

SPRING 2011

# Apogee



The Literary Journal  
of  
**HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY**



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THE LITERARY JOURNAL  
OF  
HIGH POINT UNIVERSITY

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**Special Thanks**

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**"Serge"**  
**FIRST PLACE**  
**High Point University Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

It was almost fall when I told you  
 That I don't know how I became  
 What I became.

It's not what I planned.

It's just something I remember  
 Sometimes. Like when I'm  
 Cutting another raw edge into  
 A bolt of cotton twill and  
 Watching as the fibers fray.

I wonder if life is this way.  
 A vast amount of potential,  
 Ten yards or so at a time  
 And just waiting to be cut,  
 To be transformed into something  
 Useful or beautiful or a heap  
 Of fabric at the bottom of the  
 Scrap bin.

I like to think it is.

So, I draft out my patterns and  
 Serge the tattered edges and  
 Baste and backstitch the pieces  
 Of my life together. Blind hem  
 My love just in case my shriveled  
 Heart decides to grow.

And it's not what I planned.

It's far less beautiful than the sketch.  
 But, I'll just keep my shears sharpened  
 And hope,

And hope,

And hope

the seamstress will know best.



"Daydreams of a One-Eyed Monster"

FIRST PLACE

High Point University Fiction

Phoenix Literary Festival 2010

Grandpa's back yard was a graveyard of dead and dying cars. Most were rust splattered, bleached brown and ugly by the Missouri summer heat. Some were merely skeletons, picked dry by scavengers until nothing was left but drooping metal frames and peeling leather seats infested with mold and beetles. My daddy used to play out here, Grandpa told me one night, leaning against the icy hood of a brown-ing 1952 Chevrolet, hidden behind mounds of metal tombstones, far enough away from the lit house that the lazy curls of smoke rising from Grandpa's cigarettes were neither smelt nor seen. He breathed in deeply, breathed out easily, rolling the webs of gray over his dull pink tongue and yellow teeth. I was younger then (it was '86) and my legs barely hit the grill from my seat atop the hood. I was swinging them back and forth just to feel the crunch of peeling paint and rust against my calves.

"Yup," Grandpa whispered, turning his back to the flickering light on the porch where Grandma no doubt was sitting and reading, sniffing the air to catch him in the forbidden act. "Yup, you just like your daddy, boy, climbing and crawling like a monkey in this trash." Daddy died five years before. I barely knew the man—I think he was just like me, not the other way around.

Grandpa blew the smoke up, away from me, to the half moon drifting above, in the blue-black mess of sky and shadows. He was silent through the last of his cigarette, flicking his lighter open and closed with his left hand. When he was done he flicked it through the gaping hole of the windshield. I watched it burn futilely against the sheet of dirt blanket-ing the dashboard. Grandpa slowly made his trek back to the house, a solitary giant. His shoulders drooped under the weight of a dying sal-vage business and the haunting grief for a son dead too soon. Grandpa was wrong then, though I was too scared to open my mouth and say it at the time.

The graveyard wasn't *trash*.



My favorite was the 1957 Buick named Cammie, resting silent and rotting behind the family of '77 El Caminos and '52-'59 Cadillacs. She was blue at one point. Sun, dirt, and old age tinted her a dirty brown. She wasn't the best in the yard, not by far. But she was *mine*. Far away from Grandpa's workshop, farther than Grandma's preying eyes, farther even than Grandpa's '52 Chevy hiding place.

Cammie was a rust bent skeleton—the doors were missing and the brown top was locked down, leaving her spread open on all sides to any small animal looking to nest. The leather interior was ripped and boiling from the sun. Despite the rotting disrepair of her insides and the hollow emptiness under her hood, her grill gleamed in the sunlight, like a split faced grin. The headlights were deadened eyes staring off into the nowhere beyond Grandpa's yard. One was knocked out, but flecks of glass still remained, overcome by spider webs and little spider bodies, curled on their backs—burned brittle from the heat. Cammie was my own one-eyed monster.

I'd climb all over her, through her, behind her, beneath her. If I sat the right way I'd reach the steering wheel, digging my fingers into the rips and creases of it, wrapping my fingers where Grandpa would have when Cammie was a living, breathing, purring machine. I'd drive anywhere, I'd be anyone. Sometimes I was Grandpa when he was younger and strong enough to lift five men above his head. Sometimes I was Daddy, a nameless, faceless shade. Sometimes, I was just me, an older me, and I'd dig the accelerator into the floor uselessly, peeling out and driving as fast as I could to nowhere. Those summer days with Cammie dragged on forever, until dusk bled into the sky, and I was suddenly blinking sleepily up at Grandpa lifting me in his strong arms, carrying me home.

It's 1992. I am fourteen years old. I'm too tall, I'm too clumsy, I'm either angry or I'm lonely. Grandpa's graveyard hasn't changed. Cammie is still in her resting place, bereft of tires, and doomed to sink deeper and deeper into the hot soil, trapped. I slide inside her belly, leaning back into the familiar cuts and twists of the driver's seat. One leg is inside, one is hanging outside the door. My dark dress pants are beginning to flare uncomfortably hot as the sun loitered higher and higher in the sky. Already they are wrinkling, bunching up along my thighs.

I am with a girl. Her name is Staci (with an "i") and she's the

most beautiful girl I've ever seen. Her voice is calling me in the distance. "Sammy, Sammy!" an echo between the shimmering air wafting from the roasting metal between her and me. I left her to the grieving pool of my own family members. I am too raw to be smothered by their tears, their memories, and their drunken, *useless* questions ("Are you going to cry? I know you were close, it's ok to cry, such a big boy, no one will judge you!") so I left. I want to call out to her, to bury my nose in the citrus strands of red hair draped over her neck. I want to spread her along the stomping ants and crinkling leaves strewn along the earth floor of the back seat and forget this day ever existed.

