hands were rough and always appeared dirty even though they were clean. They were the hands of a man who crafted and labored all day long. He watched as those same rough hands gently cooked dinner. No words were exchanged until Aaron's brother, Brennan, came into the room.

"How's it going B," his father asked as Brennan hung up his work jacket and took a seat next to Aaron.

"It's going good dad," he said as he nudged Aaron playfully and took a seat.

Aaron took off his hat and ran his hands through his hair. He slumped back in his seat. He couldn't relate to his father the same way Brennan could. There were feelings that he wished he did not have. It had to do with the fact that he had a different plan for his life than his brother and father had for themselves. His idea of a hard day at work was sitting at a computer composing and crafting stories; the art he loved more than anything. He was a sports writer, a word artist conveying the poetry of the athlete.

"So how hard was that wiring job today?" his father asked.

"Not bad really," Brennan said.

The conversation continued, but Aaron tuned out the rest. The technical words and lingo were beyond his comprehension.

Talk to me about baseball, he thought to himself. Ask me about how my story is coming, or how I'm waiting back to hear back about that internship I applied for last month. Show you care, he thought, cutting up the chicken on his plate into tiny little pieces and swirling around the ice cubes in his cup that were quickly dissolving in his drink.

Suddenly his father had begun to ask him questions.

"You catch that game last night?" his father asked.

"Yea, pretty wild huh," Aaron replied somewhat disinterested but hoping to find his way back into the conversation that his father and brother had inadvertently left him out of.

"I say we get to a game sometime soon."

Aaron sprung back to life. Baseball had become the only way that he could see eye to eye with his father. He did not have to defend his cause, or explain a reason why, and he definitely did not have to tune anything out. He could converse with his father and feel a connection using the game as an outlet.

"I've been looking to get to a real game," Aaron explained. "Covering these little league and college games only does so much. I love writing, but sometimes I just like to watch the game for what it is too."

"You can really see yourself writing for the rest of your life?" Brennan chimed in.

"Absolutely." Aaron began to plead his case. "Why else do you think I'm going to school for this?"

"Because you're a book worm and you don't want to get your hands dirty," Brennan said with a smirk and a mouth full of chicken.

Aaron threw down his fork, got up to clear his plate and put it into the sink. Without even acknowledging his father or brother, he made his way back up to his room, kicking out of his way the *Sports Illustrated* magazines cluttering the stairs. He closed the door and sat down at his computer once again. Sitting back in his chair, he gazed around the room at all of the baseball memorabilia. Jerseys hung

from the ceiling. Posters and framed photographs of baseball legends of the past and heroes of the present covered the walls. The room was a shrine to the holiest of games; at least that was how Aaron Lee viewed baseball. He could hear Brennan coming up to his room and he braced himself for what he would be thrown next.

"Dude, I was only messing with you," Brennan said leaning against the door frame.

"Yea, real funny. Let's pick on what I'm doing with my life a little more," Aaron mocked as he took off his hat and threw it down next to him.

"Well, I mean, it is pretty cool you get to write about baseball. I couldn't do that. You were always the smart one. I guess I'm just like dad."

"You and dad, just don't get it," Aaron pleaded. "I wish there was a way you could, especially dad."

Brennan quietly left the room leaving Aaron alone with his empty screen. Aaron began to reminisce about his father and the days when he would play catch with him and Brennan in the back yard. Baseball always brought them together and he wondered, could it still bring them closer now?

As he watched the sun set out his window, he looked out to the back yard. He imagined those days until his focus was brought back to the blinking cursor on the screen. It was then that an idea had come to him.

He typed what came to his mind and the page quickly began to fill with text. An idea for a column began to take shape. He vigorously typed on the keys stopping at nothing.

When 3:30 a.m. flashed on his clock, he was just about satisfied with the piece he had pumped out without a break. The only thing left now, was a headline.

"Ah, the dreaded headline," he said aloud laughing to himself.

And then it surfaced.

"9 innings with my father" he typed and sat back to admire his work. He closed the top of his lap top and finally went to bed.

The next week, the story got handed off to his editor at school, and it received nothing but praise. It was by far his best piece to date but there was still something that was not fully satisfying about it, at least to Aaron. He was worried what would happen when his father finally read it, but there was also a part of him that wanted him to see what he had written.

When the printed copy came out, Aaron had strategically left a copy on the table for his father to stumble upon.

One night while preparing dinner, his father came across the page. His son's name as a byline at the top of the page caught his eye. He carefully read the words, astonished they had come from the mind of his own son. He never understood the art of writing and was amazed how strongly his son sounded as the words seemed to dance across the page with a steady flow. The last paragraph was what captivated him the most.

And I know it is my father I can thank. There was no lesson I could have ever learned at school or words that could possibly express how I have gotten to this state of devotion to the game of baseball. Just as he has conveyed the beauty of a father who loves his son, I write these words to convey the beauty of a man

who loves this game. I am in love. During those nine innings, no matter what game it is I am covering, I am closely connected to my father.

A strong emotion came over him and he felt deeply connected to his son in a way he had not felt in a long time. He understood why his son chose to go off to college to pursue a writing career rather than working a trade as he had. It was suddenly a path he was proud his son had chosen .

Aaron came down from his room and sat at the kitchen table.

"Need any help with anything dad," Aaron asked.

"Yea," he said softly. "Tell me how it is that you got to be one hell of a writer."

Christina Zwilling Upsilon Upsilon

A Candy House

I want to be Gretel, to come across a candy house with sugar-covered windowpanes that sparkle in the moonlight, to taste the buttered walls on my tongue and rip off the front door to satisfy my stomach.

I want to meet the old witch there, the one with the red eyes and crooked smile, and I want to tell her that I will gladly check the oven. I want to stick my head into the heat and let her push me in completely; I want to savor the way the flames feel in my bones and let them melt inside my skin.

Hansel will fill himself with savory sweets; he will devour the house after I am gone. He will rub his stomach and groan, but I will not be sick. The witch will use my ashes to paint her walls; she will cover me over with butterscotch, and I will watch from behind the sugar. I will hold my breath and fade to nothing beneath the icing-flavored wallpaper.

Fingertips

Outside it is drizzling, the kind of rain that curls your hair with the humidity and soaks into your bones. It falls onto our shoulders and leaks through the fabric of our sweatshirts, making me shiver. I pull my hood over my head tighter and we walk, beneath the moon, over the puddles of sitting water and through the campus where we live.

We don't say anything at first. I am watching the little rivulets of water as they slide by, illuminated by the half-moon and the streetlights. It looks like glass; like thin strips of crystals that slither beneath my feet, clear and empty, the way I sometimes feel while I am in the shower, or just waking from a long, unexpected nap. My eyes can't seem to stay in focus, and with the mist from the rain, the yellow lights lining the sidewalk seem to be hazy, surreal; floating orbs that remind me of the way the bulbs of the Christmas tree would look when I took off my glasses.

Kristina slops through the puddles, letting the water splash her tennis shoes and lap up onto her bare shins. She lifts her eyes to the sky and lets the warm droplets fall onto her face, dripping between her hood and her hair and sliding down the back of her neck. I watch her curiously, eagerly – certain that if I, too, were able to enjoy the rain, the leaking, drenching weather of Northeast Ohio, that I would finally be happy.

