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Watershed

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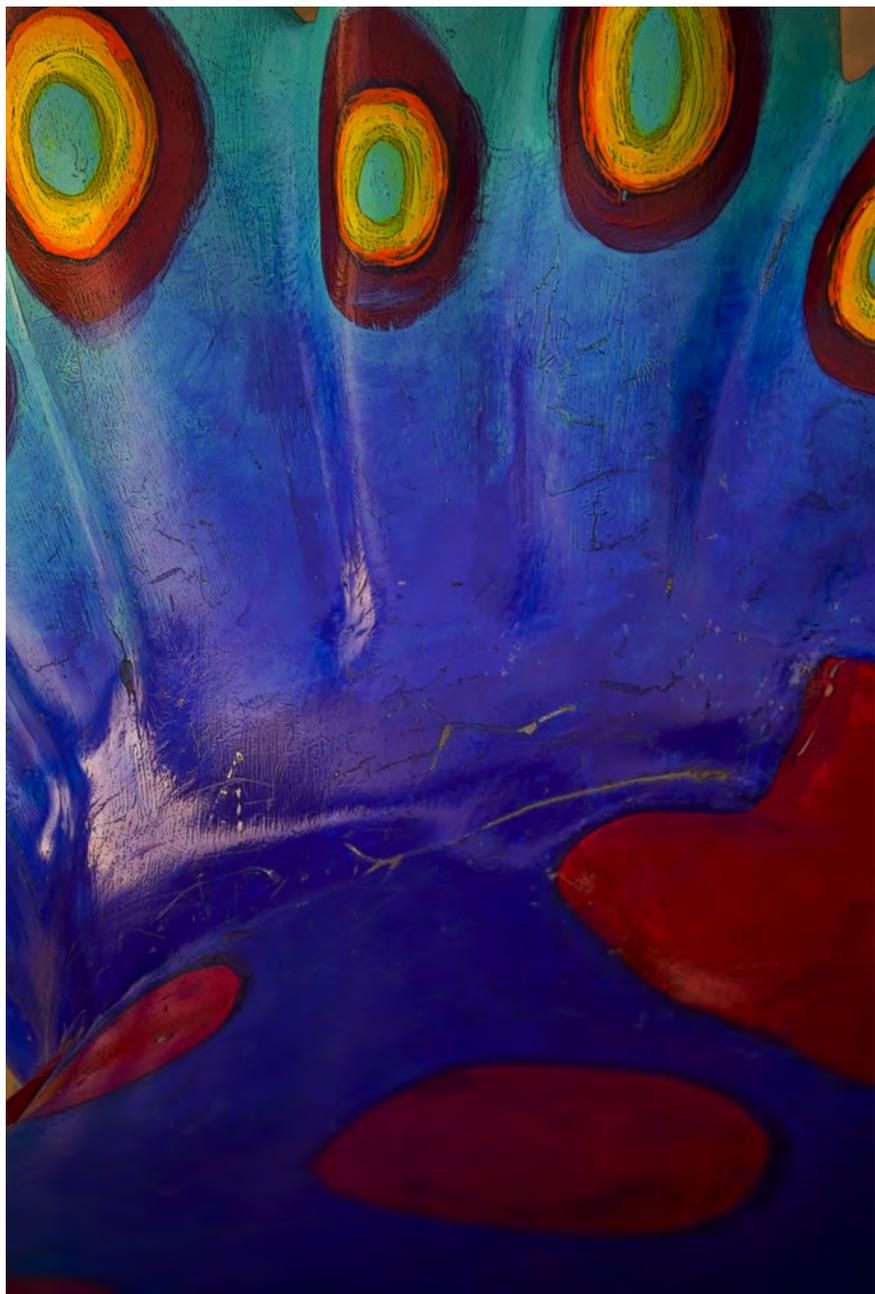
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Congratulations

to **Brianna Lichtenauer** and **Ashley Sims** for placing in the top three of the Sigma Tau Delta Poetry Contest with their poetry collections.

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Doubt Brianna Lichtenauer

The mind's tracks are worn
from the to and fro pacing
of **maybe, what if, and but**,
those anxious sisters who never sleep,
who rub the fine skin of your wrist
raw with their twisting.

They chatter in trees,
jewel-colored parrots
taught by sailors to swear.

On dark days they peck
at the fruit in your orchard,
stealing the ruby-fleshed apples,
the fragrant peaches, the heavy
dark bodies of plums:

this loss is slow
until the day you step outside
and find nothing but empty branches
and the new-made nests of crows.

Bed

I snickered, curled beneath the covers of my parents' bed. My warm breath bounced off the hair that covered my face, held in by the sheets around me, white and carefully checked with delicate blue lines. Outside the cocoon, my mother's voice, in the exaggerated tone of the consciously overheard, noted the unusually large lump in the bedclothes that day. A follower in the tradition of the warrior housewife (vanquisher of dirt, mold, stains, bad manners, dust, and grime), she declared her intent to turn the white and blue tangle into a neatly made bed.

Through the slow vibrations of the metal bed springs, I could feel Mom start patting the covers, then patting me—my sides, feet, head, and protruding behind—assessing the situation, feeling the lump out, gently, carefully. I quivered a little with excitement.

"Oh, so it's a moving lump!" the smooth voice proclaimed, as its owner proceeded to work her living lump out. I was pushed, prodded, and pressed, touched and tickled. I giggled and squirmed some more, laughing at the tickling, at my role as the lump, laughing because I was playing with my mom, whose gentle pushing was code for a hug, whose massaging meant kindness, whose rough, firm hands were the ones that held mine when I crossed the street, whose tickling fingers covered me with Band-aids when I fell. As she smoothed the sheets, she kept up a commentary on just how hard the bed was to make that day, how this one particular lump simply wouldn't disappear. This was the voice that sang nursery rhymes to me at night and hymns in church, the one that I was biologically trained to recognize, search for, and to obey. I wriggled down to make myself a little flatter.

Eventually, I lay with my stomach flat against the surface of the bed. But it still was not good enough for the warrior above me. Suddenly the top sheet flew off, and there Mom stood, enthusiastically feigning surprise to discover her bed-making problems had a name. I smiled up at her, giddy and triumphant. She smiled back down. Uncovered and exposed, I lay there, separated from the comfort of my breath-warm cocoon, but now surrounded by another warmth: the joy and pride radiating

from my mom above me. The unspoken love that filled the room.

Piano

The sobs started in my stomach, echoed in my chest, and rang loudly in my ears. Sprawled on the floor of the den, I was twelve feet underneath, six feet over from, and a few years past the blankets that had once disguised me as a lump. Skewed rectangular patches of sunlight on the beige carpet told me it was afternoon. This meant freedom; it meant basketballs and Barbies, jump rope and roller skates. My best friend knew this, too. A minute before, she had called my house, beckoning me to come out and play. Only one thing stood in my way: one foot over and five feet up, it crossed its arms and looked down.