I don't. I flick Grandpa's lighter open and closed in my right hand, desperately trying to drown out the heavy silence of Grandpa's ghost riding beside me, sitting in the passenger seat, waiting for me to start the car, to drive away from the familiar Missouri sunshine and the low, burnt grass that spread on forever. It's what he's always wanted to do but never could.

But I don't do that either. *Click.* I open the lighter. *Click.* I close it. "Sammy," Staci calls. She's getting closer. Grandpa's ghost stares at me, then he smirks and turns away, unsurprised. Something's burning wet behind my eyes, blurring my vision, and I wipe away at them furiously before he sees.

**"Grow"**  
**FIRST PLACE**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

His feet sprout roots  
that lift him from the ground  
till his hair is a cloud  
and his limbs harbor finches.

His green fingers  
stroke the air  
as leaves fall from the sky.  
Then the clouds are his tunic.

He pats the nest  
on his head.  
Birds chirp and jump  
onto his fingers.

He grows and grows  
till his eyes become stars  
and he sees the Sahara  
and the glowing North Pole.

He watches big movies:  
the birth of a star,  
the galaxy collision,  
brilliant Andromeda.

He laughs as a comet  
streaks his smile.  
But the men don't see stars  
only flames, smoke.

He's not one to mourn,  
so he waves and smiles  
as the men  
torch his feet.

**"Song of the Land"**  
**FIRST PLACE**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Everyone in the village of Melando just assumed that Delsin had a strange love of tin cans. Each morning, as the people clung to their fading dreams and the stars gave a final twinkling ovation, Delsin made the rounds. Weaving through the convoluted paths from hut to hut, he contemplated the small piles of tin cans that every woman placed beside her door before going to bed. He studied them in silence, rubbing his graying beard in a constant rhythm—long, short-short, long—as a violinist would stroke his instrument. When he had selected two cans superior to the others, Delsin would make his way to the river, striding with purpose. Men watched from their windows as he walked by, and though Delsin had never exchanged a word with them, they felt a kinship with the hunched little man who centered his life around this routine. Delsin never spoke to anyone. Some people thought he didn't have a voice at all, and with reason, given the shock of his birth.

Right at the moment Delsin arrived into the world, a frog had hopped into his mouth. The frog had been calmly perched on the ground right beside Delsin's mother, and when the Old Women of the River expanded wide lips to belt their water song, the little creature had jumped right into the baby's wet mouth in fright. The oldest and loudest of the women had yelled "Get it out! That can't be good!" and pranced excitedly around the child, pointing and gawking and doing absolutely nothing to help the situation. There was no scientific explanation for how a frog could take a boy's voice, or why it would want to for that matter, but Delsin had not spoken a word since. The people of Melando had a delightful habit of making up explanations that had little relevance to the matter at hand, and so the frog became a feared symbol of muteness.

Delsin's father knew the real reason for his son's lack of speech, but he never revealed it, being himself a man of few words. Just days before Delsin's birth, his father had murmured quietly to his woman's expanded torso as she slept, "It's not important, Delsin. You don't need to talk out loud, just talk inside your head. The real matter's the land. That's who you should be listenin' to. Now me, I never heard it. I never got that lucky. But there's somethin' about it. Sometimes I hear

it yearnin' to speak, and the wind sits still and the river holds its breath. But I never got that lucky. My boy could be, though. My boy could be."

On one particular morning, he reached the river and set down his sack. The cans clanged together as he strung and knotted the rope through tiny holes he had poked through the bottoms. His eyes watched as the dark sky gradually dismissed the scattered stars to make way for the sun, and his hands worked swiftly with experienced skill. His device finished, Delsin cleared a small circle in the reeds and crouched down on the bank, one shoe seeping up the river's early waters. He placed one can, still smelling of dried beans, against his ear, and set the other face down in the clearing.

Every morning, just like this, he waited. So often had Delsin done this that he had trained himself to hold his breath for long periods of time, scared that the rhythm would overpower the land's voice. He closed his eyes and at once felt his head sway with the dancing of the clouds and his torso stiffen along with the rest of the slender reeds. The moment his eyelashes touched his cheek, his senses grew tall and he knew that if he reached out a hand, the fingers would skim black feathers of a crow gliding far above him, searching for his morning meal.

Delsin squeezed his eyelids in desperate concentration, hearing the echoing wind within the can pause as if to clear its throat. The moment always passed after a second or two, and Delsin would know that the land had chosen silence. Today, Delsin was distracted. Just as he closed his eyes, the Old Women began to sing farther down the river and he felt a brief flash of anger at their disrupting the invaluable hush of dawn. His anger dissolved as their song dropped out of the air and fell into the river. It wound through the slick mosses and boulders and snaked its way into Delsin's boot, up his leg, and into his soul.

The song was different from the women's shrill melody. It hummed and whispered and sang with a deep tone of regret and sorrow. Delsin wouldn't have moved even if he had been able to. The music hit him with such a strong wave of sadness that he thought his heart might explode from feeling too much, leaving his body hunched into a dusty, crinkled shell. The song swelled and softened and all but disappeared. Delsin broke his stiff position, lurching toward the river, desperate to remain connected with the music. It was leaving, growing

colder, and his hand moved away from the can on the ground, ready to break the surface of the frigid water.

Something held him back. A voice, flowing into the cans, broke through the waves of sound that poured into him. It was as though the rich notes of the song had curled and tumbled around the melody to create words. He listened as the voice of the land spoke, and the words chilled him.

**"How Northern Ladies Act"**

**SECOND PLACE**

**High Point University Poetry**

**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

You two-timing, man-stealing Jezebel!  
Oh, where is my etiquette?  
I hope you rot in Hell!

How dare you come after my man, whom I love so well.  
Did you think I wouldn't throw a fit?  
You two-timing, man-stealing Jezebel!

I don't care if my wrath is causing me to yell,  
After stabbing me in the back like this! Screw it—  
I hope you rot in Hell!

