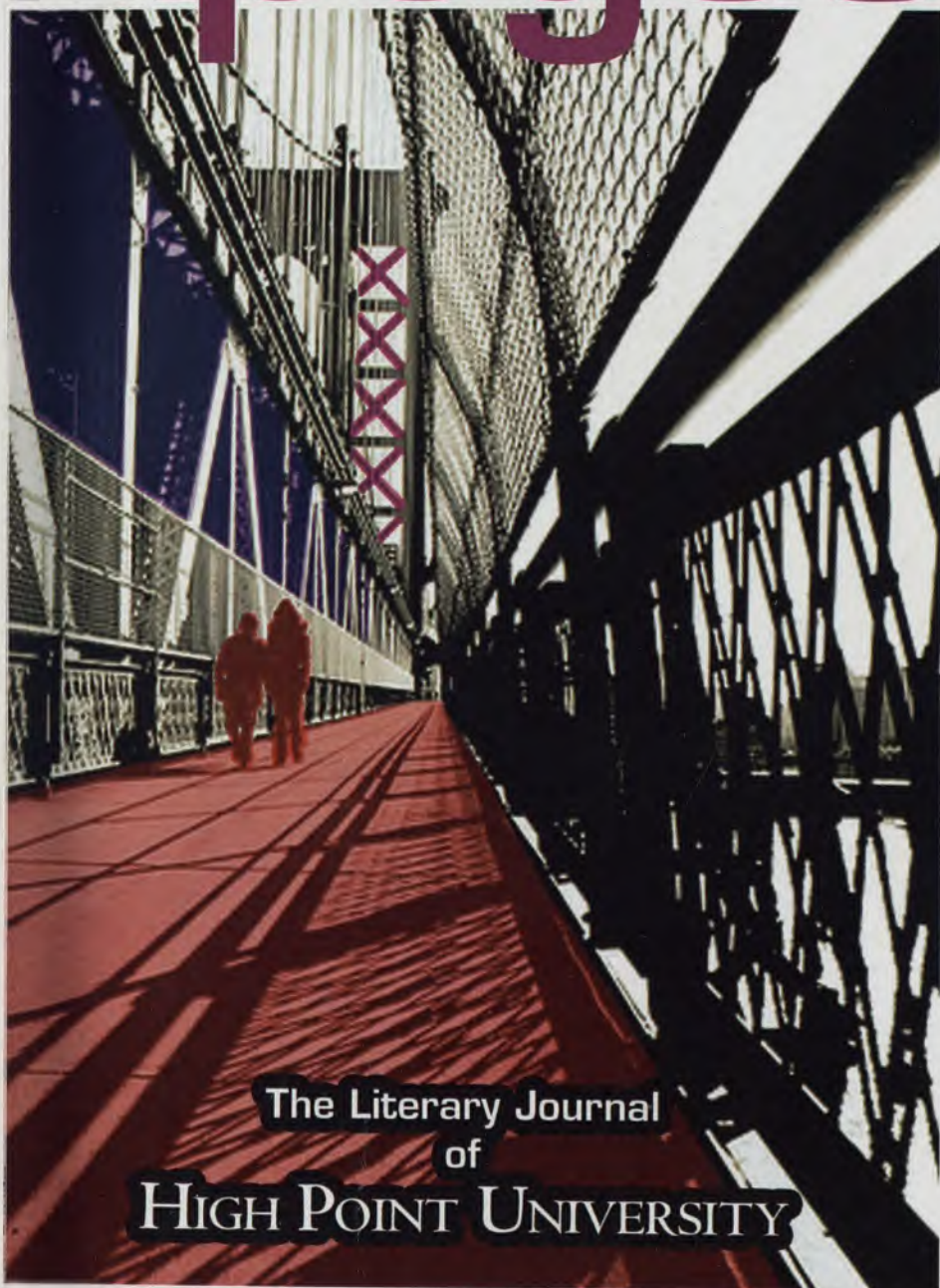
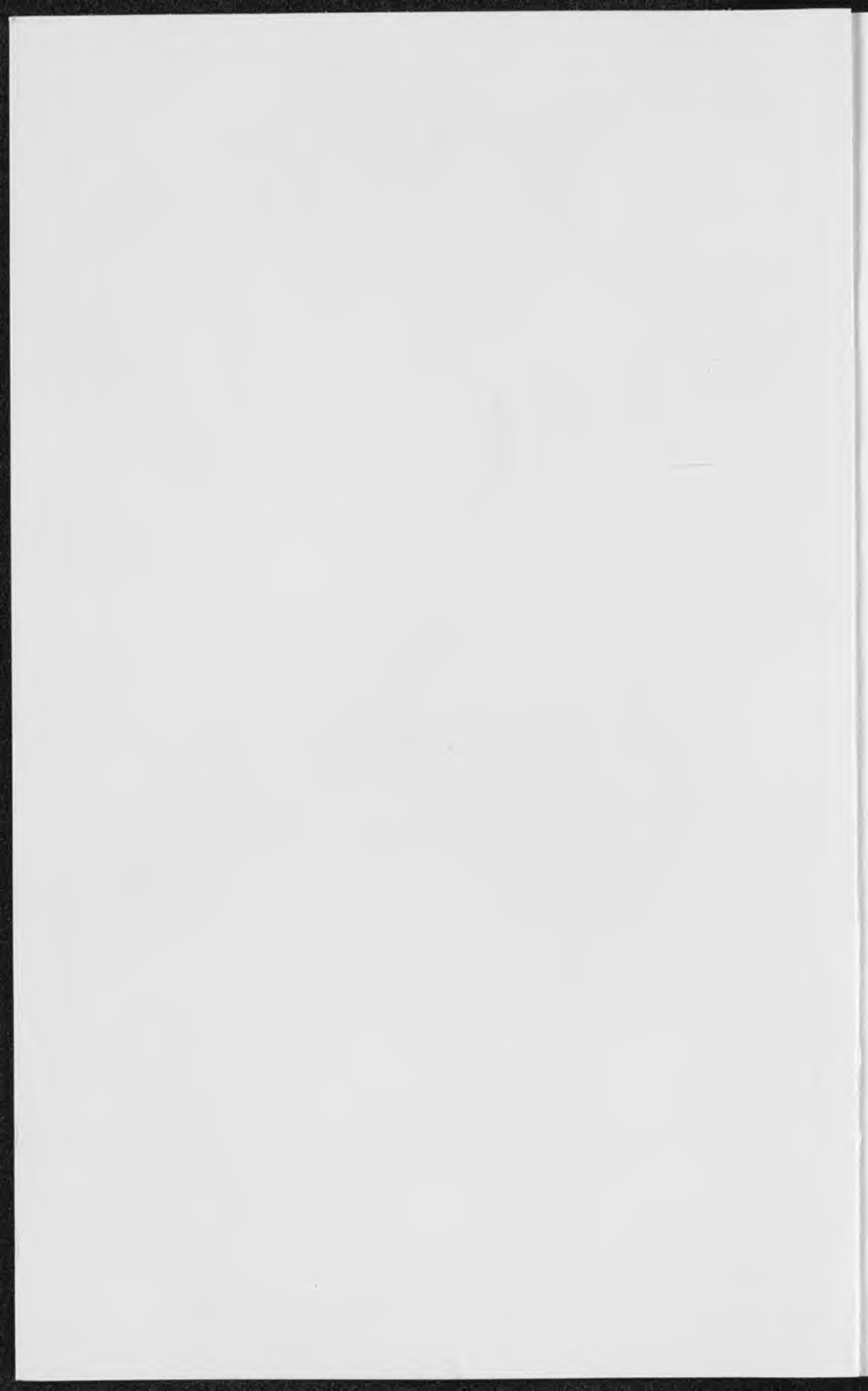


SPRING 2010

Apogee



The Literary Journal
of
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY



Apogee

SPRING 2010

THE LITERARY JOURNAL
OF
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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"The Early Aborter"

FIRST PLACE

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I have always been

a misanthropic mass of cells in a withering womb
from the moment the haploid collision commenced.

And I was killing before I was born:
solidifying siblings to thrive in selfish seclusion,
the created destroying the creator,
hemorrhaging hatred with red red meiosis
like the incomplete poetry shoved into a corner,
and the forgotten manuscripts saturated by
coffee stains from a cold, half-empty mug,
and the fabric pinned next to the sewing
machine.

My life will end the way it began
with a hundred books dog eared before the conclusion,
a heap of damp clothes in the dryer,
and aborting, aborting, abandoning the
incomplete.

"Endymion"
FIRST PLACE
High Point University Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I wait and listen—the softness of his chest beneath my ear is soothing; but the rhythmic *inhale, exhale, in, out* of his breath taints the beauty of silence hanging in our bedroom. So I wait, feeling the sickly feeling of anticipation and dread rising in my stomach. I never intended to fall in love—I made my heart impenetrable to the vile emotion—willing myself to hate rather than endear. It wasn't so hard to achieve, after all, lovers are the worst kind of fools, opening their hearts as easily as they surrender their bodies—giving every last inch until there's nothing left. Absolutely nothing. I was safe from it, always too quick, too aloof, and too *cold* for it to ever catch me. So I thought.

But this man—

I sweep my hand across the dusty hair of his chest, wishing my fingers could melt into his skin. His breathing is ragged and his hear beat sluggish in my ear. I draw circles down his sternum. This man, this *being*, became my *everything*. He fell so easily into my life and my heart, as if he had always been there. And this Love I feel consumes, like a putrid, pulsing poison that spread from his lips to mine. I feel him now beneath my ear, but he is living and breathing in me. I never wanted to fall in love, but this wretched feeling—these chains connecting me to him are real—like burning, engulfing me from the inside out.

He smiles at me and tells me from time to time, "*I love you*" and I wonder where my strength has gone that those words can unravel everything I am—I'm drowning in him. It terrifies me. I sit up slowly. The sheet pools around my hips, my lover doesn't stir. It is terrifying how easy it is to loose myself in him—he's beautiful. I trace his lips, feeling the ghost of his breath against my fingertips. This feeling is burrowing so deep in me I feel I could die from it—but he smiles and tells me *he loves me* so easily. Too easily. Just earlier tonight after drinking his last cup of tea (a special brew I made just for him), he kissed me sluggishly and whispered, "*I love you. Goodnight.*" The words slip out just like every other word, beautiful on his lips, but painfully *normal*. Like "good morning", he sees me and says, "I love you"!

Does he realize what he is to me? *He is everything* but he throws those words around like they're nothing. I drag my fingers down his chest wishing I could rake deep groves on his skin. I want to dig out his heart and replace it with mine. Only then will I know exactly what he feels for me; I'd hear my heart beating in his chest and know for certain that he's mine.

He's beautiful sleeping. In these moments, with his soul-deep eyes and treacherous smile slack in sleep, I can look at him without worry, or care, or shame. Sleeping lovers can't lie. They can't lie, or betray or *leave*. In his sleeping moments I can calm the beast within me called Love. I can shower him with everything I am—but sometime he wakes. And he smiles that damnable smile that makes me want to trust him—but I *can't*. Awake he can snare me in lies and I'd believe every word because I'm a fool and I love him, I *adore* him, *worship* him. He could destroy every bit of me if he wants to; all he'd have to do is walk away. No. Never. Awake he is danger.

A sleeping lover never lies.