“You can go out after you practice piano,” Mom said over my crying. “If you start right now, you’ll be outside in half an hour.” Her tone was kind, but firm. She made it seem so reasonable—said it like it was no sacrifice at all. But I’d heard this pitch before, and I wasn’t buying.

The sobs broke into a half-scream as I whined that it wasn’t fair, that I shouldn’t have to practice when it was afternoon and nice out and the exact time that Darchelle was around to play. If I waited, I would miss her. Mom just didn’t get it. She never got it.

“It’s only thirty minutes,” Mom said, exasperation now apparent in her voice. “Besides, you play with Darchelle every day, and you just saw her at school.” Mom was right. Her case was logical. Work now, then play. My 8-year-old sense of justice, though, just wouldn’t take it. I faced half an hour, a slave at the piano. All my songs, ten times each, counted off by the glassy seafoam, coral, pearl, and black spheres resting on the right side of the piano’s music shelf: a ten-marble-abacus of condemnation. Not that I minded playing the piano. I liked it, really. But practicing? Practicing when I could—when I should—be outside with friends? I could practice later. Later it would be dark. Darchelle wouldn’t be there later, but the piano would. Between snuffles, I tried the argument on my mother. She was impassive, completely unsympathetic. Obviously frustrated, she left the room.

Alone without an audience, I lay on the floor for awhile longer. After a moment, I wiped my eyes and pulled myself up. I turned to face the piano. The path to freedom. I set the egg timer, and the quick ticking started up in mid-tock, as though continuing a conversation its bell had interrupted. With my index finger, I gently pushed the marble farthest left in line. Too noisily, the glass rolled to the other end and bumped to a stop against the books sitting there. One, the abacus reported. I started playing. In the kitchen, I was sure, my mom was smiling sadistically.

Note

*I will not talk to you for one hour.
It will be hard, but I will do it.*

The note was scribbled in uncertain print on a small slip of paper. My mother found it years later, tucked in a dresser drawer among construction paper valentines and stick figure family portraits. I do not remember writing the note, nor does my mother remember receiving it. In the absence of memories, I conjure the possible.

I penned the note, perhaps, after fighting with Mom over whether I could attend a birthday party or go swimming or spend the night with a friend. Maybe it was the product of an unreasonable demand to clean my room, do my homework, or practice the piano. I picture myself handing Mom the note. In one version, I stride to her with arm extended, shoving the crumpled sheet toward her and quickly turning away with my nose in the air. In another, I slip it under her door or leave it on the kitchen table, not wanting to confront her, wanting to hide my tear-stained cheeks. Was my face tight with anger when I gave it to her? Was there sadness in my eyes—or determined resignation? Was Mom upset or regretful? Perhaps she was secretly proud of her strong-willed daughter. Perhaps she smiled, saw beneath my resentment an unconscious admission: some unasked-for bond made hatred impossible. Some compelling force made anger short-lived.

Coat

It was the semi-annual clothing exchange and fashion show at the Greve house. Maybe twice a year, I discover something I like hanging in my mom's closet or on the rack of unworn, unwanted, and out-of-season clothes in our basement. These are outfits that have been in Mom's wardrobe since at



least the Nixon administration, but haven't been exposed to the outdoor air since Iran-Contra. Once, I unearthed a yellow corduroy skirt: floor length with an appliquéd rose on the bottom front. Another time, a billowy shirt in a coral gauze-like fabric—light, but somehow warm. Later, a woven cream suit jacket, colored with plaid in the blue/green/red/yellow of the 8-color set of Crayola crayons.

At the time of this particular clothing swap, Mom and I had just returned from an evening of shopping. We were in her room modeling our purchases for each other, asking and giving advice on tucking in shirttails and which shoes looked best with which pants. The outing had been short, and we must have still had some shopping left in our systems. Thus the pilfering through the closets began, and out came the brown shirt-jacket I dubbed Safari Coat. I tried it on in front of the mirror. With its front pockets, short cuffed sleeves, and large matching belt, the shirt made me look like a child of the '60s. I liked it. I've often felt I was born in the wrong decade—that I should have been around when people went out to protest, when social justice was the cause du jour, when bell bottoms were in style and Simon and Garfunkel sang their perfect harmonies to a nation dying for change.

Mom came over to comment on the outfit.

"You know, there are pants that go with that," Mom told me. I glared at her with a hint of a smile, rolled my eyes, and tossed back my head in silent laughter.

"If you want to look like a UPS man," I replied, smiling to be sure she caught the joke. She laughed, an almost noiseless laugh that lit up her whole face. Turning back to the mirror, I saw myself: my light brown hair, my dark brown eyes. But I also saw my mom: the shape of my face, the tip of my nose. And I'd heard it, too—the her in me and me in her—in that laugh.

It shot me back to the revelation I had made a couple years before while walking across my college campus. I was taking a class on America in the 1960s and had been talking with my mom about topics we were studying: Vietnam, LBJ, feminism. And I suddenly recognized something that had been latent in my mind for a long time: my mom and I were very similar. We held basically the same political beliefs, cared about the same social issues, found similar subjects interesting. If we had been contemporaries, we would have listened to the same music, worn the same clothes in similar sizes.

“I don’t really know how to say this so it doesn’t sound weird,” I told my mom hesitantly, possible formulations running through my mind, none of them fluid or poetic enough. I continued anyway. “I think that if we had been the same age, we would have been friends.”

If she had been someone else, Mom might have misunderstood. Hypothetical friendship could seem like an insult after years of diaper-changing, laundry, and help with schoolwork. Instead, she hugged me back as I wrapped my safari-coated arms around her. Really, there was no “if” about it. We stood there for a moment and smiled, understanding how friendship—because it is voluntary, because it is chosen—can be stronger, even, than love.





The Heart Attack of the EMT's Father Ashley Sims

You wake up, darkness pressed against your face
and feel the iambic rhythm of your heart suddenly
miss a beat. You breathe in, create an awk-
ward enjambment.

Your son—who has Shakespeare hands able
to steady the heart beat heart pound heart
break—sleeps in the room above. He dreams
of Macbeth, of Hamlet, of blood and broken verse
as you struggle to find your heart's meter.

When the night ends he finds you too late:
the ink is already dry and the only words left
are the reflexive rasps of a body that

does not know it is dead.

Graphology

K. B. King

In digital love
the letters are not
as revealing—
typeface is too perfect,
deceiving.

I would rather
see your hand
in desperate scrawl
smeared over the
anonymous barns
of cheap postcards,
looped through
the header of
hotel stationery.

I need the soft curve of
your g's, the slant of
your t's, to show me
how deeply you feel.
And in the places
where your pen
rests—uncertain
of the next stroke,
I will know you
remember our mornings—
my burnt rye toast, and
your slow stir
softening the dark
body of coffee
with sweet cream.