My eyes show the fury my fits want to tell,  
I just want to rip out your hair and chuck your body in a pit,  
You two-timing, man-stealing Jezebel!

You think I didn't hear late phone calls to his cell?  
Oh! You don't know the firecracker you just lit.  
I hope you rot in Hell!

You of all people know me well,  
So when I say this, please note: our friendship I'll omit.  
You two-timing, man-stealing Jezebel,  
I hope you rot in Hell!



**"The Wisdom Keeper"****SECOND PLACE****High Point University Fiction****Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

It was the summer when the world was cracking and shifting beneath my feet. Things were changing. Everything was changing. I was not the same and neither was the world. It had moved on. Fissures had formed in the hard-packed soil under the cracking soles of my threadbare sneakers. The gossamer cracks were spreading like the spiral patterns I saw on a cracked window after someone put a fist through it . . . somewhere.

The cracks would become chasms. The chasms would span miles. I was trying to keep up. I was trying to avoid slipping through the cracks. I was trying to fly.

It was the summer when I worked two jobs to just scrape by and barely did that most of the time. It was the summer when I had to pay thousands of dollars to a school that claimed to care while increasing tuition and building movie theatres and arcades. I watched financial aid dwindle, and cried and hoped to make it through one more year—just finish my senior year and move on to graduate school and hope to afford more than a cardboard box to live in once undergrad was over.

It was the summer I wondered why I was doing what I was doing. It was the summer I was really scared.

I stood in the dry heat outside of the tobacco store. I had a cigarette dangling from my lips and the bottom of one sneaker against the hot brick behind me. Smoke swirled around me in some pattern vaguely reminiscent of the wise old man with dark eyes and tan, wrinkled skin sitting cross-legged on a blanket, smoking his pipe, and telling the stories of his people. Mystical, inspiring stories I listened to as a child and just a few years ago when things felt so different, so much easier.

I guess it was a vision quest of sorts, my bildungsroman. I guess it was the sort of thing that high school teachers always tell you

about when you are reading coming-of-age novels. It wasn't as drastic as they said it was in the books. I wasn't as interesting. But, then again, nothing really happens the way it does in books. Nothing is as poetic. Nothing is as special. It was just me, sleep deprived, hungry, on my third cigarette of the day, desperately in need of a stiff drink, and waiting for my replacement to arrive so I could pack up and move on to my next job.

Taking the last drag of my cigarette, watching the ash meet the butt and the smoke still swirling lazy spirals around my head, I contemplated what my life had been and what it may become. I turned to the customer about to enter the store. I crushed my butt beneath my worn out sneaker. I watched it fall through the cracks of the earth, cracks that were growing smaller and smaller as the world resituated under my feet, as things settled into their new places.

I told him my story and smiled as I went through the robotic motions of completing a transaction.

And, as I sat back down behind the counter, I realized something that I hadn't before. I realized that, like the ancient stories of my people, the world will somehow remember my tales, my life. I was the wisdom keeper that summer. I was tired and overworked and just plain worn out, but I had a purpose, and my stories would live on. I would be important, vital even. I would mean something.

**"Sonata in Black and Red"**  
**SECOND PLACE**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

You were born on a different rock than I  
 So you suffer and you atrophy, huddled in shadow  
 As I bask and tan and smile in the heat.  
 But it's just as well.  
 Your rock is dirtier, darker, blacker than mine,  
 And I've known nothing save the gleam of fun and sunny comforts.

Why question the providence of the Sun?  
 It moves around the Earth, that much is certain.  
 It warms me, it ignores you; who am I to question?  
 I, a mere pawn in its wide and grand rotation,  
 Spending its green leathery radiation as my tokens of prosperity,  
 Offering my life as servant and as living sacrifice  
 To its wondrous glittery gifts and its pleasant pacifiers.

Sometimes, though, in the swamp of deepest night,  
 When dominion has passed to the glimmering wild-eyed Moon,  
 All Her whispered charms and hexes infiltrate my soul  
 And I feel a crowded croaking wilderness rising in my chest.  
 There, in that darkness, your face hovers, haunts.  
 Filthy, black, tearstained,  
 Malnourished, decaying, aching of impotence.  
 Then a sharp pang, horrid clustered dissonance.  
 Shiver. Vomit. Loathing my gilded life. . . .

And, curiously, I envy your bleak existence,  
 Your withering, chained to the rock,  
 Crucified by long-speared centurions—power, greed.  
 But at least you know communion,  
 Beating drums and singing in those manic flames,  
 Leaping to dance and chant beneath the Moon.

Here on my rock, the Sun blisters us all  
 And tumors burrow deep.

**"Mermaid's Tears"**  
**SECOND PLACE**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Misty hummed lightly as she sat on her cushioned chair and stared at her desk. The crepuscular light slipping through the cracks of her window traced over the dusty bookcases and crusted lampshades, illuminating the small particles that floated about the air, giving a dull radiance to the precious gems that sat patiently and waited for their polishing. Misty marveled at the sea glass and their vibrant colors of crimson and emerald and sapphire. It *didn't* matter what the treasure was crafted from, a beer bottle or wind, or shards of broken pottery and glass discarded ten years ago by a lonely widow. Those jewels, those diamonds in the rough that could only be procured in a place on par with the Cave of Wonders, were all she had and ever needed; her crown of blackened thorns and luminous glory.

Her mornings were always like this before her work called to her, when Misty would awaken just as the Sun glazed the horizon of the Atlantic and she'd meander over to the sea glass just to stand and stare at them like a jade statue. They reminded her of better times when she was a child growing up down in Boston, times of when she'd go to Fenway Park with her father and watch the Red Sox hit a homerun, and when she'd run over to Old Port with her friends to get the best ice cream in Massachusetts. The best part about those memories was that they had dissolved now, mashed under the weight of a delightful burden. Misty licked her lips and smiled, then picked up a cloth as white as snow powder and a piece of sea glass.