"Let's play a game," she turns to me suddenly, her eyes bright with mischief. "Let's play tag in the rain."

"I don't want to." I pull my sweatshirt together around my neck where the rain has managed to snake in and chill my skin. My fingertips are pruned from the wetness. The rain begins to fall harder.

We walk on, past the chapel with its tinkling wind chimes, past the residence halls we used to live in. It feels to me like a movie reel, like the places I have been in my life are going past one more time, and the memories creep in on me. I push them away.

"We should call Kelly," Kristina flips open her phone and begins to dial. I watch the tiny flies illuminated in the haze of the streetlights. I wonder when they will die.

"She won't want to play tag with you," my voice sounds flat, monotonous, and it surprises me.

Kristina ignores me and puts the phone to her ear. We pass the track, with its bright, painted white lines glimmering in the soft rain. It looks like a vast expanse of nothing, and I can't help but wish I could walk the oval, stay between the crisply painted lines and see where I end up.

"She didn't answer," Kristina puts the phone back into her pocket, her brows pressed together tightly, as though they are drawn together by a piece of string. "She's probably with her boyfriend."

We turn the corner and start down a long sidewalk, gray and broken, littered with an empty beer can and a plastic bag. There is a group of several people a few feet in front of us – they are in pairs, one boy to each girl, six of them in total, and they are walking slowly in the rain, as though they can't feel the way it soaks through the girls' pretty blouses and dribbles down their legs. The two closest to us have locked hands; they are tittering to the left as they smile at each other, neither one noticing the deluge that has recently broken free from the sky. The girls all hold their high heels in their hands, bare feet slapping the dirty pavement, cool, slick skin meeting grainy sidewalk. I am mesmerized by the way they keep on going, the way they don't stop to examine the rivers flowing beneath their feet, or the sticky, brown remains of the dirt on the sidewalk. Thousands of feet stomp down these roads every day, wearing boots, heels, ballet flats, tennis shoes – millions and billions of feet, of animals, of leaves and grass that fall on the sidewalk, and here are three pairs of beautiful, striking, bone-white heels that plod down the cement on a drab, miserably cold Friday night.

"Once, we were playing hide-and-seek in the rain," Kristina's voice cuts through the air, and the girls and their feet are far ahead of us, and I can no longer hear the way their heels splash in the puddles.

"I was looking for my friend Val, and I thought I saw her behind the bushes in the garden over there," she points to the small pathway to our right with a bench and a few flowers and bushes. "I jumped out from behind that bush there, and I yelled, 'I found you!'" she grins sheepishly.

"But then . . . it wasn't Val." She waits for me to ask who it was, and when I don't answer she goes on, breathlessly. "It was these two kids, making out behind the bushes!" she laughs and clutches her stomach, shaking her head at the thought of it.

I smile thinly, but I can't think about the kids making out, indulging in their lusts behind a shrub. I can't think at all, really – all I can do is watch the images in my head as they spin around and around, a rollercoaster behind my eyeballs, swirling through my brain and pressing between my forehead.

I can see Johnny there, the way his eyes looked when he said good-bye, the way the pupils were so big that I couldn't tell where they ended and his brown irises began. The small curve of his chin, the way his

cheeks sagged when I finally left the car, my purse slung over my shoulder and my blouse wet with tears. I can hear his voice bouncing through my eardrums, saying my name over and over again, lilting, laughing, deepening when he became serious.

I can feel his fingers laced between mine, gripping desperately for something we could never have, would never have – but trying just the same, squeezing his warm palms between mine and making circles on my skin with his thumb. I can see the way his hands jerked slightly when I reached for the door handle, that slight, uncontrollable urge to touch me, to hold me; I saw the way he suppressed it, the way he let his eyes go blank and turn away, and I knew that he could never touch me again.

“Do you think Kevin would want to play tag in the rain?” I jump, startled to realize that I am still walking through the campus, water leaking between my flip-flops and soaking the bottoms of my jeans, the image of the navy blue seats of the car in late May fading.

Kristina doesn’t wait for my reply but pulls out her phone anyway. “I’ll call him,” she says. After a moment, he answers, and I hear their conversation from behind a screen, the way I imagine the priest at my church hears my confessions; foggy, as though they, too, are in the haze of the rain.

When Kristina closes her phone, the rain is shooting down from the sky, pelting into my face and sweatshirt, rolling through the layers of fabric and settling in the pores beneath my clavicle. I start to shiver.

“Do you want to go back?” Kristina has lost her enthusiasm after another rejection, and her face is pale in the light, almost glowing.

“No,” I let the rain engulf me, sink into every inch of me and try to fill me up. I dare it to make me whole; a rain-girl, a misty, wet shadow of a person roaming the campus at night. It comes at my face at an angle and the sharp streams pierce my cheeks. It is strange to feel like I am crying without really crying; and, given the choice, I much prefer the emptiness and solidarity of the rain.

Kristina begins to realize that I am not going to be much company, and we walk faster towards our residence hall. For a moment I think that my legs have turned to butter and are going to melt away right beneath me; that Kristina will find me sliding across the sidewalks beneath her feet, one with the rain, staring up at the sky and the porcelain heels that tromp by, unnoticed.

I look at my fingers. They are delicate, long, and skinny – it is impossible to find rings small enough to stay on them. I think of how they glide across the keys of the piano, pressing down minor chords and harmonies, creeping like spiders across sharps and flats and scales. I think of the way they felt when he held them to his lips, the way the coldness they always carry was filled up with something warmer, something real. It was the same as when his lips were on mine, that small piece of his soul that I could taste when he would breathe, the soft, slippery silk of his lips that pressed against mine for only a second, and then found their way to my forehead, my hair, my cheek.

It didn’t matter that I could feel his heart beating when I put my long piano fingers to his wrist, or that his lips could heat me from the inside out. It was nothing so long as the rain was still soaking into my sweatshirt, curling my hair, ruining my flip-flops; it was nothing so long as he let his hands fall back into his lap and watched me open the car door that last time.

I don’t think of my mother. I don’t think of the homework I have yet to do, or the children I may one day have, or the God who is supposed to be up there somewhere in the sky, watching over us. Instead, I think of my fingers, the way they had put together a jigsaw puzzle an hour before, the way they slid across

the pieces and felt the ridges and grooves, forced one piece after another into place until finally the picture was clear like the rain that slid beneath my feet, like the tiny rivulets of glass and crystal that no one noticed. I wondered why it was the only thing that would make me feel whole; the weight of those pieces in my hand, and the belief that I would be able to set them where they belonged and somehow understand.

Kristina lets her face tilt upwards towards the rain again, and I do the same. We stop and let the droplets purify our faces, sink beneath our skin and find their way through our bodies. I imagine the liquid stopping somewhere around my heart, pulsing in time with the brokenness, filling it up. I bring my fingers to my face and block out the glare of the moon, and there is nothing there but the darkness, and the hazy light, and the rain.

Man Down

I knew the exact number of steps it took to come down from the fourth floor. I always took the steps, seeing as it lends itself to enhancing my toned legs, which have lost a bit of the muscle they had when I was a college soccer player, but not much. I knew how many steps there were because I counted, every morning at eight o'clock when I went up to the office, and every evening at seven. I knew where the divits were in the railing, I knew which step had a creak and where to step to avoid that creak; I knew everything there was to know about those steps, but I did not know who pushed me down them.