His breathing is labored, like he's gasping; then—silence. Finally. I press my lips to his neck, so relieved to feel nothing but fading warmth that tears burn their way down my cheeks. I rise and gaze down at him—there's something horrifyingly glorious about him now that he's free of breathing. His mouth is open and I kiss him. Again and again and again—feeling my love for him—Love, with its thorns of uncertainty and shackles of heartbreak—shattering through me and I feel as if I can breathe again.

A sleeping lover never lies.

He never abandons you, or hurts you, or cheats. He never strays—he never *walks away*. Finally. I wrap myself around him, feeling him motionless and cold. Mine. All mine, forever now. My beautiful sleeping lover—ghastly pale and haunting; forever trapped in this one moment. My love for him is bubbling over and spilling into my throat. I'm giddy, I'm *happy*. Yes. Happy. Safe. *Finally*.

I whisper in his ear (and he doesn't respond, which is just as well):

Goodnight, my darling. I love you. Goodnight.

"Boy and his God"

FIRST PLACE

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I'm just a boy with my god.
Throwing s Frisbee, he sprints after it,
wagging his tail, making Earth pitch.
Light can't keep up, sound has no chance,
and he's as tall as I when he stands up to dance.
I throw him a treat, he jumps up so high,
the astronauts all crick their necks and cry.
But I'm just a boy with my god.
I put him on a leash, and we go out for a stroll.
He sees a squirrel and thunder starts to roll.
I take him to the pet store and the price tags all change,
I give him some table scraps, their size gets all strange.
He wants the friendly repairman to stay,
so something else breaks, and he comes back the next day.
I stand there with my head high in pride,
even though the truth is etched in my mind:
I'm just a boy with my god.

"Rose Petals"
FIRST PLACE
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

The sidewalk was slowly being covered with crushed rose petals. They fell gently from her dirt-stained fingers, wilted and pitiful. There was no wind to carry them off, so each one fell in her wake as she ambled through the neighborhood.

The owner of the destroyed roses paid no attention to this; her mind was elsewhere, far away from the sidewalk. She was in the midst of a sort of reverie, a dream-like state in which her thoughts mixed with an awareness of her thoughts, and left her eyes blurry and unfocused and her stride slow and sluggish. In her mind she was a train, dark and powerful.

Why was she thinking this? Shouldn't she be more concerned about the fact that Tabitha was throwing a dinner party Wednesday night, and she had yet to purchase a new dress for the occasion? She chided herself for letting her thoughts stray to something as silly as a train, but it wasn't the first time she had caught herself picturing utterly useless images. Last week she sat for half an hour thinking of the ocean, just imagining the *blue* of it all, when she was supposed to be avidly listening to her husband's news of the marital troubles between Mr. and Mrs. Longcombe. She had stared at him with glazed eyes, hearing his words but taking no meaning from them, seeing only the never-ending expanse of the ocean's horizon, the deepening and darkening depths that somehow both amazed and disturbed her. It was a mesmerizing thought, and one that was hard to shake.

The petals fell faster and she hastened her stride, anxious to reach her destination, meet with one of her neighbors, and casually socialize her way out of this perplexing vision. But there must be some reason she was picturing a train . . . perhaps if she allowed herself to contemplate the picture without feeling strange or embarrassed, these troublesome images would leave her.

She tried to picture the last time she had been on a train. It had been quite some time, as Thomas preferred the motor car because it required less mixing with "the wrong sort of people." When she was a little girl she would occasionally walk by the train station when she wanted to take an alternate way to school, but the sight of the huge black beetle-like machine weaving its way into the station would make her feel uneasy, and without a glance backwards she would march on to her destination. Even now, when she thought of one approaching, she thrillingly pictured herself standing on the tracks, the feeling of unease as strong as ever.

Unease that greatly resembled terror.

It was only a train, just a collection of pieces of steel made to transport passengers. She forced a laugh at the memory of her childish fear, and the laugh startled the grey cat across the street. It glanced coily over at the woman, and fixed her with an unpleasantly piercing stare that fully justified her hesitation to purchase a cat for the children, although Thomas felt that having a pet was the proper thing to do. She stopped walking and closed her eyes, still absentmindedly crushing the roses, and forced herself to see the train once more.

This time, as she began to pick out the details of the image, she saw distinct faces in the windows of the train, and the vividness of it made her wonder if perhaps she had actually seen these passengers before in the past. One man in particular stood out to her, and as she watched through the window he held up a small pocket watch and pressed it to the glass, his solemn expression fixed directly on her. This action did not confuse her; in fact, she did not question it at all, but rather became frustrated.

She did not feel the need to discover this man's identity, nor did she want to understand the reason he held the watch to the glass. What she desired, an incredibly strong desire, was to be on the very train that she saw in her mind—to take this man's watch and hold it in her hand, feel the power of the ticking mixed with the deep hum of the train's engine. The strength of this feeling overwhelmed her, and she opened her eyes to feel the sting of the blazing sunlight mixed with the absurd wetness that was obscuring

released the tension in her hand, and the remaining petals lay on the sidewalk, forgotten.

She crossed the street to the large beige house, careful to avoid the glances she knew were coming from the gaps in the blinds of the surrounding houses, and opened the door just long enough to slip inside and allow the unpleasant grey cat to slink by her skirts and into the kitchen for some choice scraps from the cook. She walked straight through the parlor and up the stairs to the bedroom, noticing Thomas's tie lying on the bedside chair.

He met her with an expression of mild interest, which changed into one of mild concern when he saw her disheveled appearance. She saw herself at the same time in a hanging mirror, and noticed that the sun had turned her cheeks quite red. He looked at her long enough to make her feel a bit ashamed that she had stayed out so long, and then inquired about the flowers that were needed for the parlor that night, as the Parliers were coming over and he wanted the house to smell of roses.

His eyes strayed down to the hand that had been holding the stems, and she glanced down as well, seeing only green sticks that did not end in attractive red flowers, but were rather harshly ripped and jagged at the tips, leaving only tiny pieces of the destroyed rose petals. She of course hurried to explain herself, but found that she had no idea what had happened to the roses. She was secretly glad they were gone forever, as for some odd reason she couldn't help but connect them with a feeling of despair.

"A Sidewalk Madonna"
SECOND PLACE
High Point Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

The bristles of the paintbrush
caress the gentle, amber curves.
Along her wrist, along her neck.
A chameleon epidemic –
smooth lines that transform.
Flawless marble with shimmering flecks
that catch the dappled sunlight.
Like ice, like glass.

Curiosity ensnares the passing Cyclops
through a single, mechanical eye.
It blinks with a click;
she holds her gaze.
I watch the stars for she is one,
the frozen reflection of another's past.

Wind stirs above the chilled cement
tossing leaves about her feet –
not a single hair upon her head
deserts to join its beckoning call.
The clock in the square bellows noon,
she sways when no one sees.
The moment between a single bell's toll –
her form is changed, her eyes are sad.

The clock falls silent, watching her –
in a moment, she is gone.
A hurried audience cannot see,
even her muscles and lungs obey.
No flinch, no jolt, no twitch.
A timeless statue, she is each day,
calculated and precise.
Yet in the rain, she seemed to cry
though the Son who died was not hers.

She is beauty not her own –
immortal in a world of stone.

"Safe"

SECOND PLACE

High Point University Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Today they were in Munich. Outside St. Peter's she let go of his hand and knelt to fuss with his coat and scarf, ensuring they were snug on his frame. He kept his eyes down, subject to her fussing until she turned his chin up and dropped a kiss on his forehead.

"Cold out, today, isn't it?" she breathed, a cloud streaming from her lips. "Might even see some snow tonight!" He didn't talk. He hadn't for three years. She had yelled at him once, but now neither of them yelled, and she only spoke softly.

"You know they had the Olympics here once?" She was unwrapping a glittering sweet and popping it lightly into his mouth. She was rewarded with the first gleam of interest all day. "Perhaps someday we'll—" She stopped, knew better. "No, we'd better not." They didn't do public gatherings. She didn't say so, but he understood. Never where there were cameras. No TV, no photos. His expression sank like a coin into a fountain, a smile gone under dark water.

He was ten today. She'd been thirty some years ago, but still so beautiful the whole world noticed. Three years ago they left home, he stopped talking, and a man had fallen dead in their kitchen, not in that order. Those men had no business being on their doorstep. His parents knew it. So his father hid them. He remembered the feel of the basement, his father hurriedly blowing out the candles on his cake and putting it back in the box, his mother breathing sharp, the loud bang – surprise – and then they were running, but not in that order. She knew he remembered it all, and understood, but for each other's sake, they pretended.

Her husband had thought himself invincible. He was important, up in a high place. He—his family—could never be touched by his people's work. He was untouchable up until the moment they knocked on the door and put a hole in him. He wasn't a good man, but he'd loved them. That's why they remembered him - why they always ran.

She took her son's hand again; they walked. "Did you ever see anything

so pretty?" she asked, pointing out the snow draping the harsh world of the mountains. Everything they saw was always the prettiest she'd ever seen, and things were always getting better, happily checking over her shoulder and counting all the exits of every room; smiling while she pulled the scarf over her hair and layered on muted clothes – the vanishing act of the most beautiful woman in the world.

For lunch she picked up sandwich makings from a corner store and bottled water – anything that came with an anti-tampering seal. They ate under the Angel of Peace and she told him about the end of the Franco-Prussian War, because he loved history.

He looked more like his father every day. It terrified her. His dark hair and smooth, pretty face was hers, but he was stark pale like his father, and with the same fathomless blue eyes. It was hard to hide a child with those eyes from people who had seen them before. She leaned down and kissed his freckles, holding him close to her chest as if she could make her body stone and shield him with it.

Maybe they could go to Paris next. He enjoyed Paris. They hadn't been there in over two years because it was dangerous to be frequent anywhere. Maybe now was safe. Maybe not. Maybe next year.

That night they checked into a dingy hotel. Happily, she checked under the bed, the closet, outside the window, and bolted the locks.

Late at night there was a shot.

He sprang from his bed and thudded into his mother's body, her arms locking readily around him. Resting her head over his and holding her breath, she counted the seconds to see if the sound was coming for them.

Two... three... four...

She closed her eyes so tight the blackness bled to colors of yellow and green on the inside of her eyelids.

Five... six... seven... eight... nine... ten.

Maybe it was safe now. Maybe not. Maybe next year.

"Aqua, Terra, and Zephyr"

SECOND PLACE

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

When a mother's child is abused by another, would the mother want revenge?

Aqua:

I smiled when they sailed across me
Splashing their faces with the sea water
Gladly providing them with the molecule for life; the universal solvent
But they dumped their trash in me
Leaving a scar twice the size of Texas in the center of my back
Then blamed me when tsunamis crushed their factories
And when hurricanes soaked their cities

Terra:

Initially, I didn't mind when they cut off my limbs
I was happy to give them firewood
But they wouldn't give me a break
Kept on chopping off my arms and legs
Wired their own electric system through me
Then blamed me when my blood boiled over
Destroying their precious wooden houses
And when infertile soil wouldn't grow the trees they'd just cut down

Zephyr:

I gently moved their bonfire smoke
And brought the rains to dampen their factory smoke
But I started coughing after a while
I got sick and bringing the winds took longer
Their cars and planes didn't help either
They started to tear a hole in my cloak, my armor, their armor
Then blamed me when I rained their pollutants back at them
And when tornadoes tore their material things away

**"A Guide on How to Travel When You Can't See
the Stars"**

SECOND PLACE

High School Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Nighttime is intimidating where everything blocks out the stars. So many people used to use constellations to find their way, but here in the city there is a chance one may always be lost. Even when I am sitting on the bus, riding through in the city with a map of the bus routes in my hand, I'm not sure where I am.