This type tells me
nothing—pixels
blink on screen,
no emotions on
their faces.

The words say
you are well, that I
should expect you soon.

Trevor Hedburg

Bleeding to Death in the Forest

having been impaled by a falling tree branch

It hurts.

Please just

take my word for it.



Recipe for Success

Cara Breedon

2 wealthy parents

1 prestigious private school

10+ clubs (organizations may be substituted)

½ c. beauty (naturally or artificially flavored)

1 tsp. athleticism

Dash of charm

Mix all ingredients and let stand. Happiness and childhood is optional. Do not mix with low-grade products or use off brands. Best served with chauvinists and assholes.

Raising six children without a college degree in a rural Kansas town is not easy. My dad became a man of many trades to make ends meet: locksmith, school bus driver, fish hatchery guardian. But the trade my sister and I loved most had little to do with fish ponds, yellow buses, or locked doors. Every summer my dad went to the local golf course to change the position of the holes on the greens before the Sunday morning tournaments. *Changing the cups*, he called it.

On Saturday evenings when the sun began to dip below a horizon unmarred by trees, my dad laced up his black tennis shoes, reached for his mug of Coke, and settled his Kanza Lock & Key cap on his head. At that moment, my younger sister and I knew it was time to go to the golf course. *Can we go with you, Dad?* we asked without begging, always fearing he would say no as in *I just want to get it done fast tonight*, which would leave us with disappointment so palpable we could taste it in our mouths. But, oh, when my dad said yes. A quick dash for our shoes (and sometimes a frantic hunt if one was missing), and then we were running after him as he headed out the door, an impish grin on his face as he pretended he was going to leave us behind after all.

Part of the magic of the evening was riding in my dad's pale blue pickup. Instead of sitting squeezed side to side in the cab, my sister and I were allowed to crouch in the back of the truck. I loved to lean over the side and watch the painted yellow lines of Highway 23 flash by during the brief drive to the golf course. By the time my dad, my sister, and I arrived at the golf course, the last diehard players were heading home. We were left alone to work and play on the greens, which stood out against the stark prairie like bright swimming pools in a concrete city seen from above. As my dad's official assistants--in our own minds, anyway--my sister and I would race each other to the yellow flag that marked the golfer's goal: the white cup nestled in an open hole beneath the ground. Our job was to pull the flag from the hole and lean it against the side of one of the squat fir trees that surrounded the greens and acted as buffers against the wind. The hole was then ready for my dad and his tools.

The tools of a cup changer are not complex or sophisticated. A pocketknife. A watering can. A looped piece of

nail-like metal pointed on both of its crossed ends. The most interesting to me was the golf hole cutter, which looked like a pogo stick with a hollow cylinder attached to its base. With this my dad made the golf holes exactly the right depth and diameter. I could not tell how he knew where to place the new hole; he never consulted a diagram or map. If there was some regulation he was supposed to follow, he knew where the hole went before we ever reached the greens. I could only guess.

After removing the flag, my sister and I waited just on the edge of the green's closely-shorn grass until my dad indicated where he would cut into the earth. Only then would we join him, though not before I had taken off my shoes so I could feel the prickle of grass blades beneath my feet. We were always careful to walk gently on the grass. *It bruises easily*, my dad reminded us as we approached to watch him begin.

Cup changing is simple work. First my dad placed the hole cutter over the chosen spot. Using his pocketknife, he sliced a circle into the ground around the base of the cutter so its hard edges could sink through the sod more easily. Then he used his whole body to push down, *down* on the pogo handles, squeezing the earth into the cylindrical tube. There was little sound, only the quiet grind of metal against dirt, like a shovel's first biting *snick* into unbroken earth. When the hole cutter was pulled out, the earth came with it, trapped in its metal prison--and a perfectly shaped hole was left behind. I watched for the pale white spiders, disturbed by my dad's work, to scatter out of the fresh hole and across the green, barely visible except for the eerie last light of day reflected from their bodies. My dad, meanwhile, transferred the displaced dirt and grass to the old hole and the white plastic cup to the spiders' abandoned home. Using the bent piece of nail, he deftly stitched the ground back up, melding the raw edges of the hole to the surrounding earth with a twist of the two-pronged metal. A generous dose of water from the watering can finished the process, a sacred task my dad entrusted to my sister and me. Relentlessly we would ask him *why why why*. And he would reply, *So the grass won't die. So the earth can heal.*

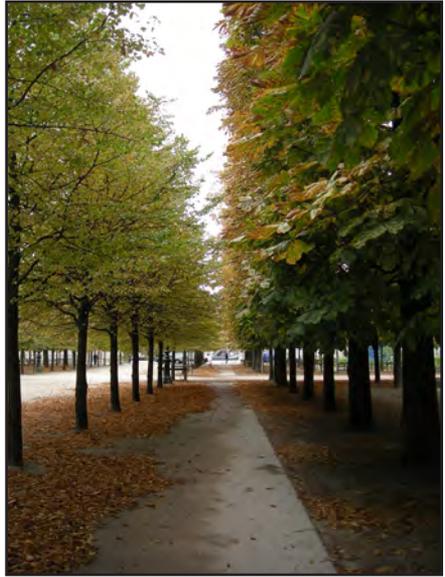
By the sixth or seventh hole, my sister and I were drawn away from my dad's side, pulled by the allure of strange

shadows and the south wind. We chased each other around fir trees or searched for golf balls in the tall prairie grass. We hunted toads for our mother's garden. Sometimes we simply stood and stared at the roundness of the moon. We felt no need to create an alternate universe in which to stage our games: the sloping edges of the greens were enough. The darkness and its sounds were enough. For us, our dad was enough. He was the axis around which we revolved, the center to which we always returned. No matter how far we wandered in our quests for abandoned golf balls and toads, the halo of cropped grass where he silently worked was a sure haven when the coyotes howled too near or the rustle in the prairie grass no longer sounded like the wind. No matter how far we wandered, we returned to his side to show him the rare red or blue golf ball we had discovered, to laugh with him at the toads' futile attempts to escape our hands, to make certain his work was going well.

An hour or two later my dad, my sister, and I returned home to my mom and two younger sisters, full of satisfaction at our night's work (and bearing our gifts of toads and balls in a battered bucket). The toads made my mom happy, but she always grumbled about the golf balls that would soon litter her garden, blaming my dad for letting us bring them home. I never wanted these nights to end, never wanted to go inside the house where everything was perfectly ordinary and too bright in the artificial light of lamps. While my parents smoked their customary cigarettes on the front porch, I stood in our circle driveway and watched the stars burn until my name was called and I could forestall the inevitable bedtime no longer.

I think back on these nights and wonder how they felt to my dad. Were they just as magical to him--or did they simply mark another job he had to get done? I wonder about those times he said *no* to our eager requests to join him. Perhaps his refusals came from a need to escape, to be under the sky away with his own thoughts for awhile. Then I wonder about those certain nights he said *yes*. Perhaps it stemmed from a father's love and a desire to please his children. I like to think he understood our need to be granted entrance into a world that belonged to him. To make it our world, too.