It was a strange experience, falling. There are eighty-three steps from the very top, and of course I was at the very top when I was pushed. By step number seventy-nine, I was aware of what was happening. I kept count as my forehead, kneecaps, and elbows tumbled down the flights. I felt my satin tie wrap itself around my neck, and I wondered if maybe it would choke me before I reached the bottom.

It did not occur to me to try and look back up to the top, to see the face of the man who had pushed me. I knew it was a man because I felt the size of his hands on my shoulders. I wondered, as my hips cracked on step number sixty, if he had left any residue on the collar of my pinstriped shirt. I surely hoped not, for it was a designer piece, flown in from Paris, and it could not be replaced. I had hoped to get the matching tie, but when I checked, they were out of stock. I felt my collarbone cracking on the edge of a particularly hard step, and the pain reminded me of how I felt when I realized the Paris tie was out of stock.

Upon reaching the second floor landing, I began to think about what would happen when I reached the bottom. I truly did hope that a man of a certain social standing would find me, and not the janitor, for I do hope for some dignity, even in death. I did not think I would be able to bear it if my body were to lie on the gray-tiled floor for several hours, the dust resting atop my neatly combed hair, only for the janitor to find me with a wet mop in his hand and a toothpick dangling out the side of his mouth.

Feeling slightly jarred from smashing my temple into the handrail, I began to loosen my muscles to prepare for the landing. There would be no need for any person to look upon my body and not notice the rippling muscles in my abdomen, and also the tightened glutes I have been perfecting since last February. It shamed me to know that my hair was being ruffled by all the air that blew past it on my way down the stairs. I silently cursed the man who had pushed me. He was surely jealous of my standing in the company.

I believe I broke three ribs on my way down to the final stair. Around step number fourteen, I started to lose consciousness, and by step number eight I was sensing blood around my temple, which really is a shame, because my temple was previously so well-groomed, with not a bit of gray hair, and the blood there

will really make it difficult to notice my youth.

I landed quite gracefully at the bottom of the stairs, so gracefully, I might add, that I suppose it would have looked like I planned to fall in just that way, had any educated person been at the bottom to see me. As it was, there was not a janitor there, for which I am very thankful, but there was no one there at all. I lay in the grime of the gray-tiled floor and pondered the thought of being buried in my gray Italian suit, with the matching shoes. I decided, before I died, that it would be nicer to be buried in my very best business suit, the one with the subtle blue pinstripes, the one that I had bought with the money from my promotion. It occurred to me that I did not know who had pushed me down the stairs. Upon further thought, I wondered what would happen to my matching Italian shoes when my body was placed in the morgue.

Brittany Lodge Alpha Upsilon

Surrender

As a little girl, I used to have a lot of trouble falling asleep. When I most desperately wanted to capture those proverbial Z's, I found them most impossible to find. I remember one night of tossing and turning and watching the minutes flash by on my digital alarm clock. When I rolled over one time and saw the bright red numbers 11:06, I could only imagine the rest of the world fast asleep, while I alone inhabited the region of the waking. Of course, I didn't know of the thousands of college students just getting started on research papers at 11:06 on a weeknight, or of the mothers up with cranky babies, or the retirees watching Wheel of Fortune reruns. I also failed to understand that on the other side of the world, men and women were wide awake, thriving in the brightness of day. I saw a dark, snoring world and me all alone, my open eyes illuminated by the red alarm clock glow.

As I recall that night, 11:06 doesn't feel so late anymore. In fact, I can't remember a recent night I've fallen asleep before midnight. But I've also discovered the magical world of naps. I can fall asleep almost anywhere. And I've found a deep and secret pleasure in falling asleep in unconventional places. On my four-day service trip to New York City last year, I found the supreme ecstasy of dozing off in subway trains. I have long enjoyed the cozy pleasure of sleeping on the couch, still in my day clothes, or succumbing to the sweetness of sleep on a sunny lawn or beach. Falling asleep is like being transported to a different place, like being in a magical time machine or space capsule. The body remains in the physical realm, but the spirit drifts into that realm beyond consciousness, into another dimension.

I'm captivated by the mystery of sleep, a state in which I am alive, but unconscious. In sleep, I do not control my body, relinquishing something inherent to awareness. Yet there is a new and magical awareness in sleep; dreams and half-waking moments are memorable upon reentry into the land of the waking. Sleep refreshes our bodies and renews our minds. Those hours of doing nothing prepare us to do everything. Sleep is on equal footing with food and water in its value to our bodies but it remains a mystery. What happens when the body falls asleep? To what far-off realm does the mind travel alone?

The space between the waking world and the sleeping world is a fine line indeed. Novelist Jerry Spinelli wrote that we are most alive, most human in those few moments between wake and sleep. We find there our primordial roots, the part of human nature that connects us with the rest of humankind and the rest of the living world. Sleep is universal. In sleep we find common ground with all other people who have ever slept. The mystical, ethereal quality of our dreamscape is a shared mystery among the human race. But,

paradoxically, there is privacy in sleep, a boundary that keeps us from invading anyone else's sleep. Sharing a bed with someone, for the purpose of sleep, is invasion of personal space. But lovers, sleeping together and waking together, presumably find joy in that shared space of not just sex, but also sleep.

Whether I'm curled up with another warm and sleepy body or stretched out and comfortably alone, I love surrendering to slumber. I love feeling the slow slide into that foreign yet familiar land. I relish that no-man's-land between waking and sleeping. But sometimes, my lust for that moment is thwarted. Like when the duty of a long drive takes precedence over my desire for sleeping.

One memorable weekend last year, I was leaving a parking garage in Baltimore at midnight. Normally, I'm getting ready for bed around this time. My body starts to shut down for the night. My heart rate slows, my breathing deepens, my eyelids get heavy... all powerful sleep begins his conquer of my body. But that night, with a two-hour drive ahead of me, I couldn't succumb to his conquest.

As if the nighttime itself weren't enough, other factors contributed to my weariness. My feet hurt after standing for the duration of the four hour concert. My calves ached, my toes were cramped from my stylish but not-so-practical shoes, and my eyes felt dry and itchy. I felt dirty too, from the smoky bar. My hands felt sticky and still bore the big black X's of the underage concert attendees and my hair had trapped the smoky smell of the bar. I couldn't wait to fall into the clean and bodiless freedom of sleep. But I had to hold on to the slippery cliff of wakefulness, thought my body was utterly against me.

For a while, I managed to feel alert. The bright lights of the city and the rush of traffic just outside the city stimulated my eyes and ears. But as the tangle of overpasses gave way to the endlessness of the open highway, I started to lose focus. Other vehicles were few and far between. I pictured the world falling asleep without me, reminding me of a Best Western commercial. I drifted alone in the realm of the waking as I did at 11:06 that long-ago night.

The taillights up ahead wobbled uncontrollably before my eyes. Exit signs swam in the haze of my sleepy vision. Once I found myself just a bit too close to that concrete median. I wasn't always sure if my eyes were open or closed and if I was watching the tangible road, or some gossamer thread of a dream. I kept glancing at the time on the car radio, waiting for an hour to pass, trying to make progress through time. I counted the minutes, trying to calculate the time that remained. My eyes forgot how to focus. I could only see the ten yards directly in front of my car. Lanes drifted in my half-dream.