The alarm clock on the nightstand in her room roared angrily, personal time had ended. Misty frowned and cursed under her breath, throwing down the sea glass and cloth and then sauntered over to her bathroom. The most annoying thing anyone or anything could ever do to her would be dredge time from her, especially time devoted to her sea glass. She violently brushed her teeth as though they wee soft hands being shoved against coarse sandpaper, washed up, and moved on to her closet. She was too upset over her sea glass to look in the mirror and tidy her skirt-length locks of brunette hair. Appearances were one thing, sea glass was another.

As soon as Misty slipped on her pants, she rushed out the front door with a croissant in one hand and a trench coat with a color as dark and dingy as freshly-lain asphalt in the other. The Salem sky was overcast and windy, a suitable day for going to examine corpses. No doubt it would rain. She climbed into her 2001 Volkswagen Beetle and threw her croissant on a stack of files sitting on the passenger seat. Most of the files were open with parchments inside drifting out slowly. She stared at the files and cringed as she thought about each dead victim; it wasn't that the victims and their sorrowful fates disturbed her, it was how much she didn't care about them at all. They were just unfortunate people, and nothing more; giving them a second thought would be pointless. Her car sprang to life and she turned down out of the driveway, heading out of Juniper Cove.

Salem was covered in dismal silver that made the quaint New England town seem like a disdainful and lonely place, boasting a silence that put Misty at ease. It wasn't a depression to her like to many of the melancholy bodies that stalked the streets looking for a purpose, a reason to continue bleak, insignificant lives. Perhaps they'd show up in her files next; any of them could've been suitable candidates. During the autumn, the most mysterious and precious treasures that the Atlantic had to offer washed up upon the pearl-tinted shores. Misty drove past the beach, gazing out at the serene grey stretching over the water, and the streams of light that pierced through the body of clouds that pooled over the water like shining discs; she would go to the beach later, at all cost. It always made her feel better after dirtying her hands with work.

Misty pruned her lips, dyeing them in a black cherry lipstick, and threw on her trench coat before stepping out of her Beetle in front of a dank cemetery. Four reapers stood at the gates of Old Haven, their hollow dark faces staring forevermore into an unseen abyss, with their scythes diagonal to themselves, each pointing at another. It seemed more like a gateway to Hell than to a cemetery, but it was more appropriate that way. She headed for the far back, a journey that took nearly half an hour. Not a soul was in sight, except hers and the lingering spirits of the grave. It was as if Misty could hear their hell-bent screams, their wails of pain and anger, and they only served to bring crooked smiles to her face. Through the displaced gravestones and the memorials for the Witches burned during the Trials, there it stood out of the earth, crafted of marble and limestone: her father's burial place. Her smirk faded and she frowned, gazing at the file she held; it

displayed the face of David Pennington, the man responsible for putting her father to shame, causing his suicide, as he had caused others to kill themselves. Misty's hands trembled at the sight of Pennington's wicked, disgusting face. However, she couldn't help but grin at the man's twinkling eyes.

"I didn't bring flowers, Father," Misty whispered, crumpling the picture in her fist, "but I do have something just as good." After she performed a short prayer, she descended the stone steps into the Tomb. Torches lit the chamber, and Misty stood at the bottom of it, grinning at a man tied to the top of a stone mantle, next to a corpse. Next to the man were tools of death: long and short knives of all keenness, gavels to bash the skull so beautifully it would echo throughout the place, and two shards of sea glass. "Why?" the stirring man cried, tears streaming down his blanched face. "Why?" Misty lightly smiled and kissed the man softly on the cheek.

"For love, of course," Misty said as she lifted a knife and sea glass. She chose the red one. "It's what he would have wanted."

A blood-curdling scream filled the chamber, but not one ear would it fill.

When the police found David Pennington, not one blemish disgraced his body. The only thing they reported was blood scorning his back, black lipstick smeared across his cheek, and two round jewels where his eye sockets should've been. They twinkled just like his eyes did in his photo.

"eleven plus one"  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High Point University Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

she grabs his hand, grasps  
five tangled fingers  
presses them to her heart

listens

eleven beats  
plus one

beep, beep, beep  
a dying heart pierced by a rogue,  
a stray, a bullet burning

a crack of thunder, a second past, a flick of a finger  
splits air, races past skin, muscle, creates  
a smoking cradle within a cage of bone

eleven saved  
but one

a clear mask over white lips  
clouded, veiled with cold puffs of uncertainty  
she presses her ear to his chest

listens

eleven beats—  
wait,  
now none.



**"I Mother Africa"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

My father's blood is in the river of the Nile  
His skin is in the sand of the Sahara  
His tears nourish the growth of the palm  
Walking eight miles to see his mother's bread  
    I mother Africa gave him strength

My mother's blood is in the river of the Nile  
Her skin is in the sand of the Sahara  
Her tears nourish the growth of the palm  
Leaving her home for a new land  
    I mother Africa gave her tradition to carry on

My blood is in the river of the Nile  
My skin is in the sand of the Sahara  
My tears nourish the growth of the palm  
I am Africa and Africa is me  
    I mother Africa gave me my life

**"White Rabbit"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Wheeling, rushing,  
Down mountains  
Of bedding and  
Blankets, the small  
White Rabbit  
Hurried to wherever  
He needed to be that night.  
Mother would tell me  
About how he would  
Win the egg decorating  
Contest at the fair  
And sell them at his store  
In our Make-Believe Land.  
When, really, all he did was  
Sit on my bedside table,  
With his painted smile  
And his painted eggs,  
The ones he loved,  
The ones nestled in  
His wheelbarrow, in front  
Of him, so he could hold on  
To them while he raced down  
Hills of plastic grass, into  
Towns of porcelain and smiling  
Painted faces.  
The eggs I stole.  
The ones  
I tore out with trembling  
Fingers so that I could  
Have them. The ones that I  
Lost, somewhere in time,  
Beside his ear that got  
Knocked off when I  
Threw them against the wall  
That one night. Lost, somewhere  
Beside all the other toys I never  
Forgot and never  
Missed.