"Do you know if I smoke?"

"Um. . . . Sir?"

"I'm sorry, but I just can't remember. I found these cigarettes in my pocket, but they're not open, so I'm not too sure. Have you ever seen me smoke?"

I can't figure out why this is the only vacant seat. Maybe he ran off the person sitting here before me. If he made the other person I this seat feel as uncomfortable as I do, it would make sense for them to discretely relocate. His faded navy blue suit is frayed at the edges. He has a black umbrella, much like the one that Mary Poppins uses to fly. He ignores the umbrella at his side, though, choosing to hold his pack of cigarettes instead. He had been concentrating on his hands, almost as if he is looking for a map in the creases of his palm, but he is now looking me straight in the eye.

"Well, me personally . . . I can't say I've ever seen you smoking." At my words, his eyes flicker with a bit of recognition, as if a memory just flew past his brain, like a starling caught in the wind.

"I think you're right, ma'am," he says, making me feel older than nineteen. "I don't think I smoke." He takes one more look at the cigarettes and then holds them out to me. "Do you want these? I don't smoke."

"No, thank you. Maybe soon you'll find someone else who needs them more than either of us." I smile at him. To fill the continuing silence, I

say, "So, are you from this part of town?"

"Give me a second." He looks down at his hands again, deep in thought. "I got on the bus quite a while ago. . . ."

"Well," I start, trying to think of an easier question to distract him from his confusion. "Do you have children?" He looks up at me with a light in his eyes.

"Yes, yes, I do! I think I have have two of those, actually. I wonder where they are. . . ." He trails off again, struggling to think of his past, a past obviously mysterious to the both of us.

"Are they sons?"

"No, no, I don't think so. I remember longer hair, though that doesn't necessarily mean I'm remembering a girl," he jokes.

"Well, then, do you have daughters?"

"Wait, I don't think I have any of those, either. Maybe a puppy . . . kitten, or. . . ." His face creases more than ever, a thought hiding in every line. He jerks suddenly, though, turning to me, burning with curiosity. "You look familiar. You aren't my daughter, are you? Brown eyes are something I keep coming back to."

"I don't think so. I have a dad back home."

"Do you know where your home is?" he asks casually, as if it's not a complicated question.

"I like to call it an apartment a few bus stops from here, but. . . ." I look up and see the coffee place on the corner. "I'm getting off here. Is there anything I can do for you?" He looks at me for a long second, racking his brain.

"Try to find your home. Try to find it before I find mine," he says, looking at me for a second longer and I notice his eyes. They are now a darker blue, a blue that almost matches the worn suit. He holds my gaze for a second longer and then looks back down at his hands, fiddling with the strings on the sleeve of his coat.

As I walk down the aisle, I see the singles and workers and husbands and wives. I glance back a couple of times at the man in the worn suit; he had the same expression on his face that he did when I sat down, as if he were trying to keep the thoughts from escaping his mind. I take my last look as I squeeze past a girl a few years older than I, and she takes my seat.

Reluctantly, I step off the bus to go to the coffee shop. As the bus drives off, I watch the back window, where I can see the man's head. He is turned towards the person across from him, talking. From what I can make out, I think it is the girl I passed when I got off. He is making exaggerated hand motions as if he were describing someone. *I hope that he has remembered something*, I thought as the bus roared out of sight.

My bank is across the street; I talk to the teller every time I'm there, and he even knows my work schedule. Down the street is the local bookstore where the clerks know me by name and keep up with the books I read. And behind me is the coffee shop, filled with students from the local college and baristas who know everyone's regular, even mine. *These must be the constellations I can use here*. I go to order my regular. *I found home*.

"Revisions"

HONORABLE MENTION

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Possibilities only become probabilities when revisions comply to heartfelt emotions.

Dignify the loyalty to be kind of a kindled mark.

Swift notes are able to retract the boundless feelings that remake dreams.

But the fantasies control your mindset and allows temptation to seep through the frustration.

Don't complain. I'm here to emote my being in the lack of intimacy.

Contain the portrayal of forgiveness. Yet, the memories can only tell when reflection of times traces back to realization in the appearance of love.

Still, the possibilities endure painless sorrows and develops untraceable memoirs that flow without perseverance.

Shape the magnitude within my crying soul

Needing possessions that forces you to speak openly

Engage in times

Intertwine more than our feelings, letting our hearts beat as one

But the endless situations keep circling until it stops at none

Come forth the feelings and let the dreams escape

Fiction is what is real

Must take these criteria into the possibilities nevertheless the probability of enhancing the love that remains in the degrees of hearts

Which complies in our emotion of a kindled mark.

A

"Eleven thirty-four"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

After deliberating over which flavor Pop-Tarts
you will really want to eat every morning for the next week
and should you get one percent milk or two,
you'll wander through aisles looking at Fritos
and Coke and pick up Jif instead of store brand

and maybe you'll even spring for a nice bottle of wine
to have with the chicken breast Charlie the butcher
cut especially for you. Invariably you'll see someone
for the first time in years and be forced to make small talk
like you did at the last high school reunion. He

will show you pictures of his snotty children
and you will smile and say They're beautiful,
even though you think little Cindy looks like her face
was flattened by a steamroller when she was a baby
and all you really wanted to do today was buy groceries

and watch James Bond movies on cable until you fell asleep
in front of the TV. But you talk for a while and then politely
excuse yourself under the pretense of actually having a life
and deadlines to keep – and stop to look at the latest People
on the way to the checkout. In line, Father Time loves

to slow the tick, tick, tick until the second hand
on your watch hardly moves at all and you feel
like you're in that Dali painting forever stuck
at 11:34 because Mrs. Cassini from down the street
needs her grapes perfectly weighed and Joey

the checkout boy can't find the Camel Turkish Golds
and price check on Tampax and because you are finally,
finally next in line and James Bond is waiting for you,
the guy in front of you has to write a check. Then?

Well, the woman behind you finally snaps
and throws her kiwi at everyone she sees
and you finally get to put that self-defense class to good use.

"The Forever Kind"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

No tears today
Your carriage is riding off
I hope you're comfortable
I hope—

No tears.
I'm sorry
I can't help it
I'm trying to do better

Everyone says,
It's not good bye for good, it's good bye for now
But I can't really see it that way,
Because someone stole you from me
(God? Karma? Your cocktail of opiates and bourbon?)
No tears
No tears because you're dead
Deceased, pushing daises, making nice with the reaper—

You're dead
Not for good
Only a little while, because dead isn't *dead*
Or so I'm told

Everyone says,
If you love someone they'll be with you forever
And I did love you. I did. I *still* do.
Even though you're dead, you're not *dead*

It's not like we'll never see each other again
Right?

"Superheroes"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

*"All hell has broken loose and you're on the moon with me?
 The world needs you." – Batman, Infinite Crisis*

It can read all of the emerald green rhymes of life
 and never get closer to their meanings –
 their rings of power and spirits of redemption –
 sometimes I had to research the intricacies
 yet always pretended I knew it all along.

And we destroyed some earths and lost friends
 and killed friends and hated things like friends
 and sometimes felt bad about the tiny footprint
 we left on their hearts, memories, and brains.

And I've shared my bed with others before:
 artists, singers, even superheros,
 but none of them griped me as you did:
 with desperate grappling ttk holds
 so full of that emerald-tinged love
 that I set aside long ago when
 the Robin suit became red and black

no green. Our colors collide. Completing me.
 Helping me to reach the top of the bookshelf
 where I stored all of the books I've never read.

You were my Bane,
 cracking the spines of the classics.
 Crippling my façade and forcing me
 to settle down, relax, enjoy.

I brought you down to my level. Way down
 where the comics lurk in the second-hand grime
 with their covers hanging like tattered capes.
 Showed you the oozing open wound where *Batman: Year One*
 once stood bold and proud and worked through the pain,
 but now lies on the floor of some boy's apartment
 lost – traded – betrayed – hurt.

But our powers may fade as we save our separate worlds
 and we'll toss them into the Lazarus Pit reviving only half of what we
 had.

And from the moon, the stars are still just old photographs.

"Timekeeper"

HONORABLE MENTION

High Point University Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

The constant pendulum rocks back and forth
with timely grace, immortal in its song.
It tinkles like the change inside a patched
and dirty pocket, neither seen nor heard.
Yet though a line, we've oft been told, Time does
not always wish to be. Its "tick" is like
a house of cards, its "tock" – them falling down.
A ribbon dancing through the wind, he twirls
between our hands – once lost, is lost forever.
Tonight its trickle falls along my skin
as gentle as honey – an hour each inch.
He is no tightrope for us to nimbly cross
but more a spider's web of sweet gossamer.
When lovers meet, he quickens pace, at part
he stretches out like shadows do at dusk.
His fickle face upon your wrist; I wish
he would not mock me so. He has become
an aging mirror in your skin, and yet,
the twinkle in your eye. How many years
and seasons have you felt his beauty new?
Returning with persistent hope, he is
like ripples across galaxies and minds.
As rigid as its cogs and wheels, and yet
as flimsy as great Dali knew he'd be.
He flows and crashes with the ebbing tides;
he keeps the moon as his own pocket watch.
Existing only as he chooses now,
only in our last breath, does he stand still.

"Metaphor"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

He's sitting on the floor with a pile of notebooks and newspapers and smoke writing harsh poems in the air around his long red hair. The manuscripts smell of tobacco and dust and something so familiar that he can't place. Some smell he attaches to the memory of Josef. He traces each handwritten letter with his eyes, memorizing the long forgotten points and curves of the shapes, trying to revive it like a lost language.

Adam jolts awake on the sagging couch behind Lucy. The heavy Uzi still clasped loosely in his right hand. He is always on guard, always paranoid after an assassination. Adam snags a cigarette from Lucy's rapidly diminishing pack and lights the tip with his lucky Zippo. He inhales deeply but sluggishly and releases the smoke through his nostrils over Lucy's shoulders. Adam scans the stanzas before swiping another notebook from the wobbling stack on the coffee table.

The poetry is brutal, cruel, and vicious. The page is littered with violence and sex and death. It's crude. It's sad. It rings true.

"I didn't know your brother wrote poetry," he rasps between drags. "You told me he was a journalist."

"He wrote poetry for himself. Just something he did but never showed anyone. Never got any of it published."

Lucy's voice is distant like he's lost somewhere between memories and dreams. His eyes scan over the curve of a 'y', the pronounced concave of the 'v' and the looping, swirl of the tail. He thinks of better times. Times where he didn't have to watch men, barely older than him, bleed onto the pavement. Times when his shoulders were never sore from the recoil of a gun. Times when he didn't pay his school bills with money he earned by assassinating others. Times when his brother was still alive and made him pancakes in the morning and folded his laundry when it was still warm from the dryer. Times that seems so far away in his mind.

"What do you think he meant by all this? The metaphors, I mean?" Adam asks to draw him back to reality.