Finally, I recognized my exit, drove past the mall, and parked safely on campus. Luckily I was able to sleep late into the following day in my warm bed. They say that sleep clings to a person. I think perhaps we cling to sleep. We find in the realm of sleep something that we can never find in the realm of wakefulness. An intangible ambrosia, an ethereal honey whose sweetness has no comparison in the waking world. We get drunk on sleep, addicted to sleep.

I will fall asleep again tonight, as I have almost every night of my life, even the night I was still awake at 11:06. And tomorrow morning, when my alarm clock brings me back to the realm of the waking, I will wonder anew at the mystery of sleep. May you sleep well tonight, and perhaps I shall meet you in the collective dreamland of the sleeper.

First Speed-Dial

My first memory hides in hazy shadows at the back of my mind. I can't be entirely sure that it

happened, or that it happened in the way I remember it; it comes to me as fragmented images laced with emotion. It finds me at a frightened and vulnerable place where my only comfort came in the form of my mother. In the memory, I am upstairs in our old house, a building I cannot even picture anymore except for my perspective in this story, listening to a cassette tape in my room. There was one song on this tape that scared me, a song about a little boy eating too much candy and getting sick. I was probably two or three years old and I didn't know how the cassette player worked. I wanted to skip over this song, so I went to the top of the stairs and called for my mom to come and fast-forward the tape. When I remember this event, my perspective shifts from the top of the staircase, where I stood, to the bottom, where my mother probably stood to hear my cries. Somehow, in my memory, I play both roles. I don't remember what happened next. I'm sure Mom came upstairs and helped me with the tape. If there were tears in my eyes, I'm sure she dried them. Those parts of the memory have drifted, irretrievable, into the realm of the subconscious. The accuracy of this memory matters much less than what it represents. In that moment of fear, in my time of weakness and inability to care for myself, I called on my mother. As I think about how she calmed me that day, I see how little has changed.

I tend to operate under the assumption that Mom can fix anything. But I've slowly learned something about mothers: they are human too. As magical as they seem, moms are not another race or another species or another variety of mammal. Moms get tired. Moms get cranky and sick. Moms get self-conscious and stressed out and overwhelmed. I used to think moms were impervious to this sort of thing. They are perfect, unaffected by the normal emotions and ailments common to humanity, right? No. Actually, a mom has to feel these things multiplied since she internalizes all the symptoms of humanity that her children feel in addition to her own struggles. My own mother demonstrates this well. No matter what might be going on, she takes my situation – happy or horrible – and makes it hers too. If I'm frustrated by a professor, Mom sympathizes. If I'm sick, Mom brings me juice and soup and pills. If I'm excited about a new friendship, Mom wants to share in my joy. I assumed that this ability for a mother to enter into her children's lives with such understanding came with the black bag of magical tricks all mothers have in a back closet. But I haven't found that black bag in my house. I'm starting to think a mom has to function without pixie dust, a fact that makes the charge of motherhood all the more impressive and infinitely more daunting.

They say a mother's work is never done. As I've watched my mom take care of my sister and me for the last twenty-one years, I'm starting to understand the truth of this adage. Mom's presence has to serve us whenever we find ourselves needing her. She's at the other end of the phone line when we need advice on which dress to buy, or on how to phrase an important email, or on how to cook a casserole. She comes to all of our performances and competitions. She encourages creativity, independence, and confidence. She made me a sandwich this morning, even though I'm twenty-one and capable of making my own sandwich before work. Mom is there for us because she chooses to be. She is our stable constant in this world of constant change. When no one else is there, when nobody else wants to listen, I always have Mom.

It's been almost twenty-one and a half years since I made my mother a mother, and I am now well-versed in the fast-forward buttons of various tape players. But I'm still calling Mom for help and comfort, as well as to share good news. Two recent conversations with Mom show the range of roles that she fills in answering my calls. Last summer I had an interview for an important summer internship. Mom was at work, but she knew what my day held: finding my way to the office, finding the municipal parking lot, finding the receptionist's desk... I felt mature and important driving to the interview, walking into the big building in my high heels, and meeting with my potential boss in the conference room. I tried to do things the way

Mom would: a cheery hello to the receptionist, a smile as I sat in the waiting area, an unobtrusive glance at my watch from time to time... The interview went well and the editor of a minor suburban newspaper offered me a summer as Lois Lane. When I got back to my car, feeling even more important and mature, the first number I called on my cell phone was my mom. Her number is my first speed-dial on my Samsung cell phone, which, incidentally, matches her Samsung cell phone. Before talking to anybody else, my initial impulse was to call Mom. She shared my joy as if it were her own.

The second instance was not so joyful. On a busy Saturday afternoon, I was driving on an unfamiliar highway over an hour away from home. Suddenly I heard a sound like a helicopter close overhead. Only, the sound was not coming from overhead; the frightening sound was coming from my car. I pulled over, my heart pounding and my mind crowded with visions of exploding engines and burning shells of former SUVs, and did the only thing you can do in such a situation. I called Mom. She was calm, just as I'd expected her to be, even if my engine actually had been exploding. While I told her in frantic fragments about the scary noise my trusty car had been emitting, I crawled over my passenger seat, and opened the door away from the rushing traffic. My back right tire was a sadly deflated balloon of black rubber. I started to cry into the phone. My engine fears quelled, I now anticipated a broken axle or a destroyed wheel. But Mom, always comforting, told me to call Triple A and wait safely in my car. She assured me that it would be alright. Which of course, in the end, it was.

There's another dusty memory in the back of my mind that I can just barely touch, and usually only when I'm on the fringes of sleep. It's a sensation rather than a memory. When I'm just drifting from wakefulness into the silence of sleep, I sometimes find myself encountering an unknown but familiar sensation of physical comfort. I feel small, surrounded by something blank and huge. Sometimes my mind converts this into a large, pure white room. Sometimes it feels closer, like I'm clutching a fat, white feather pillow. For a long time I couldn't figure out why this strange dreamscape felt familiar to me. But I've got a guess now. As impossible as it sounds, I believe that as I lose myself into the clouded subconscious realm of sleep and dreams, my mind reaches all the way back to its first experience. I think I begin to re-experience the sensation of the womb. This place of the mind is without sounds, without words or images, without flavor or scent. It is an inner sense of calm and rest, a pure space of complete peace. Before my mother ever held me or spoke my name, kissed my forehead or dried my tears, called my cell phone or made me a sandwich, she provided me with the perfect understanding of love and comfort. In the warm half-memory of my pre-birth slumber, I get closer to perfect purity than in any other experience.

There is something infinitely comforting about having Mom at the other end of a phone call. I know that no matter what, she will remain level-headed and collected and reassuring. Mom is the voice of reason and the voice of wisdom. She is the one I trust when I can't trust anyone else. Maybe moms don't have any special magic, but I know they have extra grace. I don't know where I'd be today without my mom's constant presence. She has been the best example of motherhood I have seen. I have a long way to go before I'm in a position to match her mothering skills. But I hope I can someday be as good a Mom as she is. I hope I can be somebody's first speed-dial.