Samantha  
Foreman

**"Shattered on the Floor"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

A vivid splash of color and a shadow of the dark  
The shadow overpowers the joy of the colored lark  
Her blue eyes can see so much, but are blind  
She suffocates from the mask she hides behind  
A beautiful bird whose wings were clipped by her own hand  
Vision blurred from doubt  
Broken by anger, her reflection lies, shattered on the floor  
I see a bird that has trapped itself in a cage  
One that could be reborn from its flames  
She sees only a molted wing—ugly, unclean  
To banish the truth to hide her sin she piles on layers of an actor's skin  
How long I wonder will she be able to abide her façade  
Preening and crowing a happy little tune  
Each day a test to see how high she can fly before she falls

"the boy with candle eyes"  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

the boy with candle eyes  
peeks around to see  
through my window  
to watch the city go

he cannot seem to sleep  
and let my thinkers think  
for he will not rest  
'til he colors the world within

the world within was crafted  
with buildings of paper and tape  
that he made for himself  
the canvas for his mind

his fingers crayons  
and his palms drip red with ink  
so everything he touches  
holds his fingerprints

but when he gets restless  
I'll say "good night, my dreams"  
and let him yawn to sleep  
and let my lids open

**"Germ Wars"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Oh,  
Amoeba.

Swirling around your  
microscopic pool  
of beautiful bacterium.

Acquainted in some  
far-away science class  
and quickly forgotten.

Oh,  
Amoeba,  
I remember your face  
and it was calm.

**"Like a Tree in the Road"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Poetry**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Like a tree in the road you are standing there  
cursing the sun for its lidless stare,  
scoffing at the travelers moving ahead,  
wondering why their feet aren't of lead  
and you aren't the one with wings instead  
against which light would scarcely dare.

You stand with your feet elevated,  
smile with your feet devastated  
by needles and tools and grime,  
and your hair is unyielding as the skin of a dime  
and your lungs and your brain are fired and sublime.  
Your eyes have all but evaporated.

Your arms are bent as if warding off flies.  
Your nails are all polished and your bows are all tied.  
Your fingers are curled so they won't have to touch  
food or railings or people and such,  
not that you allow these nearby very much;  
they can't rise to your level—they've tried.

You wince in disgust in that we hold dear,  
yet see how fast you are to letting your tears.  
You duck inside the stall and weep  
with only your immediate circle to keep.  
Because of your wails I can't fall asleep.  
Why must you always cry so near?

You step with your whimsical skewered toes  
that know your friends' backs as much as your foes',  
and yet you feel you are not to blame;  
instead, it's the world, with unworthy shame.  
You growl and you whine but all else must be tame,  
for if you do not approve, it goes.

**"Unreliable Reality"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Two cars appearing out of opposite horizons crossed each other directly in front of me, the one closest to her car seemingly causing the other to disappear. She laughed at the odds and rolled down her window allowing the wind to possess her dark hair to cover her face in a sort of mask. Her old station wagon lurched forward as she pulled out into the intersection. She told herself that she was never going to stop and that she would drive through the summer into autumn, as if time was a road that she drove on often. Work could wait, the open road called her. She opened her mouth and screamed out to the heavens exercising the freedom that she craved so much. Like it always does, this freedom came to an unwelcomed halt when she pulled into the handicapped spot at Dover's Pet Mart. Rolling her eyes and cursing the subconscious fate that had willed her to come to work, she pulled the key out of the ignition and headed inside.

She danced through the front door. The stocky, underpaid manager nodded at her and summoned her over with two chubby fingers. When she stood in front of him, his eyes looked her down to her toes and continued back up, ending in confused eye contact. "Why are you not wearing your uniform?" he snapped.

Her uniform had not crossed her mind. She looked down at her worn cowboy boots, and then up her bare legs at her homemade cut-off shorts, and a fairly new Hanes t-shirt with very few paint stains. She smiled, shrugged. "Oh, I forgot."

He fixed his glasses and ran his fingers through his hair. Then, stumped, he nodded and returned to the office he had made for himself out of a maintenance closet. As he walked off, she noticed his ironed collared shirt and khaki pants and was glad she had never worn that uniform. The minutes seemed like hours as he packed up for the afternoon. Bored, Lyla returned to the large station that held the cash register and sat underneath the cutout in the desk where someone would normally push in a chair. She enjoyed the darkness of the make-



shift cave. As soon as Jerry left, she appeared again and shifted her attention to an old computer chair that probably belonged in the cave. She slipped on her headphones, slumped down deep into the chair, and began to draw on the back of an unwanted receipt that someone had dropped.

She sat with her right leg situated underneath her left. The desk was cluttered with notes and other disregarded receipts. A guinea pig sat in front of her, and she rubbed her small, paint covered hands through its fur, telling it of all the things she had done throughout the day. Her long hair clung to her cheeks, blocking out all of her peripheral vision, leaving her eyes to see only the guinea pig and part of the nearly antique cash register behind it. Partly because of her hatred of headbands and the slight throbbing they caused behind her ears, she didn't recognize him until he was standing directly in front of her.

Her eyes rose to meet his as he stood casually with his hands in the pockets of the pants clinging to his thin waist. Her laughter interrupted his silent speech, and she removed her headphones. "Sorry. What? I couldn't hear you." He smiled forgivingly and asked if they were closed. She said no, they were not closed, since it was only five-thirty. In response, he fought to lift a large brown sack to the counter. It smelled of dogs, and the bold writing naming it said "Horse Pellets." The two talked for a while. During a pause in the conversation, she noticed that it had got dark outside. She glanced down. No watch. She looked at the store clock, surprised to see that it was eight-forty-five.