"What do you mean?" Lucy scans.

"Like this one here, talking about cicadas dying moments after they emerge from the earth. It's gotta mean something, right?"

Lucy lights another cigarette without removing his gaze from the paper, still trying to engrave that haphazardly written letter into his hippocampus. Trying to remember. Trying to forget. He tears his eyes away from the paper, neck straining to look at Adam.

"Why?"

"What do you mean 'why'?"

"Why does it have to mean anything? I mean, I've read somewhere that Robert Frost never meant anything by his poems. They were just about winter and nature and roads. Then someone came along and said they had to be metaphors, they had to *mean* something. And that's when everything got so complicated and confusing."

Adam lets the words bounce through his mind like ricocheting bullets. It makes sense. He nods and opens his mouth to respond. Lucy continues instead.

"I just don't understand why people won't let things be, just leave them alone. But, they have to put some sort of meaning on them, make them represent something. Poetry just gets lost under the jumble of jargon some scholars claim the poem means and then... and then..."

He stops talking and takes another drag, tears shining in a glossy and unflowing sheen over his eyes.

"And then everything just loses the beauty of simplicity," Adam finishes for him.

Lucy swallows back a silent, choking sob. A tear rolls down his cheek and lands on that 'y', smears the ink and converts it into a fuzzy purple blob. He nods.

"Why can't anyone just let a road be a road?"

There is no answer. There are no comforting words. They simply light another cigarette and continue to read.

Hunter
Edwards

"Voyage"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Life is short and sweet until it goes bitter,
lasts long and dull until the sun comes up—
As rose of light's petals drift away, so shall
the shadows in play; lighting your darkness isn't so fast,
Light travels slowly in the mast of this thought-whirled
craft; you hang on tight until your hands go numb,
The last long fight, until life has won.

"One, Two, Three, Phor"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Poetry

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

The Poet grabbed Meta-One as he walked out the door.

Fearing One might not last, he went back for more.

The street was a mad house, everyone's mood turned gay,

So he got Meta-Two, then went on his way.

Now the streets were a bull fight, dangerous and wild;

Unprepared and alone, now he was a child.

In the train wreck of a mob, he brought Meta-Three.

The crowd was quicksand, but he finally broke free.

He was a bull in a China shop when Meta-Three hit the floor,

And this was, of course, when he needed Metaphor.

Colton
Faucette

"Worn Away"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Grinding away at the world, he treads on;
His shoes have tasted the oceans and rivers
And been coated in the earth,
Of plains, mountains, and deserts.
Little grains of asphalt embedded in the soles
Click on the polished tiles
Of retail chains and corporate establishments.
These shoes make him think of what he used to be,
Materialistic and rooted in social graces,
And how he will never achieve self-actualization
Until those shoes are worn away
And his feet turn to leather.

"The Landfill Man"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

every morning they saw him
 hobbling over the heaps of filth,
 slowly ascending the rotting mounds of trash,
 cigarette in one hand and paper bag in the other.
 shabby, with trusting hands and yellowed fingernails
 his grey eyes were bright as he showed them his treasures.
 "Look here, kiddos," he would crow,
 and look they did, teetering with childhood curiosity.
 "Look and see what the kings have tossed away,
 and what the gods have deemed unworthy."
 rusty silver chains, empty perfume bottles,
 love letters stained with spaghetti sauce,
 watering cans and egg-splattered pillow cases,
 chipped blue bowls and a broken can opener,
 all held in the shivering hands of the landfull man who wept
 whispering to the world that they were beautiful.

"Tonight We Discover"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

C'mon, you guys, let's gather 'round
and turn this mystery upside-down
so facts and knowledge will pour from it
and the dark confusion will be lit.
Tonight, all questions will be answered.
If you don't want it, step back, coward.
We spend all of our lives blindly groping
and in our ignorance, blindly hoping
that whatever the hell is going on here
the truth will be one to which we adhere.
There's a whole universe stretching before us,
of which we know little, but we don't give a fuss,
because tonight we discover, after toil and strife,
exactly what happens in the life after life.

"Where I'm From"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I am from loud mouths and bad attitudes
From a rusty bench on the old back porch
From late sunsets and loud rain.

I am from the dirt on papa's truck
From heavy sweat after a football game
From the damp twin bed with dents from my head.

I am from the Sonic game I played
From belt beatings, facing the dirty wall
From school tomorrow, lights out, no kiss at all.

I am from the sound of running water and rattling pots
From the taste of melting ice cream and flat soda
From the sight of dead birds and rat road kill.

I am from the touch of bumpy skin and poison ivy
From loud gunshots that make ears ring
From aggravating police sirens.

I am from red roses and purple lilies
From can't depend on no one, only you.

"Historic District"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

i am from a memory i don't remember
 a brick fireplace in ann arbor
 from starving pilgrims
 from a brownie pocket knife
 at a psychic reading

i am from model homes
 the insides empty of furniture
 from stray dogs that use the sidewalk
 on open window Fridays

i am from the pileated woodpecker
 the birdcall ocarinas my brother loved
 from the birthmark on your chest
 from the scars i haven't asked about

i am from interlochen and all its ghostly stories
 ypsilanti and all the true ones
 a dead man floating in the river
 his hair thick with algae

i am from a tape recorded baby's cry
 outside my mother's window
 a feeling brushing past
 not even my brother in her womb

"Mama Jack"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I, six years old, walk in the barn.
The air swirls with dust from the hay.
There she sits on the wooden green bleachers;
It's with Mama Jack I will spend my day—

Sitting together at the fairgrounds
Watching Garret, Mitch, Craig, and Luke show cows;
These are my earliest memories of her.
They seem so special now.

I was much too young so I pouted.
Showing a steer out there: I wanted that.
"You'll get your chance," she said gently.
So with her contentedly I sat.

I loved to visit her house
And never grew tired of her toys.
I could play with her for hours on end,
Too little to hang with the boys.

My favorite possession of hers
Was a jewelry box that played music.
As she got ready in the bathroom
I would sit happily looking through it.

Even with rheumatoid arthritis
She stood up in church singing hymns.
In the pew in front of me she sang alto,
Every song memorized. She praised Him.

She came to all of my performances,
Singing, acting, playing at the halftime show.
I counted on her to support me,
Cheering me on from the front row.

Trips to and from the hospital
Was how she spent most of her time,
So I didn't think anything of the last one;
Just another trip for this frail grandmother of mine.

Mama Jack's life and memory
Can't be encompassed in a poem like this.
This is only a feeble description
Of the grandmother I will forever miss.

"Coffee Stains"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I don't think
The world spins
Of its own volition

We walk
And talk
And live so fast

That we push the earth along
And it just spins gracefully under our feet
Like a dreidel
Or a tilt-a-whirl

After all
If it were otherwise
We wouldn't be so afraid
To slow down

Sarah
Cassell

"Listen, Boy"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

(A response to *Jamming at the Savoy*, Romare Bearden)

Zoo be doo be doo wa
Ching chaching ching
A-zoo be doo be doo wa
Beat.

Ching chaching ching

Beat.

Ching chaching ching

Beat.
Zoo be doo be doo wa

Zoo be doo be doo wa
Beat.

Let me tell you a
little something about jazz,
Boy.

It ain't little black lines or
Every Good Boy Does Fine

Here in Harlem we
color outside the lines

I see my music
in red purple
yellow and blue

It paints the room
Can you see it?
I see it, too

Feel it, Boy.

"Present"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I thought about the day I had gone to the gym I thought about you
crying in your blue computer chair while the wedding mix played too
loud in the background; and that it's spiteful you would leave like that
you should've done something; I thought about how angry I would be
soon how angry I am at you; and my nails dug into the car
and I walked home instead

My sister lit a cigarette and played her Avett Brothers and then I
couldn't listen because the lyrics had reached in through my mouth
and pulled out my heart pulsating in fear and the despair of my father's
words and then softer voice running through and through the crevices
of my ear drums; and I didn't know what was presented I am not here
because I want to be.

I could have been easily made up; the water hitting my back like
warm blades; food that stuck in my throat with the thought of you not
consuming it; the clothes that you didn't wear; the friends you thought
you didn't have; that absent imprisoned mother; that computer flooded
with our photographs; bloodshot eyes resembling caves empty and
moist;

how can I miss you if you are not gone?

I went to your funeral today and all I could think of was the vastly
obnoxious sound of the woman's voice and the carefully arranged floral
design and how you would've thought it was disgusting—how are these
the people, they don't know you, they cry to make themselves feel
better about the disarranged situation—

disoriented sweat drips from your eyebrow on my face.

I thought about a lot of the things that you wouldn't have wanted me to
think about; my mind travels to continents I was no longer supposed to
travel to, the continents that I loved and craved; that rested right in my
peripheral vision crowded into the rimming of your glasses, throughout
the aggravation of hope
and the loss of it.

You lived across the street and I don't wish to visit, but I do and I do
and the new person that lives there has shoulder length dreadlocks I
suppose that is irony through and through; I call but at points I want to
throw it back into your face; my spite credits you as its main contender,
it seethes and flourishes in your absence—

but I am just a child, forgive me.

"We Sit in Your Car"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

*Come blooming you as you pass by
Pray on these lines do case an eye
For once I bloomed as well as thee
Prepare for death and follow me*

Epitaph of a young man, UVA Cemetery

We sit in your car
Smoking out our fears
Spreading them into the air
A thick haze over the city so close

Sam throws his lit cigarette into the trash can
Day old newspapers heralding the death of Michael
Jackson smolder
The girl shrieks, afraid, excited
Smoke rises, penetrating my hair, my childlike clothes
I tap the spoons against my leg, keeping a beat
Charlie drowns out the cars, the bar music, with his
trumpet blasts
Gabriel, in jeans, bare chest against the summer air
A man walks by several times, avoiding our eyes, smiling
My swaying slows, the spoons leave my hands
Free before the courthouse, the skyline
It feels like 5 in the morning as the lights from the city
illuminate the horizon like dawn

"Unpalatable Pasta"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

My pasta is unpalatable
it's dancing across the dish
I'm really rather wondering
if I should've fried some fish.

The farfalle is flirting
with rotund rotini
whose eye is on
the fattened fettuccini.

The spaghetti is snorkeling,
submerged in the sauce,
but the zealous ziti is zipping about
and trying to prove who's boss.

The tagliatelle is touchy
around the pensive penne
and couscous is kissing
picky pappardelle.

My orzo is ogling
at ruffled riccetti
and my gnocchi is knocking
for my pining pizzoccheri.

The linguini is languishing;
the rotelle is a refugee
from finicky farfalline
and anglo-agnolotti.

My pasta is unpalatable—
the entire kit and caboodle!
Maybe I should throw it away;
now that's using the old noodle.

"From the Perspective of the Leaf Inside the Tornado"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Dear Cousins,

How is your minute?

Your day?

Your season?

Is the wind strong, do you cling to our ancient ancestor?