Open Water

It's still dark in the big beach house when I wake up to Daddy's gentle shake. "Ready for some coffee?" I can only grunt in response. "C'mon," Dad continues, "It's time to get up." He goes back upstairs, leaving my conscience to finish the job. I sit up, rub the sleepy crust out of my eyes, and reach for my

glasses on the dresser above me. I get dressed and sneak past my sleeping cousins in the basement room we all share to follow Dad upstairs.

In the kitchen, Uncle Dan and Uncle Paul are standing at the counter, pouring cereal while the coffee brews. I sit down, resting my tired head on crossed arms on the table in front of me. My uncles' eyes are as sleepy as mine. Uncle Dan yawns an enormous sigh. It's the morning of our fishing trip, and I know the routine. Embarking on another trip to sea with the guys is the highlight of my annual beach trip with the family. It's a fishing expedition, twelve hours on the water, hoping for a catch to grill in the evening for family dinner. Dad usually comes along, but this year the crew consists of me, Uncle Paul, Uncle Dan, Pop-Pop and my cousin Matt. Dad has gotten up to drive us to the marina. We'll be out in the ocean for most of the day while the rest of the family naps on the beach or explores the shops of beach-flavored knick-knacks and salt-tinted trinkets.

The sky is barely beginning to lighten when we get to the marina. In their places along the dock the fishing boats nod in the current. Marlin Mania, Miss Hatteras, and Native Son await a bounteous catch. We find our boat, Carolina Girl, near the middle of the dock and meet the captain. "Nice day out there," he says. "We're just about ready to head out." Dad and I walk into the tackle shop. I love tackle shops; everything's so colorful and shiny. Dad looks at sinkers, the most boring aisle of the whole shop. I look at lures, the big, glittery six- and seven-inch ones for all the monster fish we're going to catch today. I like the ones that claim to "smell like real crab" and "squirm realistically." They look like toys, if not for the hooks hidden in the fluttering tentacles. I sometimes think it's a waste to make something so beautiful – and so expensive – only for the purpose of catching dinner. Uncle Paul comes in, the rusty bells on the door clanking together. "Time to go," he says.

I hug Dad and step off the solid dock down into the rocking boat, ducking into the cabin to join the others. We putter slowly out of our slip and head for open waters, but once we've cleared the harbor area, we pick up speed. I remember this part. I walk out of the cabin to feel the wind in my hair as we plunge forward. We leave a wide path of ripples in our wake. I'm never sure how the captain knows where to go; all we can see is ocean in every direction. Sometimes we pass a buoy. Now the sun is rising. I snap a few pictures as the orange orb creeps up over the watery horizon. It's tiny in the distance, barely providing warmth or light. But before long, its gradual ascent has lit the sky and warmed the deck of our little boat.

We start the day with success. We hit a school of dolphin fish, and begin reeling them in, several at a time on various lines. When I'm not reeling in a fish, I'm leaning over the edge to watch them swim. Out of the water, they're just a bland green color. But in the water, dolphins are beautiful fish. Greenish yellow, some almost blue, and all flashingly iridescent, shinier than the lures in the tackle shop.

When we seem to have exhausted the school, the captain takes us onward to another location. This is pretty much how the day goes. Three of us get to reel in Wahoo, big fish that look like Barracuda, long and grey with sharp teeth. Matt catches an amberjack, relative of the tuna, and somebody reels in a tropical parrotfish that must have lost its way and ended up in the Atlantic waters along the North Carolina coast. When the sun is hot and the fish stay deep, I find shelter in the cabin. Around the middle of the day I start to feel a little nauseated and chew up another chalky Dramamine tablet. The day stays quiet, each of us turning inward to our own thoughts between catches. A peanut butter sandwich out of our cooler of snacks... a completed crossword puzzle... another school of fish to catch... these things punctuate the day as the sun crests the dome of the sky and begins to slide back down into the sea.

Out in the deep ocean I connect with something inherently human. Maybe it's the proximity to water, that indispensable human need. Maybe it's watching the sun rise over the distant horizon and knowing that the earth's been spinning like this – and the sun putting on its spectacular morning performance – for centuries. In the huge theatre of sky and sea, I cannot ignore my own smallness. Maybe the sense of isolation, even surrounded by the men on the boat, lends a quality of danger that is at once attractive and terrifying. The sea is untamed, still keeping secrets from us. Massive, unknown creatures lurk in the deepest recesses of the sea; people lost at sea are rarely found; and the vast sameness of the wide ocean forces travelers to rely on expensive equipment, or perhaps the stars, for guidance. A deal is struck with the sea when humans travel there. We agree to be passengers, subject to the uncertain capriciousness of untamed water. Yet in this position of weakness, we become strong. Borne on the waves of the sea, we join the rapids of time that have brought history here. And when we leave the water, we know it will continue to flow.

I feel this way whenever I'm around water. My first sight of Niagara Falls instilled a similar sensation of inherent humanness and essential life. I found myself absolutely speechless at the sight of the waterfall, realizing that water had been falling from those cliffs for centuries and that it would continue to fall long after my gaze was averted. Being on the beach, especially at nighttime, also evokes an awareness of the expansive and indefinable ocean. We are merely one more grain of sand on the beaches of time, the ocean stretching almost infinitely in every direction. When I traveled abroad this year, I constantly yearned to see the sea. A few field trips took us to water. I saw Portsmouth Harbour in southern England, Cork Bay in the south of Ireland, and the River Tiber in Rome. But none of these were ocean. I thought I might be getting somewhere when I went north to Liverpool with my dad in April. But as we walked downhill to the western edge of town, getting ever closer to what we knew would be water, we ended up seeing only a rather shallow and industrialized section of the River Mersey. Although I could smell the rank aroma of seaweed and sun-warmed shallows, the geography of England's bony coastline once again kept the sea at arm's length. The ocean again eluded me, as do so many of life's greatest gifts when we seek them voraciously rather than allowing them to reveal themselves in perfect, beautiful time.

I know my dad is drawn to the sea as well. Although he didn't join me on this fishing trip, he did join me on many others. And I'm sure that while I was out at sea that day, he was on the beach, facing the same sea and watching the same sun rise high into the afternoon sky. Though the curve of our mysterious earth kept us out of each other's sight, the ocean connected us. The waves lapping at the pebbly shoreline on the beach drew strength from the deep, rocking surface under Carolina Girl. Because of this mystery, I know that I am still connected to my dear England although an ocean divides us. I know that rivers are not boundaries, but seams. Water gives life, sustains life, and represents life. Into the fringes of this vast life, we dip our toes, drop our lines, and shove our boats. Lest we fear the mysterious deep, let's also jump in. Without fearing the danger of the shiny lures, let's bask in a new sunrise or come to the cliff of an unknown waterfall. Let's wake up to the rhythm of the waves far above and blink away the salt water to look with new eyes at the life stretching out toward a distant horizon.

E. Jayne Forigh Alpha Eta Sigma

Acid Dreams

I am the Mad Hatter, hosting a party for the ghosts of nostalgia in a wonderland of solitude, but I want more than to live the lies that manipulate the freewill of others. I want your heavy promises to become weightless, so I return to your apartment in hopes of regaining some sense of balance. I intend to

tell you the proper way to care for a person such as me, the curious girl who chokes on her lies as she simultaneously breeds them like an airborne virus.

I ring the doorbell repeatedly and hear shuffles inside, but you refuse to answer. I scream, "Open the door!" and listen for a response.