Then she noticed for the first time how sickly the man looked. She leaped forward and squinted, trying to deny what was obviously a nearly invisible person. His skin began to flicker and fade just like an old film. Her eyes slowly adjusted to his fading, but now she was sure that he was nearly transparent. His voice faded out, and he disappeared into the dust that covered the desk, leaving his horse food behind.

Sadly, she picked up her pen to return to doodling.

She thought what fun her imaginary friend had been.

As she looked down to begin writing, she noticed the odd coloring of her very own hand.

It began to flicker and fade just as his had, and she sighed in disappointment,

"I'm not even

real."

**"The Left Behind"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

I pick up the crumpled can, observe its worthlessness, and throw it over my shoulder. The gray suffocated sky opens up for a second before closing its doors again. It's sad to think about the world we used to live in compared to the life we live now. What used to be filled with green fields, and happy Americans, is now littered with burned houses and year-old newspapers. I scuff down the broken glass-covered dirt road to nowhere.

I've been alone now for a full year, I'm guessing. I can't exactly say what the date is, or the time, but I can say that I've survived one more day here in this abandoned purgatory. Few of us are left. Most days I wish I hadn't been spared. I wish I had been taken away by the bomb.

Since the revelation I have seen only two people. When I approached the couple, I was relieved until I learned that some people left behind had stooped so low that they would do anything for food. They were cannibals. I am lucky I escaped their trap. From then on I was cautious about every move, and when I sensed strangers, I hid as quickly as I could.

While I scooted along, I heard a conversation close by. I panicked, and planned an escape. But as I listened, it seemed that someone was trying to persuade someone to leave. That's weird, I thought. I went closer, and listened carefully. These were people I knew. The girl was in trouble, pleading, her words spoken tenderly. But the other, an eerie stranger, did not want to leave her alone. My concern made me peek from behind a wall. The girl was pretty, probably in her teens, but her clothes were torn and dirty, and evidence of a hard life painted her face. She pleaded. "Please, just leave me alone, I have done nothing to you."

The eerie stranger smiled grimly as he pulled a fork and knife from his back pocket. "Where's the seasoning?" he said menacingly.

He moves toward her as if she's fresh meat that he's about to devour.

The girl turns and starts to run, but another man grabs her and holds her still.

I stooped down behind the wall, pressing my back against the rotten wood. I know what was to happen, but there was nothing I could do to save her. It was inevitable.

Her lashing screams and tortured cries for help seared my ears. The men laugh and jeer. Then she stopped screaming.

I run because I'm a coward, and everyone is alone in this new, hellish world.

**"The Forest of Wooden Trees"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

It had been decades since the near extinction of trees, and nowadays even ex-environmentalists haven't given them a second thought. So it doesn't make sense that I, a mom of three with no relation to an ex-environmentalist whatsoever, would find myself eating a turkey sandwich on an airplane in Poland to see the one and only Forest of Wooden Trees: the Bialowieza Forest.

It all started when my crazy niece Suzie read an article about the rainforests where people used to get medicine from plants. She went up from Texas to DC to visit the Washing Tree Memorial Museum, which must have been quite an investment just to learn about trees. They must have been so unstable—I can't believe that the government is still saying that it was people who killed the trees. Everyone knows it was all the wild birds and squirrels spreading diseases that wiped them out. The metal trees look almost identical, and they're all over the highways and backyards, so why waste money to see the same thing made of wood? The metal trees even have the same colors and emit the same amount of oxygen from their pumps in the trunks.

But anyway, Suzie's sister thought it was a brilliant idea to take a family vacation to the Forest of Wood Trees in Poland for Suzie's twenty-first birthday. We rode the double-decker airplane for thirteen hours, then made our way to the hotel. The kids were whining the whole way and I could console them only by buying way too many Hershey bars. And the lights in our hotel room didn't even respond to our voice commands.

Then the next day we all caught the tour bus and rode to the International Wooden Tree Conservatory. I could see the trees towering behind the strikingly small two-story building. Suzie's eyes shimmered when she looked at the different types of leaves behind the glass. I glanced at the ones called "oak," "pine," "birch," and even "redwood." They were all pretty similar—green and all. Then they displayed the trees' fall hues—the variations of red, yellow, orange, and even green were pretty interesting. Then it showed the history of the wooden trees, including all of the ancient legends centered around

wooden trees, including all of the ancient legends centered around them such as the tree in the story of Adam and Eve.

After that came the part that everyone had been waiting for: a walk in the Bialowieza Forest. Our tour guide pointed out all the different species on the dirt trail, and then we were released onto the trail to walk the forest alone. Suzie wandered off when the trail forked, and somehow she took my kids with her. I could hear them exclaiming how beautiful the trees were even when I couldn't see them.

So somehow I found myself alone on the trail. The ooohs and ahhs faded and I could actually hear the wind blowing through the tree tops. It was a strange sound that I'd never heard before. It almost sounded like a waterfall. It sounded like it was whispering to me.

All of a sudden, I noticed a tiny finch bouncing on a branch with a worm in its beak. It jumped over to a nest and dropped the worm into the mouths of three baby finches. Their chirps of content sounded like the old music box my mother used to play for me before I went to bed.

I looked at the trunk of the tree and saw the wrinkles of age and the peeling bark. I wanted to hold a piece in my hand and feel the rough edges of the ancient relic. It was then that the wind started to blow furiously, causing the trees to lean back and forth and the branches to wave. It was then that I watched a leaf break from the oak and swirl with grace down to my feet. It was then that I picked up the leaf, its green veins spread like my blue veins under my skin, and I clutched it to my heart.

**"Green Grass"**  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
**High School Fiction**  
**Phoenix Literary Festival 2010**

Grave digger sat heavy, with his sour breath exhaling moth stench onto the worn pages of his dirty book, marking off names.

Twenty-four graves in the past two weeks.