Her arms reaching out, as if she wants to rid herself of
your presence

There is no cradling among the trees as there is in the
bushes

We are thrust into the atmosphere, high above all,
exposed to the sun

The bushes have it good (those wimps)

They're not as likely to be torn from their home

Into this vortex of sound and darkness

It's worse than the howl of two million cats having their
tails stepped on

And my fellow victims of destiny

Delight in crashing into me

My skin is being torn and scraped into pieces

And soon I will be in the nothingness of nothing

I hope I will at least be able to hello to Dorothy

Your beloved cousin,

Leroy Edwin Al Francis

Jillian
Clark

"Meditations"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Poetry
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

I.

i crossed a street
today, thinking "what
if i'm beautiful"

a red car went by &
someone yelled "grow some hair"

after an event like that
it's a comfort
to go home and exist
and read too many poems

II.

i can be honest
for two seconds
and feel like myself
for five

i wouldn't take you
in the way i wouldn't take mezcal
without the side effects

in your sickness i'm sure
there's something in the corners of intuition
these places i've learned finally
to sleep in

"The Laugh"
HONORABLE MENTION
High School Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

So here I am. Sitting under the oak tree in the park with her, my love, and this notebook. It has been weeks of nothing but writer's block and I seem to be troubling her by it. So I am forcing myself to write. Perhaps something beautiful will come out in the end.

She is peacefully asleep right next to me under the tree, her head resting on my shoulder. Though her eyelids are shut, her eyes wander in the deepest part of her sleep. It is so satisfying just watching her next to me. I am tempted to reach and touch her cheek, but I resist, for it might stir her from her blissful rest.

Suddenly, the sweet angel laughs in her sleep!

That charming smile on her lips—how I want to trace it with my fingertip. How I want to tell her how much she means to me, how much she drives me mad with adoration.

Her laughing wakes her up. Her eyes slowly open to tiny slits as she gazes up at me from my shoulder.

"Hey," she greets, a small grin on her lips. If only she knew what she does to me.

"Hey," I reply, finally granting myself permission to touch her face.

"I fell asleep," she realizes, her voice exhausted and embarrassed.

"Yes, you did," I confirm, resting my hand on her cheek.

"I had a dream about you," she reveals. Yet I dream of her when

I am both awake and asleep.

"Really? About me?" I ask in disbelief.

"Yes," she says. "You told me you loved me." She does not need to sleep for me to tell her such a simple way to express my affection, my obsession for her.

"I do."

"And you kissed my nose," she says, blush creeping to her cheeks. How lovely the blush.

"That made you laugh?" I admire the crimson on her face.

"Sort of."

I give her a small kiss on her nose—and she giggles. I bend my head so the tips of our noses graze each other's as her eyes gently shut. We fall silent as I just watch her breathe evenly and calmly, her serenity taking my breath away.

"Then what really made you laugh?" I breathe in her scent, but she has already fallen back asleep.

"Mia's Final Ride"
HONORABLE MENTION
High Point University Fiction
Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

Mia dug around the inside of her brown leather purse until she found what she was looking for, the blue and white pack of Parliament Lights. Parting her lips, she slipped the cigarette in between them and then wrapped them back around the stick. She fumbled with the lighter, a cheap red one from the local convenience store, trying again and again, until it finally caught. She sucked in slowly. Relief. The cigarette taste mixed with the tea she drank earlier and burned her nostrils when she exhaled.

"Excuse me, miss," said a voice. Mia turned around to see a southern woman with an angry look on her face. "Do you mind putting that out? This is a no-smoking area and there are kids around." She huffed, and gestured her head toward a sign that read "NO SMOKING," and then looked down at a little girl holding her hand. Sensing the tension, the child stuck her small thumb inside her mouth and scooted behind her mother's legs. Mia wasn't one for confrontation but she also didn't want to put out a perfectly good cigarette. She looked around, and seeing that the few people on the train platform didn't seem to mind, she moved closer to the yellow line.

Mia brought the cigarette to her lips and took another satisfying drag. The train's whistle could finally be heard, and she knew it would arrive in three minutes. She thought back on her day and was certain everything had been done. She had fed her Siamese cat Milo, e-mailed her boss, and sent a letter to her parents. For once everything was perfect. The train was quickly approaching. The headlight glared.

The decision was made.

Mia took one last drag of her cigarette, dropped it to the ground, and, as if casually walking out her front door, stepped out in front of the train.

"Mommy! Mommy! The lady!" screeched the girl who tugged at her mother's pant leg. The mother checked her e-mail on her Blackberry, ignoring her daughter, when screams started to fill the morning air. The train had come to a loud stop and the people on the platform were running down the track. Abandoning her suitcase, she scooped her daughter up in

her arms and followed the crowd.

"I swear I didn't see her. She came out of nowhere!" cried the conductor. A businessman surveyed the scene and quickly walked to some small shrubs to empty his stomach.

"Go stand over there and don't move," the mother commanded. The girl nodded her head, stepped uneasily onto the rail, and wobbled on tiny legs away from the scene. Lying on the tracks in front of the mother was the woman she had yelled at earlier for smoking. Her jaw was unhinged and hung slack on her face which was mangled by the train. The left arm was crushed, and the legs were twisted unnaturally. Blood was starting to pool around her. The mother heard sirens in the distance.

"Look what I found, Mommy!" the girl said, running toward her mother, who turned around, blocking the view, and pulled herself together.

"What is it?" she asked, a bit shaky. The girl giggled a little and placed a small white object in her mother's palm. It was a tooth.

Mia woke up slowly. She rubbed her eyes. She stretched out her arms and hit her left hand against a window. Startled, she turned her head and saw the countryside whipping past.

"Where am I?" she asked a train attendant walking by. The man looked from side to side and then back at Mia.

"Well, ma'am, you're on a train," he drawled. Mia rolled her eyes.

"Where am I going? When will I be there?" she asked. The attendant only shrugged and continued down the aisle.

"It's your punishment," a voice said, "for killing yourself." Mia looked over the back of her seat and saw a teenaged boy. Mia arched an eyebrow.

"So, why are you here?"

"Come on, you can't possibly think you're the first person who jumped in front of a train. I had you beat by a few years."

"Rory's"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

It a bitter cold December night, and I was driving my 1991 Toyota Camry on the Main St. of a standard suburb: Jeffersonville, which was identical to every other mass-produced "small town" on the nation's never-ending conveyer belt of Walton's drug stores, Buy-Mart grocery stores, Starblock's coffee shops, and any other corporate chain you can think of that has raped all which was once sacred in our free-market economy.

As I drove down the street, headed for my new apartment I'd just rented for the year, I felt eerie déjà vu; I knew that I hadn't driven down this street before, but of course Jeffersonville's "Main St." was like any Main Street I'd ever driven on—every building was the same, because every original establishment in America had been bought out and crushed by a corporation with a dependable product and a catchy jingle.

And over the last twenty years, even those corporate chains had sold out to Walton's, which was once a One-Stop-Super-Shopping-Center chain that now owned every market, coffee shop, bookstore, and restaurant in the country.

The worst part about all of this was that as of the date of the most recent presidential inauguration, the government now owned Walton's because Walton's was of course a "military supplier," and since the government owned Walton's, whatever it was happening with "Walton's" controlling an empire of major chains, was being considered a "Natural Monopoly." The sheep had excitedly herded into the voting booths for "lower taxes" and "reformed health care," but they were blind to the Communist machine growing right before their eyes.

Only about one out of every fifty Americans even knew that "Walton's" owned everything they centered their lives around each day, because it was all done every so quietly with "corporate" mergers" and no change in the names of the businesses. The government didn't exactly make

it a point to nationally broadcast the fact that they were spoon-feeding Americans everything which we were buying.

Nonetheless, my whole life I'd been sure to viciously boycott all of the mass-produces coffee and discount milk on aisle 5 at Walton's. How is this possible when everything is owned by Walton's, one may ask. Well, back in my old hometown of Martinsville, I'd always had one little slice of salvation from all of the conveyer-belt "Walton's" products cheaply manufactured in a sweatshop somewhere in Asia.

The name was "Rory's," and it was an island of hope in my conformist suburban village. Rory's was a little shop a block away from where I lived, and it was so different from any other squeaky clean vinyl siding establishment in Martinsville. "Rory's" walls were brick, inside and out, and I loved it because every brick was a different color from the next. It was as if Rory himself had traveled around the world, searching for different bricks just so that the layout of his building could never be imitated. Six foggy windows were on each wall, and on top of Rory's rusty metal roof there was a half-eroded chimney from which smoke always seemed to puff like someone was baking cookies inside.

Past his "Come on in!" welcome mat, "Rory's" was like home. On one side of the store, little grocery aisles held everything my family could ever need to sustain ourselves. None of our groceries ever had any brand names, and that's the way I liked it. On the other side of the store there was a quaint bookshop. Books and movies were on great shelves that covered an entire wall, and Rory even had a little coffee bar set up where we could buy a drink while we read on his mismatched sofas. Random posters of Rory's favorite bands and poets lined the walls, like reminders that I was lounging in a place unlike any other in the world. It was my own little unique sanctuary from the rest of the government-owned world I lived in; the one place where I wasn't living in a uniform.

Rory would always joke with me and the rest of the rebel shoppers that he would be the last one the corporations shut down. "Don't worry," he'd tell me. "I'm not going anywhere unless someone shoots me dead in the street."

And now, as I drove down an icy "Main St." in Jeffersonville, I was sure that my déjà vu sensation wouldn't last much longer. I was sure of this because as I turned the corner I knew that I'd see yet another "Buy-Rite" rather than my home-away-from-home that was "Rory's."

Then as I casually turned my wheel onto "Maple Dr.," I nearly stopped breathing. It was "Rory's" brick for brick, five-thousand miles from Martinsville. After nearly driving my Camry into a ditch, I quickly pulled into the parking lot, but I couldn't believe my eyes. Smoke was puffing from a half-eroded chimney, and as I shuffled towards the door a familiar sign hung from a wooden door: "WELCOME TO RORY'S!" I glanced around and felt like I was in some sort of sick nightmare.

The posters, the books, the unmarked groceries: it was all the same. I thought of how many times the other "rebels" and I had smiled as we said, "No one else shops like we do! There's no place like Rory's!" We'd been so loyal to Rory, but it had all been a clever fabrication meant to deceive us. Every mismatched brick and sofa had been a strategic move by "Walton's" or some other corporation, to trap people like me into consuming a lie. I looked behind a counter Jeffersonville's so-called "Rory," a likeable looking fat man with a red beard and a nametag that read his imposter name.

"Hi, Rory," I sighed.

"I see we have a newcomer!" he replied with great enthusiasm. "Look around, don't be bothered if things are a little different than you know at 'Walton's.' Some call it 'over-pricing' but I say 'what the hell, it pays the bills.'"

I wanted to vomit.

So many times I'd heard my own Rory say that sentence and every time he'd just been another corporate employee lying through his teeth. Rory, who'd been like a second father to me, was a paid actor who probably resided in half the towns in the United States! "How much are they paying you to say that, 'Rory'?" I was getting angrier by the second. I couldn't believe that all these years I'd been paying full price for Rory's cereal and milk, when I could've gone to Walton's and gotten ten percent off for the same government-manufactured fodder.

"I don't know what you're talking about," replied the fatter version of Rory.

"Don't play stupid with me," I shouted. "I've shopped at a Rory's before in Martinsville, you stop your act!"

The fake Rory chuckled. "This is one market that isn't changing. They can shoot me in the streets before that'll happen."

Now I was furious. "Stop it! I know what's going on here! I'm going to tell everyone!"

Rory smiled warmly and made yet another comment I'd heard my entire life: "Come check out the library. I promise I have books you aint never seen at 'Walton's Books-a-Billion.'"