"Can you wait?" you say through an open window, so I wait, lonely in the forgotten street. I wait for you to pull me in and shelter me from the cold. I've *been* waiting, waiting to trust myself on these old grounds, waiting for you to understand who I was and who I am, to understand my sorrows and to forgive my mistakes, but time's wasted like chafe in the breeze.

To be known as someone I am not is my sole means of escape, for you will always lose the person I am. *You* are my means of escape, my hero of yesterday, and I stand here wishing for your permission to indulge under the pink clouds of the dying daylight tonight in the park, head full of 'cid.

Acid is a marked deck anyway, each card filled with the strangeness and decay found amongst the most uncontrollable of emotions. Its reach is as long as eternity, but since I cannot distinguish my heaven from your hell, then maybe neither exists in the first place. Perhaps I shall always remain caught in purgatory, at least until you find the church of my heart, where the choir sings with the clarity of winter winds.

Before you open the door unto me, the clouds turn black, and scattered raindrops splatter on the pavement below my feet. October is the month of downpours in my fishbowl world, and if I want to avoid the storm, I simply cannot await your blessing any longer.

With a maladjusted mind I precede towards the park, prepared to commit a variety of sins along the way, for I have powerful thoughts to envision before I seek salvation in the aftermath of my tainted journey. Besides, it's hard to focus on forgiveness when you have faith in nothing.

In world of chaos, I look towards the future realm of infinite possibility, and my own eyes stare back, reflecting the image of a self-destructive genius. I then realize that the only certainty in my life is that you'll take a sledgehammer to my heart once I return. The image of the pulverization of my bleeding heart infuses my mind with the fear of possibilities, and the useless chatter in my head will not relent.

Nighttime descends from the heavens, and I stare into the vast darkness as I smoke the last cigarette of today. I gaze past all horizon lines and emerge at the end of eternity, where I wait in limbo for purity and for sin. My sight adjusts into focus and then fixates on the brightest star within the tiny piece of the universe that hovers above my head. I gaze into the naked world in a desperate search to grasp a hint of truth before the twilight drapes my mind with darkness, and I am suddenly aware that I need chaos to function. If only its coupled confusion could become stagnant, then I would put the brakes on all this excess and fall into the light.

Lost in my head, I zone out and into the blackness, wondering where and why the rain decided to vanish. The whole experience – both of mind and of body – must have been dealt from the bottom of the deck, for I feel cheated. This is not what it means to be, to exist, but I convince myself, nonetheless, that the 'cid makes me feel alive again.

As I walk towards solid ground, I throw my emotions into the night, and now I'm hollow inside, purged of temptation. Dawn's light shadows the ground with impenetrable blackness. At one time fallen leaves had carpeted the forgotten grounds like a mountain of rare gems the color of fire. I reminisce alone in a landscape where dull rays of light drowned the night sky. The gradual illumination causes the shadows to

retreat and the colors to radiate.

Branches shift into new forms as they divide the skyline into a chaotic mosaic that floats between the clouds and the colors, creating the landscape of a surrealist's wet dream. To escape the visualizations, the mind, especially the imagination, must remain paralyzed as it waits for the counterfeit landscape to come together. Reality regains its normalcy as the final residues of acid molecules dissolve, but before the sprawling fantasia disappears, I patiently piece together the negative space of the blaring sunrise, the space that forms between the silhouettes of bare branches as they reach upwards towards the waxing sunlight.

It is then that I realize I have entered a state of emergency, for my spirit is wrecked. I have forgotten my true path, and I just want to find my way back home. I choke down the mounting insanity and regret with a handful of downers, but the feeling spreads like a cancer of the mind, so I return to your apartment. I don't bother to knock, for I know you left the door unlocked in case I returned. You always wait for my return.

Although I'm here to be healed, I know you'll no longer listen to my pleas, for I am a liar to everyone I don't need, and I need no one.

I find you at the kitchen table with a cup of a coffee and the morning paper. You give me one quick glance and ask, "Are you fuckin' high?"

The 'cid makes it hard for me to judge you, but I know you'll turn sympathetic soon enough. "Pull me close," I command softly. You remain motionless.

"Pull me —" I ask again, but then I am suddenly paralyzed by tears as I reach the point of collapse, realizing that this shall be the last time our two worlds ever collide. Our love burns away into hot ash, but the embers will soon smolder out, for there's rain in the air.

You won't be the first that I've lost. I disconnect from everyone, for they cannot handle my madness, and you cannot handle my heart, for it's fragile like the mind that's been promised the perfection of acid dreams.

Criminal Love

It's mid-winter, and Blake and I drive to the only place open in Brattleboro when the bars close at 2:00 a.m. — the 24-hour Price Chopper. We stumble down the aisles, holding each other's hands for balance more than for a human connection.

We stop in Aisle 9, and Blake suddenly grabs my waist, pulls my body towards his, and then shoves his tongue deep inside of my mouth. Workers stocking the shelves stop to watch but quickly turn away, embarrassed by our unabashed display of public affection.

He runs his hand across my ass but not as a sexual gesture, for in the same fluid motion Blake smoothly slides a package of Lipton PastaSides into the back pocket of my jeans. The make-out session hides his actions; my winter jacket hides the bulge of stolen goods.

Blake stops kissing me and reaches for my hand to lead me casually down the next few aisles. We fane interest in taco fixings, but after a moment or two I place the salsa back on the shelf, and we move on to the frozen food section.

We stagger throughout the store hand-in-hand, and I giggle to myself as Blake pulls me towards him

and beings to kiss me again. I shiver slightly in his arms as the frozen peas shoot a chill through my body. He slips a few more packages of food into my pockets, and then we suddenly part lips, and he flashes me a knowing look. After quickly turning away, he heads towards to the front of the store, and I trail slightly behind.

We peruse the magazine racks that line the checkouts before walking out the sliding glass doors with a confident air of nonchalance. I burst into laughter as our footsteps hit the pavement of the parking lot, now blanketed with a fresh coat of snow.

"Pure genius," I announce as I unlock the driver's side door and begin to climb inside, hoping that my defroster will decide to work this time.

"Nah, lemme drive," he says, ignoring my comment as he holds out his hand expectantly for the keys.

"But you've had more to drink than me."

"Barely."

"Barely's enough."

"C'mon. I gotta higher tolerance than you."

"That's only 'cause you got three years on me."

"Gimme the keys," he insists.

I sigh and hand them over despite my better judgment.

I empty the groceries from my pockets before stepping into the passenger's seat and turning on the radio. I allow my mind to wander to the beat of the music. *We use each other to satisfy our own selfish needs and desires, regardless of the psychological discord that always stands between us.*

And tonight my mania stands a little too close to his egocentricity, for by tomorrow my psychoses will leave me standing alone with his stolen heart in my hand.

Elike Avil Xi Xi

Humor and Fantasy in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*

Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* begins as a seemingly humorous novel about a tour guide who cannot speak English very well. It then jumps to a Ukrainian shtetl in 1791. By the end of the novel, the serious subject matter of the Holocaust comes through and the humor disappears. In a conversation the character Jonathan Safran Foer has with his tour guide, Alex, he says, "I used to think humor was the only way to appreciate how wonderful and terrible the world is . . . But now I think it's the opposite. Humor is a way of shrinking from that wonderful and terrible world" (158). This idea is portrayed in the novel through Alex's progression, yet the comic and fantastical elements are still used in a way to "appreciate" the world. The use of humor and fantasy in *Everything is Illuminated* does not take away from the seriousness of the subject matter but, I would argue, makes it even more somber and grave through contrast.