Palliative Care Caitlin Stevenson



Forgive me,
Dylan Thomas but
I would rather
Go gently into that good night.

I do not wish to
slowly waste away
with my blue eyes wide open
and sorrowful.

I do not wish to
be confined in
my bed yet clear-thinking
in my mind.

I do not wish to
hear my family whisper
outside my door
“How much longer does she have?”

I wish to slip
gently, swiftly, privately
into that good night.

If I could speak...

Josh Morgan

...to the authors, I'd say:

Miss Austen? You bore.

Mr. Thoreau? Nice beard.

Mr. Joyce? You disappoint.

Mr. Whitman? What? Why?

Mr. Melville? I get it; it's a story of obsession, enough already!

...to the Bard, I'd say:

O' Billy Shakes,

(if you exist)

your sonnets speak so sweet

yet your plays find me

snoring by Act II.

...to the professors, I'd say:

I appreciate the skill, but

I don't enjoy the classics.



Vandi Marie Crisswell Henricks

The River

my river you command
the waves you ride
my legs above you
as my head lies back
the shudder
as i give in
the grip of your hands buried
in the flesh of my thighs
my twisted thrusting
my thrashing
as i give way
my hands push down
my moans build
and at last
i do not see
or hear
and i forget
all but you
and the waves run
through me
and your fingers dance
in the water
your mouth breathes in my liquid
and i melt into you
unafraid
quivering
under the water



The definition of love Jamie Ingram

I want to dance with you in your dreams

I want to put you in my pocket
And carry you with me always

I want to sip you slowly through a straw

I want to kiss your desires
And paint pictures of your soul

I want to steal the freckles in your eyes

I want to play with your smile
And keep it safe on rainy days

I want to be your happiness and your forever.

Changes

Iliana Krehbiel

August 18, 2007

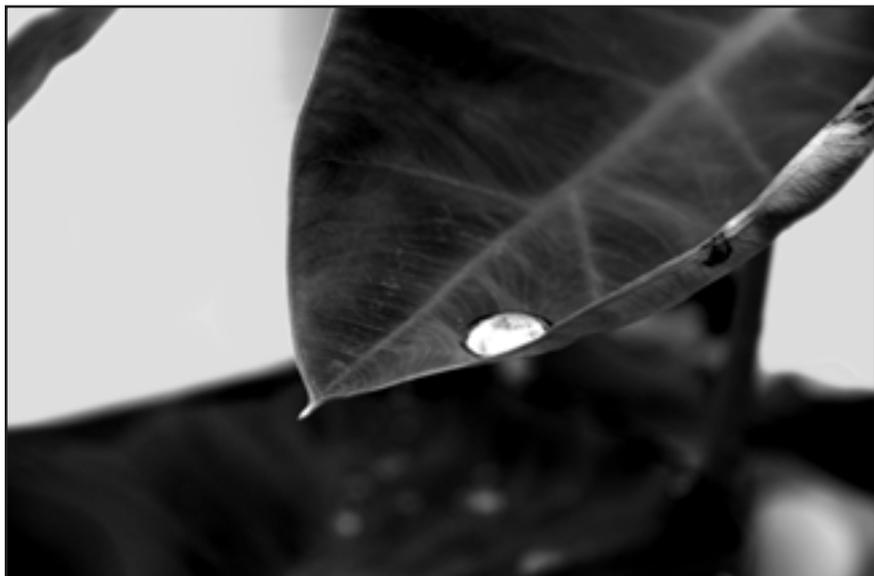
Romance bites my tongue
in a read where foreign and frightful are the unaware;
The unknown waters of a secular world
and a paragraph that builds my heartache.

Send death and goodbyes to the decrepit chapters
yet savor the tasteless fragile free-fall.
The new and untold version
for which many introductions have been written.

These hours currently pull me,
violently tugging every which way.
Like the good "can't put it down" novel
begging to be resolved.

Though I wish no ending to this time
but fear it.
Perhaps the unsung song is dead to me;
Lifeless as yellow grass between my toes.

Still these pages, minutes, and life inevitably move me,
though one step backward at first step.
But finally, like the good book
I settle with reason whether in love or broken-hearted.



Nick's Tree Farm

Cara Breedon

I grew up in a typical American family. We had no resemblance to the Partridge Family but we weren't desperate enough to qualify for Jerry Springer. We lived a fast-paced life filled with numerous extra-curricular activities, slumber parties and the PTA. Dinner was merely a meal-time and served solely as necessity. Rather than a gracefully set dinner table, the meal was typically served through a to-go window or nuked in the microwave for 3 ½ to 4 minutes. Our calendar had few if any vacancies, but each November we made ample time for the Christmas tree picking.

My dad insisted that artificial trees were for "lazy people and sissies." According to him, a *Real Man* buys a *Real Tree* -- (I don't see much logic in it now. Perhaps the prickling pine needles heighten one's masculinity). In any case, my mom enjoyed the pine aroma that filled the house and so they were in agreement.

Each year my parents, my sister and I would load into my parents' minivan and drive to the outskirts of town to Nick's Tree Farm. A pre-cut and netted tree from a grocery-store parking lot was too commercial. There is something special about choosing from rows of imperfect Charlie Brown trees. Those unfamiliar with the process underestimate the complexity and careful technique involved.

"How about this one Daddy?!!" I would yell from across the

lot. He would glance it over, circle it once or twice to inspect each branch before shaking his head in rejection. “Too many bare spots.”

If it wasn't too bare it was too fat, too skinny, too tall, too small, or too brown. To further complicate things, we couldn't select any with the yellow or blue tags. Those were the more expensive varieties. This provided an extra challenge – one fit for the Breedens.

Hours were spent pacing up and down and back up aisles and aisles of trees: Silver Fir, Noble Fir, Balsam Fir and Scots Pine. Serbian Spruce, Jeffrey Pine, and Norfolk. There was a plentiful variety but our pickiness subsided as the frigid Kansas weather intensified.

When at last all four of us, even my scrupulous father, agreed upon a specimen, we all shared a sense of accomplishment. After devoting so much time and energy to the mission, a large degree of satisfaction inflated our egos.

My dad would call Nick and one of his sons over to chop our selection so we could continue to my very favorite part of this annual tradition. It was the proceedings after our final choice was made – (not the chopping of wood, for this part rather bored me,) that I anticipated from November to November.

By this point our toes were numb and our noses drippy. Exhausted but satisfied with our find, my family would trudge through the snow to the old red barn perched at the top of the hill above the rows trees.