Now I was nervous at the way Rory seemed to be ignoring my accusations. "What's wrong with you?" I demanded. "Are you brainwashed to lie to us like this? Do they give you a script? Are they threatening you to follow it?"

He replied, "Check out my posters. Pretty cool bands, huh?"

I looked at him closer. "Are you a robot?"

Rory just replied with a comment about his story, and then he picked up his rusty red phone I had always seen on his store counter in Martinsville. Rory didn't speak, but I heard a voice on the other end say that "they are on their way."

I sprinted out of the store and frantically looked around at the new world everyone had become accustomed to. Everything was being controlled by my government, and no one was doing anything about it. Everyone, including myself, had been going about our lives moving like puppets to the whims of our government. They controlled what we ate, what we drank, what we wore, what music we listened to, and what books we read. Someone had to stop it.

So that was the night my revolution began. That was the night I burned Walton's to the ground.

"What's an Apple?"

HONORABLE MENTION

High School Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2009

A crackling laugh makes me shudder like I have just opened the freezer. Covered by shadow, the old man who spoke is hardly visible, just the silhouette of his hunched back is apparent on a crumbling wall. Hissing and coughing, he has a smoker's voice, deep and gruff. "Do ya know what that is?" he asked without coming from his lair.

"Do I know what that is? Are you asking about this tree here, because I have seen a tree on the internet, but never in real li"

"No, no, the thing in ya hand, ya dimwit. Do ya know whatcha holdin?" croaks the shadowed man interrupting my confession of never seeing a tree before. "No, I don't know what this is" I said, inspecting the lumpy object just fell from the tree, "but its awfully strange. Do you know, or are you trying to figure it out, too?"

Instead of answering the simple question, which I thought polite and not unreasonable to ask, he gives another crazed laugh. From the shadows I hear his back crack loudly as he straightens up, sounding like a glowstick being bent. His eyes met mine, bloodshot red and sagging, so I knew immediately—this man is a *Walker*. Of all my discoveries since accidentally coming here, he is the first to scare me. Walkers are the people who prefer living in the rubble of Ground Zero than in Skybreakers hundreds of stories above, safe from the polluted surface, which is why I consider them insane. The Walkers are the only people who have lived here since the late twenty-fifth century.

"Missy girl, you don't need ta fear me. I aint gonna harm ya. The most dangerous thang down here on Earth is the starving animals and they won't bother ya with me round." He waved his arms as if fighting off a hungry animal smiling insanely. With another wheezy laugh he doubles over and begins coughing. Still afraid to approach him, I back off, getting ready to run while he tries to recover from his coughing fit.

"Wait, you! If ya gonna run, at least leave me the apple!"

"The apple?" I ask, turning back to the decrepit man. "I have seen lots of apples and this is not one. I have never seen something edible growing in a tree. With all respects, Walker, you do not know what you are saying."

"Don't know what I'm—don't know what a—oh, you better listen here, ya little city-living, transporting, good-for-nothing nature-killing Skyliver. That there is an apple. Though ya prolly never seen real food that aint been prepackaged, freeze dried, fried, or made into a pill, ya should at least be able ta recognize a

god-forsaken apple. Damn it, lady! What's this world come to?" he cries to the world above, but his damaged lungs make it more of a whisper.

Unfazed by the ranting of the dirty Walker, I look at the lumpy fruit. Could this really be an apple? He was right, I have never eaten an unprocessed food or vegetable, but I cannot even think of a place to buy one. But I have eaten more apples than I can count. They always come in a bag and they are perfect circles with red and green stripes. This thing is maroon with black revolting specks and disgusting lumps and bruises.

"So, if I eat this, this thing, it will taste like an apple?" He nods, still quivering with rage at my apparent ignorance of food on Earth's surface.

"Just take one bite, and if ya don't like it, ya can give it to me."

Closing my eyes, I bite through the tight skin, piercing the crisp flesh. I roll the juicy bite around my mouth. At first the lack of sweetness I am used to made me want to spit it out. Usually the apples I eat are sweet like a green Jolly Rancher. This had a flavor so different from those I do not see how they can both be apples. As I chewed my tongue recovered from its initial shock. Its consistency was like eating wet styrofoam. Slowly swallowing it, I look back at the apple, marveling at its flavor.

"Ya look stunned, girl," he says smiling, showing rotting teeth. "Betcha never had something so fresh. Ya should see ya face. And they wonder why we Walkers didn't want to go to ya'lls's high flying stainless steel and white plastic world. Oh, but them up there, they're ones missin out, yessiree, missin out ya are, missin out." The old Walker turns back to the blackness he came from earlier, hobbling slowly away from me.

Relieved to see him go, I sigh as his crippled form dissolves into the shadows, making him invisible again. His senile laugh faded, too, leaving the wasteland around me silent except for the buzz of life miles above. How that old Walker can live in such a primitive way marvels me, having to walk places, unable to transport like civilized humans is astounding. His lack of hygiene is repulsive. It is no wonder my friends and I use the term "dirty walker" for people we hate. I squeeze the apple in my hand to make sure it's still there, as if to prove it really existed. My brother will be ecstatic to try a bite.

A sickly limb from the tree behind me falls loose and crashed onto the ground, hitting my teleporter, making it ring like a bell. Its stainless steel exterior already scratched and dented from my mistaken landing here on the roots of the rare tree. I examine it closely, wondering how I could have mistaken my simple direction of home and Ground Zero. Yet here I am puzzling over a broken teleporter, wondering how to get back up to the three-hundredth floor in time for dinner.

"This is so not home," I mutter to the teleporter as I scrape my sneaker through the pile of used cups and plastic lids around the tree roots.

"Scraping the Bowl"

"Can you get this?" Cameron asks,
his arm awkward around the base of the bowl,
batter smearing on his t-shirt.
Hovering the bowl above the pan,
he tries to reach around and gather
the last of the batter with a spoon.

Using a spatula this time,
our movements fluid, rooted
in the unspoken familiarity of siblings,
we watch as thick ribbons of chocolate
slide smoothly from bowl to pan.

Our actions barely echo of earlier times,
big sister little brother,
only now
the roles no longer matter.

"Turtle Doves"

we are little painters,
you and i.

such a picturesque
depiction of hap-happiness
that even the sun herself
cannot compare and so
she cries radioactive droplets
of despair, which plummet
into the earth and drench the
soil in holes.

yet it's as if you are also a
gardener, the way you
pick up my shovel and recycle
my filth memories into new ground.

i never knew a spirit so old and free
confined to such a young body—
incarceration never seemed
to suit you.

but you tell me that i'm your
songbird, your baby lark, whose
lyrics unfasten your chains,

and will one day birth your wings.

"Memories of Christmas"

Do you remember

When we used to break icicles off of our house, and lick them
until they became stuck to the roofs of our mouths

How we used to laugh at the silliest mistakes we would make as
if they could really give us some type of heartache

What about the smell of a freshly cut Christmas tree; we would
decorate it in abundance until it too sparkled with glee

Then there were the times we got to play in the snow, making
angels and snow people come alive, keep them growing, grow,
grow

Our mittens were always frozen from playing outside in the
winter cold, but it couldn't keep us from having fun, even though
it made our hands look so old

Going sledding was always a special delight; we would start off
slowly, and then pick up speed until exhilaration filled us with
fright

How about when we would go ice skating down at the city
common, and race around in circles until we fell on our bottoms

Visiting family and friends made us all giddy with joy; it affected
every generation from our grandparents to the tiniest girl and
boy

The holiday goodies were more than a treat, for it was the
rarest of occasions that we were allowed to have something so
sweet

Chocolates, peppermints, cookies, and ribbon candy—these are just some of the favorites one might want to keep handy

Presents were exchanged between loved ones from near and far away; we loved to give plenty, but enjoyed receiving any day

Our love filled each room from ceiling to floor, which left each one of us wanting more, more, still more.

"Melting Snow"

So, pure and new, untouched by human hands,
It came to settle on this muddy earth.
It glistened with the hope of things to come—
With promise of the things that it could be:
An igloo, snowman, and a ball of snow—
There seemed no end to possibilities.
But, then, it darkened with dirt, mud, and tar—
No longer clean, with footprints all around.
The igloos and snowmen were destroyed
And untouched patches seldom ever found.
And not long after, it began to melt.
The snowy mounds began to disappear.
For quite a while, remnants still remained,
But, then, one day, they all had gone away.
Like snow, our lives are too once pure and new,
But all too soon the human imprints come.
We too are filled with possibilities—
With things that we can do and we can be.
These things take shape and for a time they gleam.
They shine for all the passersby to see,
But soon they're muddied and some day they'll fall.
Then, some time later, we too are no more.
But as for now we glisten—shining on,
Yes, for now we glisten and we gleam.

"At Mckenna's Funeral"

I tugged nervously on the hem of my new black dress while I reread the date on the back of the church program—December 23, 2008. It felt nothing like how two days before Christmas should feel, but instead, like a nightmare I couldn't seem to wake from. The huge room held the stony faces of about four-hundred of my classmates. I never met any of their tired eyes with my own. I took no comfort in the fact that I recognized almost all of the faces that filled the cavernous room, but instead felt the familiar sick feeling creep back into my stomach, like it had each of the four previous days.

The light from outside shone through the stained glass, painting nearby faces with reds, blues and yellows, making them almost unrecognizable. My own face hadn't looked the same to me that morning as I had combed my hair, not wasting time applying mascara that would only later streak down my face. I couldn't quite pinpoint what it was that made me look so different, until I smiled and realized it didn't meet my eyes. They were tired, and hardened, the kind that should have belonged to an old woman, not a seventeen-year-old girl. I wouldn't have recognized this person looking at me in the mirror a week ago.

Suddenly the church filled with noise, jolting me out of thoughts. The bagpipes had begun playing a sad Irish rendition of "Amazing Grace." My vision quickly blurred as tears welled and spilled over the edges, rolling down my cheeks and into my hair. The last of the men playing bagpipes marched up the aisle followed by six of my guy friends who walked in the same slow rhythm a few feet from one another. I stood on my tip-toes to see above the shoulders of the basketball team that filled the pew in front of me. As soon as I glimpsed the mahogany wood of the casket, however, my knees gave way and I crumpled into my friend beside me, who wrapped her arms tightly around me, pulling me into her side. I let my head fall into her shoulder soaking the sleeves of her dress as I closed my eyes. I stayed there for the rest of the service, afraid that if I attempted to stand on my own, my legs would betray me again.

I knew my friend Mckenna had died just four days earlier due to a surgery complication in the hospital. I understood I would never see him again, since the night I received the call from a friend explaining the tragedy. I realized that when we all walked at graduation, our class would have an empty seat, where Mckenna should have been.

Even though all of this was clear to me, somehow seeing the casket being carried by his closest friends, past rows and rows of people who cared for him deeply, had finalized the loss for me.

As I left the church, I hugged my close friends, and exchanged empathetic looks with people I didn't know as personally. I spotted my mom through the crowd of embracing people and immediately felt a wave of relief flood through my exhausted body. Her glassy eyes met mine and she looked at me with understanding—she had lost four friends in high school. Days of built-up stress and the fatigue from sleepless nights melted away and my shoulders relaxed. I let her drape her arm around me as we walked to the car, cautious of the ice that lurked beneath the loose powdery snow. I leaned my head against my mom's and let her take away my sorrow, like she had so many times before. I knew this time would be no different than the other losses I'd faced in my life—it was just going to take some time to heal.