He was horrified.

Each time he hollowed the earth for the doll bodies, he would recoil in revulsion, his hands slicked with sweat, sliding on the handle of his twisted trowel, as he buried the dead. His exhaustion spun with grief as the village children dropped like flies.

The green earth sponged beneath his shod feet as he limped towards the wooden shack on the edge of the graveyard, opening the door thickly and stumbling inside.

Then a pounding at the entrance, hurried and desperate.

He creaked the door open, seeing a villager slumped in the entryway, holding a bundle, limp.

"Another dead one," he mumbled.

Business was booming.



"Midnight in the Library"

I don't ever sleep,  
Yet I'm always dreaming,  
What's inside, a closed book.  
Below its cover,  
Within its tight binding,  
Pages scream.

Behind my clenched teeth,  
Oceans and shores,  
Breath like winds blown.

Stacked books: closed fists.  
Crinkled pages: snapped wrists.  
Highlighted words: tight lips.

Empty aisles echo my coffee sips.

Book shelves creak.  
Shadows creep  
In the corners of my eyes.  
I know that rows of books  
Are really spies in disguise.

"Little Girls"

Time flew by like a gust of wind,  
Years gone before our eyes.  
We lay our heads down on pillows,  
Bedtime stories, what sweet lies.

We sang, we laughed, we had our fights,  
Through thick and thin we stood,  
From Tinker Toys to Barbie dolls,  
We imagined what we would.

Like palimpsest our lives remained,  
Like layers of Mom's cake,  
From popsicles to candy bars,  
Through Bill and Joel and Jake.

Time flew by like a gust of wind,  
Our days turned into new,  
We lay our heads down on pillows,  
Pages turned and blew.

The sweet sound of ivory gently spoke,  
Guitar strings strummed behind,  
Birthdates and names etched in Dad's oak,  
All three of us aligned.

Time flew by like a gust of wind,  
Before our twinkling eyes,  
We lay our heads down on pillows,  
And dream of our past lives.

"Seize"

Keep your lips shut, keep your hands together.  
You're mine, all mine, until the time of death,  
And you shall die, after I try tonight.  
The air is sweet outside, just like your face.

Your long, dark hair glistens under the light,  
I wish I could untape your mouth so gently,  
But I know you'll scream, a loud shrieking sound.  
Keep your eyes open, watch me have my way.

I'll hold you down and let you struggle more,  
My handprint lies on your face of deep red.  
Staring into your eyes, I know it's real.  
Nothing can stop me now, no turning back.

Wrapping my hands around your neck so tight,  
I'll squeeze and choke with all my strength. Quiet.  
Don't make me feel like I am doing wrong,  
You have ruined my life, now it's your turn.

Once deep red face, now turning cold and blue,  
I'll hold you down and let you struggle still.  
A small noise from about your lips I hear,  
The terrors in your eyes mirror the dark.

Quick and steady now, it is almost here.  
You'll pay your dues in Hell with all your kind,  
I bet you're sorry, too late to repent.  
Slowly letting go, your life is ending.

From blue to white your expression is few.  
A funeral full of colors and glee,  
The only black will lie within your soul,  
Your gasp for breath fails miserably. Seize.

## "Mountain Top View"

Walking up and down,  
Gazing at the changing leaves,  
The mountain top view.

"On Heights"

Listen, my dears.

Cold dark crow-rattles, and I burn  
Alone by fire above Watauga Lake.  
Yearning to fill infinity, I call  
With a cry made of rhyme.  
They descend, needing me—thirst, pain.

They want me to tell earth and flesh:  
Attakullakulla trading with Boone,  
The destruction of Butler when waters  
Frolicked, shaping Abyss.  
"Let's march with Overmountain Men!"

So I repeat the lore. Snow. Sleet.  
And they burr as they listen, and they praise  
Her who now hovers near across the flames,  
Carol her motherhood,  
As all do, ever, above worlds.

This, my darlings, I felt  
That holy night.

"Saved"

"I can hear you.  
I do care.  
I am with you.  
Do not despair."

You have heard me.  
You do care.  
You are with me.  
I do not despair.

## "AP Stands for Advanced Procrastinator"

Senior AP students are the seasoned senior executives of a publishing firm. Not only are they pros at their line of work, but they also have learned to lie below the radar, steal from the company, and stand around the water cooler gossiping about the boss.

Twenty-eight seasoned advanced procrastinators sit in the cracked plastic chairs of the AP Lit classroom, avoiding the eyes of El Gato Grande. The ones on the far side of the room hurriedly finish last night's homework, while the unfortunate souls so unlucky to sit up front try to brace themselves against the eye of the storm. It's raining cats and dogs. It's hailing gatos, furiously scratching at the eyes of the seasoned advanced procrastinators stupid enough to run their thumbs against the keys of the communication device connecting them to the outside world.

El Gato Grande takes a sip of his poison, the liquid that provides him with stamina to stay up all night devising plans to overload the seasoned advanced procrastinators with unnecessary homework. Tis also the poison with which he grades essays and writing assignments, pulling slips of paper out of a sombrero and scribing said grade onto a seasoned procrastinator's worthless paper. There are never any A's on the slips of paper.

"What is the meaning of the book you have never read?" El Gato Grande barks. The big cat barks. Tis irony, a rhetorical device that The Man instills in the advanced procrastinators, and when they are seasoned, fatefully uses against them.

"What is *your* opinion?!" El Gato Grande singles out a student in the back. The big cats always go after the weakest gazelle in the herd.

"Umm . . . the novel was . . . um, like, particularly I really. . . ." The gazelle trips and falls. El Gato Grande seizes the change and pounces.

"WRONG!" He roars.

"But . . . I thought it was an opinion?" The gazelle whimpers, as the rest of the herd looks on with pity and remorse.