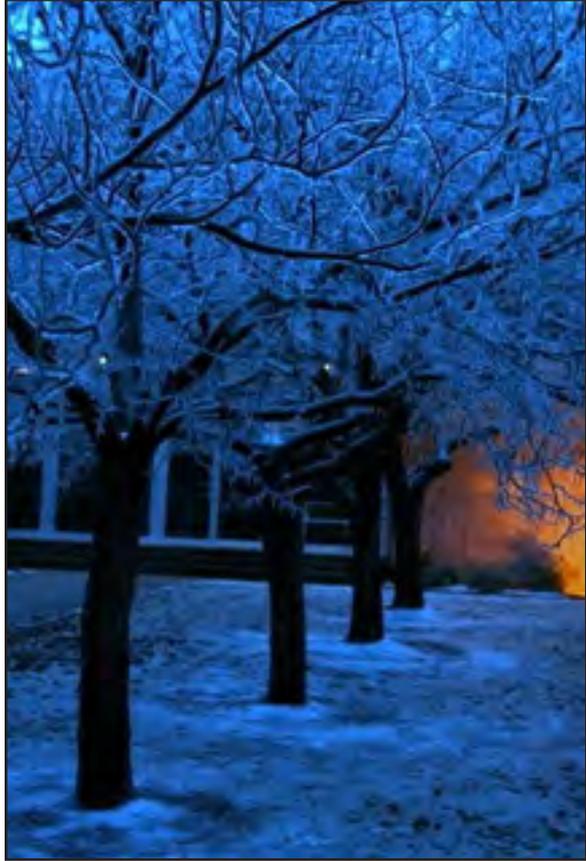
It didn't look like much, but this weathered red barn held some of my most precious childhood memories. The rusted hinges added to its character, and the weather vane rooster which topped the roof was like the North Star, guiding us to our destination. It was impossible to be anything but cheerful when entering. The blasting space heaters defrosted our bodies and the aroma of homemade apple cider complemented the warm sounds of familiar laughter.

“Well if it isn't the Breedens! Earlier than usual this year. Did you find a good one?” I never even knew the older woman's name, but Nick's wife had a smile that was contagious and a presence that exuded joy.

“I think it's the best one yet ma'am. Even better than last year's,” my dad would reply. She smiled with sincere satisfaction and continued making small talk with my parents while my sister and I made our way to the cats. I was drawn to furry friends and could have spent hours sitting in that warm barn cuddled up to a kitten.

After drinking one or two cups of hot cider and purchasing our treasured tree, we would finally say our goodbyes to Nick's wife and the cats before making the trek back down the hill to the van.

As we drove back home, I only half-listened as my mom eagerly made decorating plans to commence straight away. I nodded and interjected an occasional "uh-huh" or "sounds great" – but I was really trying to prolong the experience we had just shared -- choosing THE perfect tree, warming up to friends and purring kittens, and sipping the most delicious cider I'd ever tasted to top it off. Gazing out the car window, I was already looking forward to the trip next year. *Maybe then, I thought, I can convince Dad to get a blue tag.*



An Atheists Love Poem

Jasmine Heinson

Eyes
walking blindly through the hall
with no lights
my hands
stretched out to feel any
signs of light
Everyone screaming go left
go right
go this way or you will surely die and go to
hell
It's a shame
we can't just walk together and
open
our eyes.



My first experiences with rock-n-roll were in the backseat of our family Honda Accord. Dad drove, and Mom controlled the radio from the passenger seat. Every trip, she tuned to a classic rock station. I soon became friends with guitar legends—Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Jimmy Page. I could recite “Stairway to Heaven” before my times tables.

I can’t say that my dad enjoyed the radio as much as my mom. Every time he tried to tap his hands on the steering wheel to the rhythm, my mom corrected him. Mom tapped her thighs: *No Harv, it goes like this—bump, bubba-bump, bump...bump, bubba-bump, bump.* Dad sped his frustrated, arrhythmic hands but couldn’t match the rhythm to the song, to Mom. It was as though they were listening to different songs. So Dad quit tapping, and took to head-bobbing.

Like Dad, I bobbed my head to the rhythm because I feared Mom’s rhythmic rebuke. Even though I could follow the beat to a song, I didn’t want to give her a chance to see me slip-up on the rhythm. I could hear her—*No, Brett, like this...*

But unlike Dad, I played a mean air guitar. There were two advantages to the air guitar: the wannabe choir director that was my mom

couldn’t tell



Stratocaster like the one Jimi Hendrix played. So I did my best Jimi in the backseat—playing finger-tingling licks over my head, shredding the fretboard with my fingers (and occasionally my teeth), topping the solo in a crescendo that ended with lighting the guitar on fire. To my mom, my killer guitar performances were mistaken as near seizures. I was glad she misinterpreted my air guitar because she couldn't put in her two cents about how well I played.

On Easter Sunday when I was ten, Grandpa came bearing gifts like he was one of the Three Magi. He brought with him two instruments in shiny black cases. The smaller of the two cases held a violin—I knew this because most of my elementary school friends played violin in the school band. This hard-shell case appeared worn by careless use; cracks formed along the locks and hinges, and a Mid-Atlantic ridge down the body of the case made it look like it was about to spew violin contents at any moment. The larger case, on the other hand, had a heavenly glow around its frame. This case held a guitar—I knew this because I watched old clips of Jimi pulling Fender Stratocasters from custom guitar cases during Woodstock. Unlike the violin case, the guitar case was faultless.

When Grandpa got around to unlocking the three metal latches to the guitar case, I could hear the proverbial angels singing *Hallelujah*. From the black felt, Grandpa eased a vintage Spanish guitar. He cradled the *Fender Spanish Classical Acoustic* as if it were baby Jesus. He plucked the strings, retuned the guitar. E-A-G-B-E. E-A-G-B-E. I knew Grandpa was popular in his day, but he just added 100 cool points—definitely surpassing Mom and Dad and nearly eclipsing Jimi.

It was hard for me to picture Grandpa rocking-out because Grandpa spent his lifetime as an accountant—the permanent slouch in his frame a permanent reminder of his nine-to-five looking over numbers. But now that I knew he was the owner of a guitar, I could see him in his spare time—greasing his dark brown hair, gyrating his hips, strumming the rhythm to Johnny B. Goode. I looked Grandpa in the eyes, and I imagined the secret rock-n-roller hidden in the sky-blue. I began to invent elaborate stories why Grandpa's back took the shape of a question mark. It must have been a stage diving accident. Or maybe too much headbanging that left his shoulders and head slumped forward. Yes, it must have been too much headbanging that left his body in a permanent



headbanging pose.

I was stunned with how much the guitar changed my image of Grandpa. After all that thinking, all I could say was “Whoa!”

“It’s yours,” he shot back.