The characters themselves demonstrate that the use of humor and laughter eases the tension of serious situations. At the restaurant the first night Jonathan is with Alex and his grandfather, tension continues to

build not only because of Grandfather's anti-Semitism but also because of Jonathan's lifestyle choices such as vegetarianism. Finally, when they all share the potato that fell on the floor, tension is broken through humor and laughter: "'Welcome to Ukraine,' I translated. Then I started laughing. Then the hero started laughing. We laughed with violence, and then more violence" (67). Laughter acts as an icebreaker between the three men, and Grandfather's anti-Semitism begins to lessen when he says to Alex later that night, "[Jonathan] is a good boy" (73). Even Jonathan can only use laughter in response to the somber reason his grandmother, who walked across Europe to escape the Nazis, picked him up as a child. He explains to Alex, "I'm laughing because it wasn't until years later that I realized she was weighing me" (158).

In the beginning of Alex's novel, however, he uses comedy not as relief from the tensions of reality but as a lie to cover it up. Alex's description of his family and his love life creates an atmosphere of humor. In his essay "Almost Friends," Menachem Feuer argues that "it is clear that Alex's central deception is to use this comic narrative to endear himself to Jonathan" (26). Alex writes about liking "Negroes, especially Michael Jackson," and "[disseminating] very much currency at famous nightclubs" because he thinks these things make him sound more "premium" and will appeal to Jonathan (2). Feuer argues that through his writing, Alex is even hoping to make his relationship with Jonathan more of a friendship than it really is: "Alex looks at his translation (account of the journey), which is not yet finished, as an opportunity to change their relationship, thereby indicating that to this point, it has been unsatisfactory" (27).

Alex not only uses humor to make himself appear better, he uses humor in an attempt to cover up serious issues. He initially covers his father's abuse with humor by joking about his brother's "accidents" and his nickname as the "Clumsy One" (3). He does not want to face the realities of the abuse just as he later does not want to face the reality of his grandfather's actions during World War II. Alex even admits by the end of the novel that he uses lies and humor to protect himself and his family (his grandfather, in this particular case) from reality: "I present not-truths in order to protect you. That is also why I try so inflexibly to be a funny person. Everything is to protect you" (227). Jonathan's insistence on the tragic, however, makes it so Alex cannot continue to cover up truth with lies and humor. This upsets Alex, and he questions Jonathan, "if we are to be such nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life?" (179). Feuer explains, "Jonathan's writing introduces transgression and confusion into Alex's life. It ruins his concept of love and truth and makes him, in some way, 'mad'" (41-42). Alex argues, "With writing, we have second chances," and he does not understand why Jonathan does not take advantage of these second chances (144).

It is through the uncovering of the lies behind the humor that Alex begins to develop as a character. And it is through Jonathan's writing that Alex is forced to abandon his comic, falsely-optimistic view on life. After reading Jonathan's account of Brod and Kolker's relationship, he writes, "One could learn very much from the marriage of Brod and Kolker. I do not know what, but I am certain that it has to do with love" (143). He then writes, however, about his "not-truths." Feuer explains, "Alex goes on, in this letter, to show how reading this account has made him more honest" (41). He may not be able to specify what he learned from Brod and Kolker's story, but he displays it as he openly talks about his "not-truths" he designed to make him "feel like a premium person," and he admits that he has never been "carnal" with a woman (144). In a later letter, Alex writes, "I have learned many momentous lessons from your writing, Jonathan. One lesson is that it does not matter if you are guileless, or delicate, or modest. Just be yourself" (179). By the end of the novel, Alex has abandoned his use of lies and humor. He even writes in a postmodern style when he writes Grandfather's confession as one long sentence to represent both Grandfather's and his own breakdown. Even Grandfather realizes this change in Alex: "I had never been so

proud, or so certain of who he was" (273). Alex has learned to face reality "without resorting to comedy" (Feuer 44).

By following Alex's progression, Jonathan's thought that "Humor is a way of shrinking from that wonderful and terrible world" (158) is affirmed; yet not all humor is used to cover up reality, and Jonathan himself uses a darker humor in his own narrative that exposes the "wonderful and terrible world." Lee Behlman explains that an alternative to sentimental and redemptive fiction is fiction "riven with a more fitting linguistic and narrative self-doubt." This fiction may include "crude narration, irony, black humour, appropriation, sensationalism, even characters who mouth anti-semitic slogans" (57). This is the type of narration and humor Jonathan employs.

Much of the humor of Jonathan's narration comes from the intermingled use of fantasy and futuristic elements with a culture in the past. Behlman argues that this is one way young American Jewish writers handle their gap with the Holocaust:

With the greater cultural and historical gap, and the loss of many witnesses to the Holocaust, has come a loss in direct access to the experience of the Holocaust and its effects. One major response to the problem of representation by young American writers has been the use of fantasy, folklore, and magical-realist devices (56).

When the humorous folkloric and magical elements are used along with the horrifying reality of the Holocaust, the readers experience a shock when recognizing the clash between the culture and the cultural destruction of the Holocaust. This shock creates an even greater unease than if the reader were not first introduced to the folklore and magic.

Jonathan's narrative about Trachimbrod contains many of these humorous, folkloric, magical elements. The description of the "Uprights" and the "Slouchers" and the openness of discussion on sex are both humorous to us as we think about the history of the 1700 and 1800's as a very uptight one. Even Jonathan's play with religion is humorous: "AND THE CONDEMNED SAW THE BLESSED, SAW THEIR LOBSTER TAILS AND PROSCIUTTO, SAW WHAT THEY PUT IN THE HUNCHES OF MENSTRATING SHIKSAS, AND FELT THAT MUCH WORSE FOR THEMSELVES" (20). The fantastical elements he employs also create a sense of humor within the narrative. An example of this is when everyone in the shtetl is making love: "From space, astronauts can see people making love as a tiny speck of light . . . Trachimday is the only time all year when the tiny village of Trachimbrod can be seen from space . . . *We're here*, the glow of 1804 will say in one and a half centuries. *We're here, and we're alive*" (96). Jonathan's humor, as opposed to Alex's empty humor, is a dark humor because it points to truths in people, society, religion, or whatever it is that we find ourselves laughing about.

Jonathan also employs grotesque humor throughout the Trachimbrod narrative. The entire story of Brod and Kolker reflects a dark, sad humor. The image of Kolker with a disc-saw stuck in his head and the picture of their marriage that "was able to return to a kind of normality, after the removal of the headboard from their bed" creates images and characters that are simultaneously grotesquely humorous and sad. The use of fantasy and folklore (as well as Alex's attempt at a Romantic quest) initially creates an optimistic expectation in the reading because, as Feuer argues, "the fable is essentially optimistic" (36). This optimistic beginning of both Alex's narrative and Jonathan's Trachimbrod folkloric narrative is a way of deceiving us into believing we will learn the moral of the story. Feuer argues, however, that the "real lesson is, in fact,

both pessimistic and tragic" (36). Although Jonathan's story, like Alex's, moves from comic to tragic, it does so with this intention and is constructed in such a way that the comic eventually enhances the tragic. Behlma argues, "A significant effect of these juxtapositions is an uneasy sort of humor . . . based to a high degree on what the folkloric, fantastic Jewish world does not know, in its comparative innocence" (60). In this case, humor is used to enhance the terribleness of the world that destroyed the shtetl's "comparative innocence."