"Eve of May"

Priests led she-kids and newborn hares
to the valley where the wise man
lay rapt beneath a great wheelstone,
bewitched by deceiving Nimus,
they said, before the land grew cold.

At the sacrifice, the red sun
touched the horizon—Ostara,
life's beloved, lover of life,
dropped from the sun on lavender wings.
They sang her hymn. She touched the stone.

Its spirit stirred, it shook, then broke—
from out of the place like a grave,
the old wise man stepped, awaking
from the green sleep of seven moons
into April-end, the new spring.

"Madame," he said, "you bring me back
to the land of coiling spells,
where sleep of death turns round to life,
and stillness of the dreamer's grave
turns round to energy and truth."

"Awakened soul," Ostara said,
"this land of ever-turning times
needs the wise dreamer to step forth
and show the poor uncertain folk
how wisdom delights in fervent deeds,

how dream delights in fervent deeds."

"To the Girl in the Mirror"

Right over the horizon
lives the scariest of unknowns.
It takes years of bruises and scars
to convince oneself
that one is fully grown.
Yet the world outside still whispers
"come out & get lost,"
but walking this journey alone
is too high and too great a cost.
I've spent mornings waking,
wanting something more,
but remember:
you can't discover new oceans
without the courage to lose sight
of the comfortable shore.

So, to the girl in the mirror:
you've grown so much,
yet there's still more to hear, taste, feel, and touch.

So lace up your shoes
and walk down that dirt road alone,
frequent many towns, many houses,
until you find the right place,
until you find home,
and when you walk
never look down,
you might miss life ahead of you
if your eyes are glued to the ground,
and remember:
every passing moment
is redemption,
a chance to turn it all around.

"The Conversation"

Outside the bedroom, sparrows sing as the husk of the moon fades. A parked cherry-red Chevy bends dew-tipped oat and switch grass.

Inside the bedroom, a whisker-faced young man snores. Around him pile school books and assignments, folded laundry, computer games, and weathered novels. He snores until an alarm clock on a cedar desk buzzes by his ear. Tyler awakes groggily, with a sour taste in his throat, and he slurs "Dang sparrows!"

He feebly thrusts up a bony fist for emphasis before dropping out of his twisted plaid sheets and starting for the upstairs guest bathroom. He sputters under chilly tap water. Frost touched the waterline again. Downstairs, the Mr. Coffee pot gurgles and spits out the last drop of regular. The sound is spine-chilling to him because it means that Dad is still home. "Go to the landing," he mutters to himself. His legs feel leaden.

He lies near the landing, but hidden, so he can listen for any sounds downstairs, and so he can see without being seen. "In case Dad ambles up here," he thinks, picking carpet fuzz and wondering if the last fresh peaches were eaten.

He lives in hilly, Christ-haunted Sherman. The Bowl-O-Rama family fun center, a Dairy Queen, and several excellent bookstores provide the community's economic base, as do seasonal festivals attended by both Sherman residents and outsiders. World War II stirred Sherman's refinement of iron ore to a frenzy, but with the peace the community's economy fell away. Retired factory linesmen suck back beers and talk of a magic that has passed from Sherman's condemned Steel Street.

Dad's steel-toe boots sound from the downstairs landing, and he hears "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" whistled. Tyler can hear his dad rummaging in an Army-green tool bag for something. The bag is a family heirloom, and whiffs of tuna fish, oil, and Lucky Strike cigarettes bother Tyler's nose. Then his dad finds the something and rolls it in his palm, stops, and returns the something to the tool bag. Tyler hears the tool bag zipper close, and then . . . silence.

Dad's brow furrows and he looks extremely haggard. He's spirited away by personal thoughts. Despite trying, he cannot understand the point of his son's writing passion. "It isn't practical," he often gripes to his wife Laura. She agrees. She also prays, but why do that? The preacher doesn't have answers!

Dad wonders if his early involvement in Tyler's life, the companionship, was somehow destined to produce a seemingly unrelated son. He grumbles and flicks off the kitchen light switch, leaving for his job.

Tyler's body throbs from lying awkwardly, and when he moves, a shock of pain flares through both wrists. Then misery pierces him with alarming exactness. "If Dad gave a damn about my passion, if he had any imagination—well. . . . I just doubt we ever had true companionship." He eyes glassy with fat teardrops that pool on his scrunched cheeks, he creeps back to bed and is soon dreaming.

He's standing amidst preoccupied people with roller suitcases or slung backpacks. A mechanical buzz, like a thousand cornered bumblebees, draws his notice to a terminal window where jetliners roll along an airfield. But he sees nothing familiar about this airport; it's not Sherman's with the memorabilia or curtained arcade room. From nervous habit he fishes in both jean pockets. Something, an airport ticket stub, pokes his fingers. The place of departure reads "Greensboro, North Carolina." He just blinks at the paper, wonderstruck. Then it clicks; he stammers, "Greensboro! PTL is closest to Wake Forest University!" Somewhere in the mile-high mess of his bedroom he has printouts about WFU's Creative Writing Program. Curious, he fishes for anything else, and pulls out a handful of ticket stubs. A beach hotspot he's vaguely aware of, somewhere in California, and several Pennsylvania cities. Before his mind registers this, both jean pockets suddenly sag. Grinning, a slightly manic expression plastered on his lips, he wrenches free a small wad of ticket stubs. New York. San Francisco. London. Paris.

He looks for help. Nearby stands a uniformed woman.

"May I help you, sir?" Her lapel pin says her name is Claire.

"Well. . . . I wonder exactly where we are. City, state. This is a stateside airport, right?"

"Fine question, sir. It is a stateside airport—and it's not. Both at once. All at once."

His mouth flops open. His cheeks suddenly feel aflame. He squeaks, "Say again?"

"This is every airport terminal you'll fly out of." She has the tiniest quizzical look on her face. "Don't you see?" She gently draws his attention to the ticket stubs he holds. "You'll globetrot a lot in the future." You won't often be in Sherman. Pink-faced, he doesn't make a sound, so she continues. "You believe it's possible, but Sherman will never leave your memory. It'll be a thought sure as anything. Question is, will you choose to love your dad, even if that love is one-sided?"

Indignation flares up hot and fierce. "Excuse me! You're not even a family friend. It's none of your business!"

The dream transforms. The airport terminal becomes his folks' house in Sherman. He sees Claire dissipate right in front of him. Shock-white, the curve of his lip twitching, he looks about with a slightly mechanical notion. Something touches his sneakers. A baseball, its seams cut, strands of yarn spilling out. He's dumbstruck, but simultaneously filled with the memory of it. How his proud and joyful dad told anyone who would listen how his son had blasted a baseball clear over the left-field field during a Little League game. Tyler croaks, "We were pals. I appreciated him once. He's never been the perfect father but he was damn close to it. . . ." Suddenly, Claire's melodic ethereal voice sounds, wrapping his thought. "And you truly loved him." Big sloppy tears blur his vision and slide down his nose. He grabs the baseball and rolls it in his palm.

Then the dream dissipates entirely. He awakes all sweaty, his heart ferociously pumping. He's terrified to admit any personal fault. But cutting deeper is the fear of further rejection. Why would Dad think differently about writing? It's just dead-end job to him. If Dad ignores his affection, he thinks his heart is liable to plummet right out of his body. Claire's mentioning that it could be a one-sided love seems to be a chilling prediction. But he has to risk it once more. Feeling lightheaded because of the decision, he plunges from the bed sheets. He's sure he's going to miss first-period gym class.

After school Tyler reclines against a front-porch beam pockmarked with termite borings. He waits to greet his dad. Skippy, the family ginger-furred cat, stalks panicky grasshoppers. Above, the sun's orange-amber rays drape Sherman's mountain peaks like watercolor drops. Suddenly that old Chevy engine, full of hiccups, sounds from beyond an obtrusive tree line.

Almost home, his dad smiles at something in his unzipped tool bag on the floorboard. It's a crusty, cut baseball, strands of yarn snagged on a ball-point hammer.

"the reclaiming"

1

it was always he who broke
the embrace—abrupt, embarrassed,
with a shallow half-laugh
and a swift kiss on the cheek,
like a paternal pat on the head:
aren't you sweet.

2

she stretched these small offerings
to fit what she wanted,
gladly adopting a second identity
if it meant they could be together.
she learned:
to lie easily,
to expect less,
to avoid displaying affection,
to scrupulously maintain the public façade,
to greet the other woman
without cringing

3

what she labeled *love* became
the black hole of the pain-body
in which her integrity disintegrated.
grasping pathetically for sanity,
she sought solace in pills, sleep,
better stories, bigger lies,
and pondered the possibility
of pursuing Edna Pontellier—

until she Stopped
and faced the fire
of a mind split, at war with itself.

open, unprotected, and finally free,
she looked across the wasteland of time—
years passed in deception and double entendres.
expecting nothingness, fearing emptiness,
but finding, miraculously, a peace
which comes from reclaiming one's Self
from the separation of mind and heart.

"monarch"

—for my king

climbing with my lungs
packaged away, pressed,
yet seeping through the blinds
of the butterfly's ossein cage

where his wings are lodged
between organs, rhyme and reason.

and ever since his rhythms ceased
to pulsate with the same vivid intensity,
i have felt myself tremble

and do find myself kneeling over the edge
of a not-so-finite slumber.

"The Weight of the World: *Atlas Kneeling*"

Ever wonder what it is like to hold the world on your shoulders? To kneel and bear the weight of nearly a ton of bronze and steel, day in and day out? Never being able to shift the globe into a more comfortable position? I do.

Commissioned by High Point University to be a symbol of passion and strength for the campus, I was created by United States sculptor Jon Hair. Known for his sculpture of four Olympic figures holding up a single globe, Olympic Strength, Jon is a leading bronze sculptor for America. Like all of Jon's other sculptures, my creation was special. I was first a thought, an idea. That is my first memory – a free spirit, just floating around in Jon's creative mind. Early on, Jon would just sit there at his etching desk, staring at the blank canvas, piecing together his vision of me. When he finally decided it was time, Jon picked up his pencil and started to sketch his image of me. I started out as a single line, one straight down the middle of the page. Then there was a lightly sketched curve, and then another darker curve until soon after, there on the page was a simple outline of a figure. Jon worked at his canvas until the early morning sun crept in through the window. Etched on the paper was I, and next to me, a mysterious sphere about two times the size of my body.

Jon spent the next months slowly carving me out of a clay mold. I was small then, just a model, but already I could feel that this was just the beginning. When the clay mold came in, Jon spent days and nights sculpting me out of the clump. The detailing was explicit: the bulge of my arm muscles, the tension in my calves, the definition of the muscles in my back. Yet with that, when it came to my face, there was a certain serenity hidden underneath all of that strength, as if he wanted to show focus. From the tips of my toes to the striations on my fingernails, Jon etched out a figure of strength and serenity. To my side, the sphere had already been cast in bronze and steel. It sat there, held up by an overhead strap attached to the ceiling, a reminder of what was to come. Perfect symmetry and measurements, the globe was smooth and polished. No etchings other than some here and there on the surface of the continents; the sphere was a perfect depiction of the Globe. It was gorgeous and ominous at the same time; how in the world was I going to be able to hold that up without being crushed?