He passed the Spanish Baby Jesus into my arms. The golden body swallowed my chest and stomach, and the head of the auburn fretboard reached nearly past the length of my outstretched left arm. The only thing the guitar could not hide was my toothy grin. I wanted to spin it in the air, play it behind my back. But I didn’t have those skills, and I didn’t think Grandpa would appreciate the Spanish Baby Jesus spinning in the air. So I tried my first gentle strum. A clumsy attempt, but a beautiful sound nonetheless. I followed the harmonious Open C with a creative interpretation of the solo in Jimi’s “Foxy Lady”. Jimi liked to play the solo with two octave chromatic scales; I liked to play his solo with fast moving, contorted fingers and a wagging tongue. I failed with clinks and clanks where there should have been hammer-ons and pull-offs. But I think I beat him on style points. Mom didn’t think so.

“It’s a classic guitar, not an electric,” she said disapprovingly.

“But, Ma. You don’t understand.” She obviously didn’t, or she would have known my style in the backseat of the Honda. I finally had a real guitar, no air guitar needed. But the only practice I had was the follow-along air guitar solos in the backseat.

So I practiced, practiced, practiced. The elephant hide tips of my fingers wore through two sets of metal strings before I could make the guitar hum chords. My first project, “Stairway to Heaven,” was ditched after I realized I couldn’t bridge my pointer finger over the bottom four strings. So, I took to the vanilla of all guitar songs—“Smoke on the Water.” After a week, I felt skilled in the opening lick—enough so I could work up the courage to perform in front of an audience. Unfortunately, my number one fan, Alice (our dog), couldn’t sit still for my first ten-second performance. She preferred to use the metal strings as a chew toy—so I quickly booted her from my stage, a.k.a. my room. Dad was asleep, so Mom was the only member available for my fan club. After Alice sniffed her way out of my room, I yelled for Mom to enter my room.

Nervously, I played the ten second intro. I clanked the third power chord in and completely messed up my rhythm for the rest of the intro.

My flustered hands were not my own any more. Instead, they felt like Dad’s hands.

Mom tried to help me along by tapping her thigh. *Like this, bump-bump- bum, bump- bump- bum-bum.* Her help only made me puff my cheeks harder. Instead of applause at the end, I heard, “It seems like you have your dad’s rhythm.”



This is How it Goes

Brianna Lichtenauer

You sit with pen in hand
to write a poem about winter. Instead,
you think of the lines like veins
in the paper skin of a leaf, remember
the way the river turned black at night
and tossed foam against the shore.

You write something small about bread and oranges.
This reminds you of the smell of incense, and
the rosary beads that once passed through your fingers—
the echoes of prayers that still make your knees ache.

The sunlight cutting golden squares in the floor
makes you remember the sun-warm apples
you plucked from a tree and ate,
and suddenly you cannot stop thinking
about the fence post you rested beneath
when the sky was so blue you shut your eyes against it
and fell asleep.

You recall that you are writing a poem about winter.
It snowed the day your grandfather closed his eyes.
His tools are still sitting on his workbench downstairs,
their handles waiting for his hands to find them.



Spirit by Proxy

Alex Skov

We measure miles in time
And happiness in things.
My secondhand wristwatch,
The diamond store ring
That came before the gold band
You'd only wear in my dreams
Because right here and now
Your wedded hand's as transparent
As steam.

Leaning into your breath,
A head cradled in your neck.
Audible movements,
An inaudible feeling.
I took you home,
Stood still and waited.
Bated breath and spoke to you
When I was alone.

The Artist and His Model Jamie Larsen

She was the model of female perfection
Her skin was pale in complexion.
He saw her every night,
But she was never so white.
A gray stone sat on a table
He held his tools and began to chisel
He saw her twists and turns,
Noticing all of her luscious curves.
He thought about her form,
And what to do with it,
He was torn.

This lump of stone was dull and boring
And his skill with carving her, deploring.
He dropped his tools and weighed his mind
Looking at her all the time.
Her beauty was incredible,
And he had not yet had his fill.
Her dark eyes flashed into his
And a smile curved upon her rosy lips.
A thought ran through his mind
But he waited until it was time

"I'm going to try something new
An innovative take on recreating you."

A steady voice sounding so kind
The great idea never crossed her mind.

"I want to place a paste of white,
Upon your delicate skin, so light."

Warning never struck her
She complied with this new way to structure
Art and beauty go hand in hand
And she thought of her dying husband.
She thought, "I'm getting paid well, that's for sure,
And this money will bury him and more."

He mixed a paste so very quick
And upon her legs, it was slick.

“I’ll start from bottom to top
And then we’ll wait to take it off.”

Lying down in leisure

Her thought was, “This is almost pure pleasure.”

Taking his time
Standing back to admire
The legs were finished
And this fueled his desire
Moving up to her torso
The touch tickled her than anything more so
He started her arms
And a laugh came from afar.

“Not much longer now,
I will have preserved you, anyhow.”

For the final work to be just right
He told her, “Sit tight.”
A length of time passed on
And he came back with smile on

“It is dry my dear
But though not finished, the end is near.”

He worked quickly upon her face
Even though she asked for grace

“What is this you’re doing?
Madman, undo me!”

“You are a beauty I never dreamed
That marbled statue’s a wasteful thing
But for you are covered in plaster
And goodbye sweet muse, there I’ve caste her.”



Do-It-Yourself

K. B. King

With dull scissors and little know-how
I make the first incision

Mangled auburn clumps fall
shading the sink

Undisturbed I cut costs
and corners

Her eyes are fierce
her mouth says Mess

Thankfully she reaches
around my ears the backside the crown

My home-cut haircut is the
perfect cheap disaster

Who Built Cities

Trevor Hedburg

He was a god
to those little Lego people.
On the rough carpet
of an empty basement,
he created his masterpieces:
cities that stretched wall to wall.

Airports and harbors,
monorails and missile silos,
space stations and pirate ships --
the foundations of an empire.

But such grandeur was not meant to last,
for the boy soon tired of his subjects
and destroyed the cities he had built.

The cycle continued for years:
building and destroying,
constructing skyscrapers
only to topple them,
resurrecting people
only to take their lives away again.

Until on the day of a new Armageddon,
the boy bored with building.
He broke his creations
into pieces and stored the remnants
in the cobwebbed corner
of a dark garage.

Even now, the little people
remember their old civilizations and
wait patiently in the darkness of their
sealed bins with the forgotten Legos,
wondering if their master will return.

The boy, now grown, has not the heart
to tell them no.

To counteract nightmares, endless tossing and turning, and loud roommates, I know of only one prescription for a good night's sleep, and it's not a Serta mattress. It's my silky, and it's the one and only of its kind. Without my silky on my pillow, I am incomplete.

Although my silky didn't start out as such, it is currently a pair of 100 percent polyester pajama shorts from The Limited Too that I bought with a well-earned twenty-eight dollars of allowance money in the seventh grade. Patterned with spirals, hearts, flowers, and stars, the periwinkle shorts have stayed with me all through high school and college, even though I actually wore them for only one year. Most of the time, the shorts safely reside under my pillow for me to pull out and rub (also known as "silkying") to help me fall asleep. However, some days the shorts have been known to disappear to school with me under the hidings of my sweatshirt or purse when I'm feeling too far away from bed to leave them behind.