In his novel, Foer goes both with and against Jonathan's argument that "Humor is a way of shrinking from that wonderful and terrible world" (158). Alex's development from lying to cover up an ugly reality to coming to terms with this reality illustrates how one can use humor to shrink from the world. Yet Jonathan also employs humor in his Trachimbrod narrative. His humor, however, is not created by empty lies but by folklore and fantasy that point to reality and eventually contrast and enhance the horror of the Holocaust. Feuer explains Aristotle's view of tragedy and comedy: "As Aristotle tells us, a central feature of both tragedy and comedy is anagoresis (recognition) of what was before then unknown" (30). In this way, *Everything is Illuminated* is both a tragedy and a comedy. Both Alex's narration and the Trachimbrod narration begin as a comedy, yet through the recognition of what was unknown in the past, they both develop to portray the tragic elements of life.

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Amy Clark Alpha Alpha Lambda

Vampire Imagery in D. H. Lawrence's "Love on the Farm"

The poem "Love on the Farm" by D. H. Lawrence can be interpreted as a vampire poem. The poem centers around a mysterious man who exudes a type of eroticism often associated with vampires.

The first stanza of the poem begins to create a sense of foreboding when it asks "What large, dark hands are those at the window..." The foreboding becomes foreshadowing with the lines "Which weaves its way through the evening wind/At my heart's delight?" In these lines we begin to sense the vampire presence and know that the vampire will go through the darkness of evening to find its lover or prey.

The dark hands "grasping in the golden light" of the first stanza represent our first peek at the vampire awakening at sunset. One can imagine the arm of the vampire reaching out of his coffin and preparing for his prowl through the evening hours. Stanza four also offers an image of the freshly wakened vampire as he begins his hunt with the lines "Into the yellow, evening glow/Saunters a man from the farm below." The

evening glow clearly represents sunset and the sauntering man is our vampire leaving his resting-place.

The line "And when above her his moth-wings hover" in the third stanza could be seen as a representation of the vampire's ability to change form. In some parts of Asia and in Serbian folklore, the vampire is able to turn into a butterfly or moth. Also, the Slavs and Balkans hold a belief that the soul becomes a butterfly or moth when it leaves the body (Bunson, 36).

The fourth stanza mentions a swallow turning its head away "...making warm display/Of red upon the throat..." which can be seen in a couple different ways. First, the swallow, being a bird, could be controlled by the vampire. In the poem, this does not seem to be the case. Second, the vampire could use the bird as another of its forms. Again, in the poem, this does not seem to be the case. Third, the swallow could be a sort of appetizer for the vampire as he begins his nightly hunt. This seems more likely since the red on the throat seems to be blood, either coursing just beneath the surface or spilling out onto the surface after the neck has been bitten.

The swallow does not seem to be the only appetizer for our vampire. In stanza five, a rabbit "Spurts from the terror of *his* oncoming." The word choice of "spurts" is foreshadowing the rabbit's actual death, as it is an action associated with blood spurting from an open wound. The blood imagery is also shown in the line "Hide your quaintly scarlet blushes" in stanza four. The scarlet blushes are an obvious representation of blood.

Toward the end of the fifth stanza, we find that the vampire has fed and killed the rabbit in the line "Ah, soon in his large, hard hands she dies/And swings all loose from the swing of his walk." Apparently the vampire is feeding as he walks toward our narrator. This same line is also foreshadowing the narrator's death at the end of the poem.

In the sixth stanza, it seems that our vampire has made a gift of the rabbit's corpse to the narrator as seen in the lines "He flings the rabbit soft on the table board/And comes toward me..." In some vampire literature, the vampire gives a gift to his victim before feeding on them. On another level, the gift could be that of a suitor. A vampire is a very sexual, erotic being and some of the poem's imagery suggests a sexual encounter before the vampire kills the female narrator. In particular, the lines "...ah! The uplifted sword/Of his hand against my bosom! And oh, the broad/Blade of his glance that asks me to applaud/His coming!..." The uplifted sword is the vampire's erect penis. He is caressing her breasts and eventually climaxes. This suggests that our vampire could be an incubus, or a vampire-type demon that torments women and has intercourse with them.

Near the end of stanza six, the vampire is caressing the throat, where he feels the narrator's "pulse of life". This again is a blood image. Vampires can see, hear, feel, smell blood while it is still coursing through the veins. The last line of the stanza, "Who sniffs with joy before he drinks the blood." Further illustrates this ability. The line also represents the vampire's lust and desire for the narrator. In the sixth stanza, we are given the image of the vampire's fangs in the lines "...he flashes bare/His strong teeth in a smile..."

Vampires are also adept at mind control and we can see this in the final stanza within the lines "His bright dark eyes come over me, like a hood/Upon my mind..." Another example of the vampire's mind control is in stanza six when the "Blade of his glance that asks me to applaud."

The final stanza of the poem is where the vampire finally feeds on and kills the narrator. "And down his mouth comes to my mouth! And down" is the kiss of death moving from the mouth down to the throat. The lines, "...his lips meet mine, and a flood/Of sweet fire sweeps across me, so I drown" represents the

narrator's desire for and submission to the vampire.

"Against him, die, and find death good." The final line of the stanza can be interpreted in two ways. First, we can read it as the vampire has fed and the narrator has died and that is the end of the scene. The woman became the vampire's main course. Or, second, we can read it as the vampire has changed the narrator into a vampire as well and that she is happy to share her death, or rather, "undeath," with him.

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Brittany Blake is a senior at Westfield State College and the Associate Student Representative for the Easties 08-09. She is also president of her local chapter Alpha Eta Sigma. She enjoys long walks on the beach and slam poetry. She plans on teaching middle or high school English next year and always writing. Mind Murals is her baby and she hopes future generations of Sig-mates treat it well. **Thanks for everything!**

Ari Choquette is a senior at Westfield State College. After graduation in May, she's going out to Boston to look for a job in the publishing industry. Ari hopes to be able to go back to school for her M.F.A. in Fiction within the next few years.

Amy Clark attends the University of Rio Grande in Ohio where she's pursuing a double major in English and Education. She's previously earned a degree in photography from the Savannah College of Art and Design and hopes to teach as well as to continue to write poetry.

Eve Feldman is a 2008 magna cum laude graduate of Keene State College where she studied English, French, and Secondary Education. She is currently living in San Francisco, California pursuing a professional career in circus arts at Circus Center. Before finding a full time teaching position, she hope to travel and perform.

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Ashlee Hazeltine is a graduate of Westfield State College and former STD Student Representative of the Eastern Region (2007-2008). Ashlee is currently working in the publishing industry, and no, she will not read your manuscript, she has too many to work with already. She lives in Massachusetts.

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Editor's Note: We hope that you enjoyed the first edition of Mind Murals. We will be accepting submissions for the second edition beginning August 1st, 2009. We are also looking for a new editing staff, so please send your resume to easternlitjournal@gmail.com. Thank you to everyone who made this dream possible!

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