The next months went by in a haze. The carving was finished, and each part of my body individually molded into its own plaster cast. The next day, when the plaster was dry, a wax glaze was poured over the inside of the cast and placed into the kiln. It was the most intense fire; flames engulfing my every angle,

licking the crooks of my arm muscles, the crease in the back of my legs, and even in between my fingers. A few hours after being removed from the kiln, I became a group of puzzle pieces scattered in the warehouse—each part of my body a separate wax mold. Just when I thought that everything was just about finished, without any warning, liquid bronze was poured into my core.

Cooling down for days, I came to the conclusion that I had just gone through one of the most amazing transformations ever conceived. I started off just as a sketch, easily erasable, then a carving, easily malleable, then I became a cast, easily breakable, but now, now I was something solid, something real, a force to be reckoned with. After the final stage, after the flames had put their touch on me and the combination of bronze and steel seeped into my being, I was unbreakable. A team of workers started to piece me together and soon I was as you see me today. When they cleaned my newly cooled bronze exterior, smoothing down any left over metal scraps and wax debris, I thought that after all the long trials and pains of creation, I was at long last, completed. Then it hit me: I had forgotten about the weight I would have to bear. The world itself was hovering above me, waiting to crash down upon my shoulders. Then, and only then, would I be truly complete. I had forgotten about an important part of my being: the Sphere of Steel had yet to be placed on my shoulders.

It is not easy to be me, but it is a job that I have come to willingly do. It takes courage, strength, and passion to hold the world on your shoulders. When I arrived here at High Point University, I was just a kneeling statue. When they placed the Globe on my shoulders, I became a man. The first year was excruciating. I was only a third of the Globe's size. It was heavy, how was I supposed to hold this up forever? The weather would change from extremely hot, making the globe a ball of fire to the touch, then just as quickly, become icy from a winter storm—how was I supposed to keep my grip?

One day, a girl with a backpack stuffed to the brim and carrying three huge textbooks walked across Roberts Hall lawn towards me. At first, all I could see were her sandals; they looked as if they had seen better days. Her clothes suggested that she cared what others saw her as, but it was her face that spoke most clearly. Her hair was in a pony tail, a no-nonsense style, pulling her hair back from her face. Her eyes, though, her eyes were a different story. Although on the outside, she looked as if everything was perfect, her eyes spoke of a girl who had taken on more than she could handle. There was something else, something in the back of her gaze that caught my attention. A flame of passion and determination flickered in her eyes. It was as if she understood that she carried the world on her back and had accepted it and had decided to deal with it. She put her books down and then with a thud, slipped her backpack off and placed it next to her on the stone bench, and started to sketch me. After that hour that she sketched me, she got up as suddenly as she had come, and then came close to my ear and whispered "Thank you."

It was then that I understood. I could hold up the World. I could do this forever, I just needed to tell myself that and it would happen. I was an inspiration, a guide, a symbol of strength. If I didn't believe in myself that I could succeed, then what was I doing other than just making it harder in the long run? Fighting myself and fighting the situation I was in was just hurting me. I was a symbol of strength, I just needed to make sure that I understood that.

Ever wonder what it is like to hold the world on your shoulders? I am not the only one who knows this feeling. Whether people want to admit it, in today's world, we all need to look up and see someone else doing what we are trying to do. We need to see that it is possible to achieve the impossible—to juggle a million things at once or just hold up a sphere of steel composed of everything that we accomplished and need to accomplish. I kneel on a pedestal and hold up my sphere of steel on a campus where hundreds of students are doing the same thing. Whether their sphere is made of scholarly, social, or emotional steel, they all have a common thought: that of refusing to drop the World, no matter what.

"From the Plastic Pumpkin"

At noon your old bedroom window's open
but with a new girl at the screen
above the rusty swings, crusted birdbath, brown grass,
mourning doves warning, "School! School! School!"
With any breeze, she could feel fingers fluttering
along her spine, but the only backyard Romeo
is a squirrel skidding down my roof.

Three Augusts since you and your mom moved
after your father's lawn service went under
and the marriage finally died.
By now, you must be twenty-one.

On blistering days in your early teens,
all bones in a bikini, straps down, you fried yourself
on a chaise lounge, knowing pain provides excuses.
One Halloween, too old for the game,
you arrived in blond wig and beauty mark,
identifying yourself as Marilyn Mon-roe.
I doled you a Kit Kat like the nine-year-olds.

The time you baby-sat for my son,
you and a chum ate the whole pizza
except the scrap you granted him.
The small teach the smaller to subtract.
You said, "I hope you'll have me back."

That's why I'm writing.
From the plastic pumpkin of amends,
please accept my pardon,
for I was a parallel soul
with too much window time,

too much knowledge of Marilyn and Joe
and you were an easy target.

And what still flourishes in your old backyard
along with the purple-leafed plum
isn't your groping but your love for your mom.
You bloomed next to her
kneeling on a Tweety Bird blanket
planting impatiens.
Arranging wickets for croquet,
you sprang to her directions.
When you won at badminton,
you curtsied.

The ceramic tiles the two of you laid
in front along the driveway have survived skateboarders,
street hockey players, and a pick-up truck flipping the curb.
My favorite tile has the blue heart, the gold key,
and the legend: "Magic is believing. Belief is in the heart.
The heart holds the key. The key unlocks the door,"
which moves me to confide, "Sometimes it opens me."

"Each of You the Same"

I do not search for poetic phrases that can only be repeated
quietly to oneself.

I do not wish to whisper them, if I can manage to speak them at all,
Rolling them around in my mouth,

Searching for a taste or feel to tell me what they are,

Words that when said lose their power,

When they escape the warmth of my head become dulled and
cold and unable to carry their load.

I want to find the words that can be shouted and spoken clearly
back and forth between friends and strangers,

Repeated again and again until they shake off the awkward
pauses and the sounds blur and they are only meaning.

They mean what they mean to each of you,

Each of you the same.

"Male Heart"

cold stinging ice fills my heart
a black hole filled with nothing

when did love turn male
why is jumping off frightening

heart of a male, kiss of a male
hug of a male, love of a male

I wanna have embrace
I wanna have love touch me

we collide, we used to mesh so well
the last broke our bond

saying "NO" once ruined it all
will my heart ever feel again

heart of a girl, kiss of a girl
hug of a girl, love of a girl

cold stinging ice fills my heart
a black hole filled with nothing

will I love again ...

"The Controller"

In some far away land
That to him still exists,
I was his puppet.
From fear of rejection
I was living in a dream,
Just to be near him. . . .

But he talked more and more,
Lecturing, criticizing, judging,
Saying I should walk, not drive
To work or school,
Saying I had no work smarts,
Saying stories of his assistant,
Forty years in the making,
A senile woman who once told me
I should go home for Thanksgiving
To see my mother.
How dare that two-faced witch. . . .

But suddenly, I became a man,
When I felt another's approval and love.

Leaving him alone in his dreamland,
I tore the strings from my limbs.

"Postage Due"

Jack and Margaret Klenger delighted in showing friends and neighbors their newly constructed house which some of the town folk secretly—behind cupped palm—verbally dubbed *the mansion*.

The gossip went something like this: "Where did the Klengers get the money to build such a splendid home? Why they barely had enough earnings, between the two of them, to maintain their inherited historic home place on Main Street. And, the house that had been Jack's grandparents house had not even sold yet—probably would take some time on today's real estate market.

Speculation flew like dimes in a coin-sorting machine. No one knew the answer, and the citizens of Kernersville were all too polite to just come out and ask. Even a jovial, kidding, "Did Ed McMahon and the Prize Patrol come by and leave you five mil while we were out of town?" produced no definitive response. After all, privacy was privacy, and that's all there was to it.

Jack and Margaret just smiled as their friends took the *royal tour* through the three living rooms, library, gourmet kitchen, seven bedrooms, and eight baths. Not to mention the four-car garage, patio, swimming pool, green house, and heated doghouse. The Klengers would never reveal their financial windfall. Not in a million years.

No sire-e-e.

Only one small problem arose. They thought all the costs associated with the new house had been paid for. And paid in full. It was not really too much of a jolt, though, when the landscaper presented his bill for the new trees, sod, flowers, and shrubs. Because landscaping had not been in the building contract, and the Klengers had experienced a great deal of hustle and bustle buying all new furniture

"Never fear," Jack told his wife, "we'll just take a little trip back to the old house. Have a look-see over there." He laughed. "See what we can come up with, Honeypot."

Margaret nodded. "Sure thing," she agreed, and with a jovial, yet sarcastic grin, said, "You never know what old valuables we might find in the attic, Mr. Honeypot."

And so, after all the admirers had gone back to their own little sensible dwellings for the evening, Jack and Margaret returned to the ancestral home on Main Street. To onlookers, it appeared they were going inside to do one last repair on the old house because Jack carried his tool box, and Margaret had a big tote bag slung over one shoulder.

Up to the attic they went. Without a word between them, they went to work. Jack quickly and deftly removed one of the heart pine floorboards on the far end of the dimly-lit room. Margaret shone a flashlight deep inside the opened crevice while her husband reached his hand into the hole. Quickly, he removed an old faded feed sack and just as quickly he shoved the bundle into Margaret's tote. Then he yanked on the pull cord of the naked light bulb, eased his way down the narrow attic steps, and coaxed his wife gently down into the upstairs hallway. They left as innocently as they had arrived, waved at neighbors lingering on porch swings, got into their new truck, and drove back to *the mansion*.

Once inside their mahogany study, Jack accessed his e-bay seller's account on his new computer and entered a new item:

Extremely Rare: Unused, non-cancelled Panama-Pacific Exposition 1-cent Issue stamp. Perf 12 of 1913. Vasco Nunez de Balboa. Collector's Item. Compare at \$850,000. Buy It Now: \$825,000. Paypal only.

Margaret lovingly patted her tote bag. "And if this isn't enough to get us by for a while," she said, "well...there are the two-cent stamps just waiting for a home."

"Ah, yes," Jack said with a grim, "all those Gatun Locks at Panama Canal two-cent stamps. We're in good shape, Honeybee. Now, read me again that 1913 newspaper article we found wrapped around the stamps. Every time I hear that account, my heart hums with joy."

Margaret pulled the yellowed newsprint from her tote, cleared her throat, and read clearly—and excitedly:

June 10, 1913. Last Saturday night, sometime after midnight, the post office at Kernersville was blown open, and \$52.08 in money and \$1,239.90 in one and two cent stamps was stolen. The burglar or burglars entered at the front door of the building by breaking the lock with a pick which had been taken from a railroad section house nearby. The door of the iron safe was broken into pieces by some kind of explosive. No one heard the explosion, and the robbery was not discovered until 6:15 Sunday morning.

Jack held out his hand to Margaret. "Guess it's a good thing nobody's alive today who would remember all this," he offered. "I just hope there's no historian around today who would dig around in this old dirt."

"Guess we'll just have to take our chances, Mr. Moneypot," Margaret suggested as they turned out the lights and headed outside for a late-night swim in their new pool surrounded by their lovely—and now-almost paid-for luxurious landscaping.

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At High Point University, every student receives an extraordinary
 education in an inspiring environment with caring people.