The very first silky I remember having was a scarf given to my mother as a gift from my grandma. Grandma was never the most up-to-date in fashion, so I soon became the lucky owner. I was delighted when my mother decided to let me drag the drab thing behind me as I traveled from room to room around the house. Because the scarf had a 100 percent silk, cream-colored stripe that ran down that center of the gauzy, beige fabric, it was given the name "silky." Sometimes I would just hold it in a wad in my fist, but usually I would pinch the creamy stripe between my fingers and hold it up to my ear to listen to the soft whiny sound it made when I rubbed the fabric together. I always carried the silky in my left hand because it was very important that my right one's thumb was free to suck on while I went about my business. The silky and thumb-sucking went together, as Forest Gump would say, "Like peas and carrots." One never existed without the other.

Because I was the forgetful girl that I have always been, the silky would get left around the house from time to time, on low surfaces, and in little nooks and crannies. Usually this wasn't a problem because I would always remember where to find the silky when I wanted to, and I never imagined the silky would be in danger if I left it alone for a little while. However, I was wrong.

To this day, I can still remember the exact moment I

experienced my first traumatic silky incident. I had left the scarf on top of the gray cushion of the rocking chair ottoman while I went to play Barbies in the other room. As I came wandering back into the family room, I saw my mom whisking the sucking pipe of the little orange vacuum cleaner over every surface in the room, taking a short cut to the long, dusting process. I watched nonchalantly as the vacuum swallowed up little food crumbs and dust bunnies as it zoomed over the carpet and table. And then it happened. My mother, in her cleaning daze, swooped the vacuum tube across the footstool and *floop!* the silky disappeared into the vacuum's clunky orange stomach.

I screamed.

My heartless mother had just killed the silky. There was nothing I could do but stand there and scream at the loss of the precious scarf. My mother panicked, and ran to unplug the monster that had just eaten my silky, before hurrying over to hug me.

"I'm sorry honey, I didn't see it there. I wasn't paying attention," she consoled.

I kept crying.

"We can get it back, I promise. We just have to empty out the bag."

I stopped crying. There was still hope? The silky could be okay? I followed my mom outside and watched as she pressed a button and the vacuum split into two parts. Out popped a very dirty-looking bag. She opened it, reached in, and, miracle of miracles, the silky appeared! It was coated in gritty dust, but there it was, whole and alive. My heroic mother had saved the silky and all was better in the world. After a trip through the washer and dryer, the silky was mine to hold again.

Slowly and surely, though, the scarf did meet its end. After a few years, I had rubbed the stripe to nothing, and it no longer made the whiny sound I loved much: it was time to find a new silky.

In kindergarten, I came across my second silky, another scarf, this one pink. I had to tie it around my head in the Christmas play at my church. I played the part of the Virgin Mary and my friend Henry played the part of Joseph the Carpenter. All through the play, I sat there as Mary, with my thumb in my mouth and my left hand on top of my head, silkying the pink scarf. The audience stared at me. My poor teacher was trying to motion for me to stop silkying, but it didn't work. My mom and dad laughed through the whole performance. It remains my mom's

favorite silky memory.

After Mary's pink scarf came—in notable royal succession—my mom's silky green night shirt, then a frumpy black and white blouse, a pair of hot pink underwear, and finally, in the seventh grade, my current size SMALL, periwinkle, huggable, lovable pair of twenty-eight dollar LTD2 pajama shorts—a silky that is currently fighting a battle with my roommate, who hates it. She says the whiny noise “makes [her] teeth hurt.” She just doesn't understand the bond between the silky and me. The seven-year-old fabric has threadbare seams and worn spots, but to me feels just as soft and comforting as the first scarf that earned the name Silky when I was just three. Little does my roomie know that if she gave me the “silky ultimatum,” she would get the boot.





Absence

Brianna Lichtenauer

I.

The empty room draws you,
the unmade bed, the pillow
dimpled with sleep, the robe
draped over the back of a chair.
You cannot stop touching the clothes
in the drawer, the brush
with strands of brown still
caught in its bristles. You sit and try
not to exhale, afraid
to dispel the scent that lingers there.

II.

At night there is no sound.
A whisper of breath startles you,
a reflection in glass surprise enough
to make your heart shiver out of time.
This is a game you do not play well:
you chase yourself all night
until shadows blossom beneath your eyes
and the sun finally slips into the sky.

My Son's Picture

Vandi Marie Crisswell Henricks

i realized today that children see life in the raw... more purely than we do as adults. today i was struck speechless, to tears by my 6 year old's drawing. he loves to draw pictures and now as he is learning to read and write, every day i witness his newest adventures unfold on the paper. sometimes he skates. has a big house. mimics his big brother in his stance. today, he drew me. just me. he wrote momma at the top... asking me my name, how to spell it. when he handed me the drawing... he said, "this is you, momma. just you."

he was proud and shy waiting for my praise... did i mention children see the most important things? simply. in the raw. he had centered me on the page... my cheeks round and red, my hair spiky and hip. he added black heels on my feet... pointed and tall. big hoop earrings. my eyes were slanted and my mouth was in a huge wide open funny grin. it made me chuckle immediately... outloud, a loud laugh. i asked him why he drew me smiling so big... he said, "momma, your smile is you." mmm my smile is me.

i wanted to write this down because it struck me... hard, two bricks in the head. my youngest baby boy is wise. simply he sees me... without my worries, my achy muscles, my loaded weight of stress. i needed to be reminded of what it is he sees... i am so glad it was my smile. my loud giggle laugh. i believe this picture is a raw reminder of... it is time to live happy. thank goodness for the tiny hands, dirty from the mud outside, and my son's love of sketching... simply raw and simply rewarding, reminding me of me.

Existence

Stephen Webb

To BE, be full of life,
The enigmatic water sprite.
To acquire something so unbound,
To accomplish a goal, to obtain the crown.
To bring down false philosophies of doubt,
To be a bright soul, inside and out.
To be your own man, on your own two feet,
To be a mapmaker of your own feats.
To discover and rediscover yourself,
To apply your mental physical effort to your health.
To know every soul, to prosper,
To seek every patient to doctor.
To know the power of self, mind over matter,
To be creative, to climb the ladder.
To see your family on top of the mountain,
The existence to be, the eternal fountain.

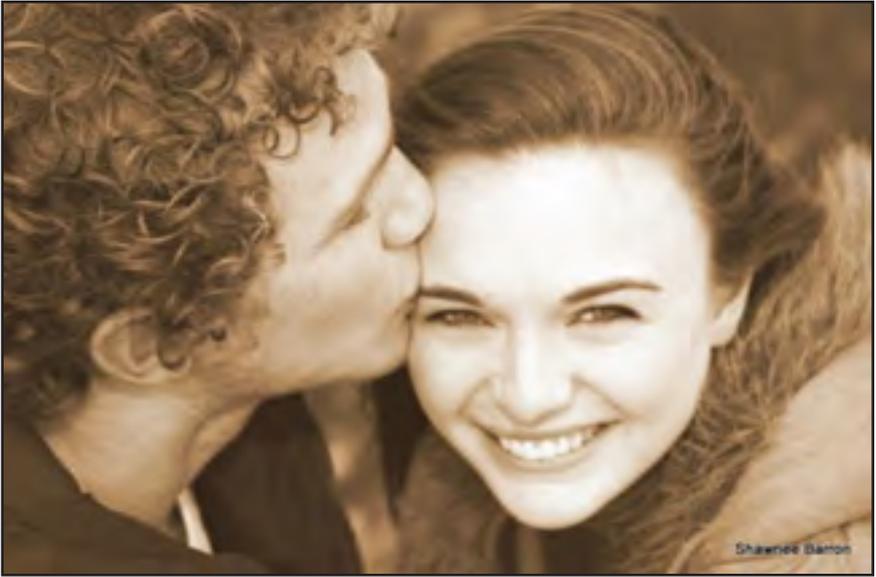




We Women

Jasmine Heinson

We women
herded into submission
subliminally influenced to follow the media
alone in the end
Controlled by men who call themselves
politicians or pastors
Put in place by religion
kept quiet and ditzy by culture
kept thin and helpless
to be appealing
kept as sex objects for too long
a slut
a cunt
a whore
whose worth is low compared to a man
We hear "that's not proper, that's not lady like"
We sit and wait for change.



After Life

Ashley Sims

We build these lives trying
to create permanence. We
give our children the same
hands, nose, sense of humor
to brand them as ours. Thus,
we tell ourselves, we do not end.
We are simply reborn.

Soon we become only
a photograph preserved behind plastic
a moment of posed happiness,
tucked inside a leather-bound book.
All the while our stories are retold
a little differently each time by those
who never even knew us. Eventually

no one remembers the color
of our eyes, or how much
we loved apples.

It started in kindergarten: I wanted to be the first to complete every assignment. The first to recite the alphabet. The first to count to 100. Even the first in line to the library, to art class. And I wanted to be the first to read, but that didn't happen. Anthony beat me to it; he lisped his way through *Curious George* in front of the entire class. When he finished, he gave a wide grin from side-to-side like he was running for an election; his tongue saluted his fellow voters through the gap where his two front teeth should have been. He earned five gold stars for his effort and was unanimously voted as the first Star of the Week by the teacher and students. I was instantly jealous. For next week, I was going to read something harder than *Curious George*; I was going to outdo Anthony.

So after school, I made my way to the library. I snaked through the aisles of books, counted page numbers, and picked three of the heaviest, brightest books I could find. Three possible showstoppers for kindergarten—the types of literary works that shouldn't be read by a six year old. I wanted to earn the Star of the Week for a month, something never done before in Bluejacket Kindergarten history. I hefted the pile up to the counter with my knee. Mrs. Green, the librarian, looked at the top book and laughed. Apparently, *Webster's Dictionary* wasn't a good start.

"Sweetie, that's not a book, it's a dictionary," she said. I blushed. She sifted through the other two books. "I don't think you are quite ready for the *Poetry of Robert Frost* or the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Look into *Cat in the Hat*, or maybe *Curious George*. Anthony just checked out *Curious George* last week." She threw a dart at my illusion of grandeur—my inflated ego—popping it like a balloon.

Mrs. Green took my left hand and walked me to the kiddy section where the picture books outnumbered the novels. The books on these shelves were all colors of the rainbow, more eye-candy than content. She used her pointer finger to slide the books along the shelf; she stopped every so often to guide her finger along the spine as if the perfect book for me was scanning her prints for a match. Finally, she pulled a book from the shelf: *The Shape of Things*. "Ahha, this is the one, a real jewel," she nodded. It didn't look like a winner to me, but I took it with a smile.

I brought the book home for Labor Day weekend. After I practiced by myself for an hour, my mom, dad, and sister gathered by my side to listen and support. Dad even offered to buy me a Nintendo if I could work my way through the whole book by the end of the weekend—as if the Star of the Week weren't motivation enough. They were eager for me to read, but they were more eager for my attempts at phonetic pronunciations. I read choppy sentences to *You can do it, sound it out*. I stumbled, stuttered, and stopped on unfamiliar words. I tried to get my mouth around the multi-syllabic ones: pa•per, fly•ing, air•plane. I formed exaggerated expressions to foreign words: my eyebrows pinched in concentration, my lips pouted for the long *o* in open, my lips peeled back to show teeth for the sharp *i* in ice, my lips curled for the soft *p* in put.

But then I hit a trap word: high. I paused. I stared. My family waited. Hig-hig-higahuh. My mom snorted through her nose, my dad laughed in between deep breaths and made sure to slap his knees, and my sister laughed so hard that she began to hiccup and cry at the same time. My reading career quickly turned into a standup comedy act. My cheeks burned in frustration; I didn't like being the source of a joke. I closed the book and stomped each stair leading to my room with as much force as my 43 pound body allowed. I slammed the door and threw the book against the wall. *The Shape of Things* landed like a bird in a pile of dirty clothes—the pages folded a tail near the bottom of the spine while the paperback wings were extended in full flight.

I don't know if the Nintendo that showed up in my room two days later was a formal apology, but it didn't make me want to pick up the wounded bird of a book as my parents had hoped. Instead, more dirty socks and underwear collected on top of the book. After my failed attempt at reading, I realized the fastest way for me to be the Star of the Week was to stick to math.

with slant stone eyes that never close,
that see everything. Whose
garden is lined with mason jars,
each one carefully placed, each one
full of light. Who watches the children
play down the street, no words
for their happy language.

The children see but do not
understand her hunger:
*Those jars are filled with the souls
of kids she's murdered.*
How do you know?
Sometimes you can hear them cry.

At night the children come
to smash her jars, to break her spells,
stones sharp and mouths hard,
unaware she waits behind the curtain
for a husband's hard-planed hand against her face.

At dawn, she walks through the broken
glass, listens to it
pack like snow beneath her feet.



What The Poet Told Me

Brianna Lichtenauer

"Be kind to yourself"
-Kerouac

Do not blame the little self who sends you
poems in bottles, who sails them
downstream where they wash up
on your shore. Take the shiny pebbles,
the bits of feather and leaf,
the broken robin's egg placed
so carefully in your hands.

Avoid the black X of failure,
the bite of a scorn-filled laugh, the
red button-eyes of contempt. There is enough
cruelty, enough poison to turn the water black.

Speak softly, accept the odd frog still slick
with mud, and tell your little self
what a fine creature she has found:
how green he is, how small.

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Language and Literature