"And your opinion is wrong." El Gato Grande smirks, a Cheshire Cat resemblance on his face. Outsiders might mistake it for a smile. El Gato Grande never smiles. Because then Hell would freeze over, and El Gato Grande doesn't like his summer vacation destination to be chilly.

El Gato Grande licks his finger, and flips through a stack of graded essays, blood-red ink seeping through the lined paper. Illegible scribbling fills the margins, technically constructive criticism, but is actually a disparagement for everything pretentious and offending to the eyes of a man over-the-hill.

Gazelle after gazelle receives a graded paper, a hateful remark bubbling from their mouths as the big cat continues to smirk.

Soccer-player-gazelle peers at his paper, the crimson letter F glaring at him. "Like whatever, dude. At least there is a plus next to it." A most expected reply. He is the guy from accounting who is always standing around the water-cooler.

Valedictorian-gazelle nods approvingly at his essay. "Not bad, not bad. There is always room for improvement though." A predictable comment coming from the executive who actually enjoys the Monday-morning morale boosting staff meetings. Come to think of it, he arrives early to said meetings.

El Gato Grande slides an essay onto Hangover-gazelle's desk. A snore erupts from the facedown body, a puddle of drool escaping the chapped lips and traveling southbound on the wood desk freeway. Unsurprising. He is the newbie from the mail-room who is always hyped up on Monster and Sour Patch Kids, and most conveniently crashes during the office rush-hour.

The rest of the herd stares into oblivion as El Gato Grande rambles on and on about Shakespeare's sonnets. Blondie-gazelle inspects her manicure while ADHD-gazelle taps his pencil on his desk, his leg, his chair, and his book.

El Gato Grande pauses in his literary tirade and shovels a spoonful of oatmeal into his mouth. The spoon clinks against the green coffee



cup his breakfast is in, and sets it down on the front table. The herd of gazelles leans forward in curiosity to catch a glimpse of the cuisine the big cat consumes in the morning. A titter of scandal rushes through the room, as gazelle after gazelle surmises what might possibly be in the green coffee cup of mystery.

"He spikes his oatmeal with vodka," Valedictorian-gazelle whispers to ADHD-gazelle. Four pairs of eyes widen in surprise. Vodka? Hmm. And here they were, thinking it was gin.

Soccer-player-gazelle pipes up. "I heard he's a communist." Twelve gazelles whip their heads around and gape at Soccer-player gazelle. They can't resist water-cooler hearsay.

El Gato Grande calls the seasoned advanced procrastinators to attention at the head of class. Hangover-gazelle snores softly on the desk. El Gato Grande hurls a whiffle-ball at the advanced procrastinator's desk, waking him. Direct hit. The gazelle wipes the highway of spit on his desk, and looks up at the smirk on El Gato Grande's face as he sips at the poison again.

"You will need to type up a ridiculously long essay," El Gato Grande booms over the heads of the advanced procrastinators. "Due tomorrow!"

The herd of gazelles groan in unison. The boss is exerting his power over the seasoned executives. Even the mail-room newbie is feeling his wrath.

"And don't forget about the other seven assignments you have due tomorrow," El Gato Grande begins on his Cheshire Cat resemblance again. He moves to speak again when a pitchy sound explodes from the speakers in class, infiltrating the minds of the advanced procrastinators, filling the room, and marking the end of today's anguish. The herd of gazelles stampedes towards the door, anxious to remove themselves from the Big Cat's ferocity.

"Rush if you will," El Gato Grande smirks, "but tomorrow is another day."

"A Wish Away"

I wish there was a way to say  
the thoughts that fill my mind this day  
I wish there was a way to slow  
the feelings that I cling to—so

I wish I could, but still I won't  
I wish I would, but still I don't  
and wishing upon stars on high  
doesn't generate the wings to fly.

don't help me see, don't help believe,  
don't change the past or help retrieve  
the longing I accept I need,  
like blood through open sores that bleed.

I wish I could walk away,  
but I don't quit, and so I stay,  
yet put off till another day  
the things I wish but will not say.

"i looked upon a starry sky"

i looked upon a starry sky.  
with sounds of crashing waves nearby.  
a bitter wind swept through the air,  
and slapped my warm face without care.  
then dry leaves swirled, and rose, and bound,  
and shattered as they struck dry ground,  
and floated upon wind to sea,  
a thousand shards of destiny.

as dry leaves swirled and spun around,  
my cold thoughts echoed without sound—  
a thousand voices in my head,  
a thousand times my thoughts had bled.  
a thousand footsteps on the shore,  
both yours and mine and many more.  
the tide rolled back, the tide rolled forth.  
the tide became a mighty force.

and starry sky shined gleaming light.  
as ocean rumbled in the night.  
then rumbling tide began its rise,  
and stretched toward the starlit skies.  
then stars and rising waves agreed,  
to crash the shore, to crash and be  
a thousand sparkles on the sand,  
that sift away and start again.

## "The Poet, the Prophet, and the Mouse"

Crashing waves meet sand on shore,  
and seagulls scream from overhead.  
The Poet writes, and writes some more.  
The Prophet prays beside his bed.

The Poet and Prophet meet  
at a crossroads near a glen,  
joining on the path together,  
talking as if long-lost friends.

"Speak of wonders, oh wise Prophet.  
I must write an epic poem."  
"Be still, young friend. Be humble, patient,  
The future is to us all—unknown."

Then around a bend they traveled,  
rabid mouse hid in the weeds.  
First bit Prophet, then the Poet,  
leaving them among the reeds.

As fever crept into their heads  
they fell down to their knees as one,  
and held each other's gaze a moment  
knowing soon their time was done.

"This cannot happen," cried the Poet.  
"My greatest work is not complete."  
"We all must die," declared the Prophet.  
"The end for us we now must meet."

"Then please tell me, Holy Prophet,  
should I record my final thoughts?"  
"The choice is there for you, oh Poet,  
for I am ill and full of thought."

Yet this alone I can assure,  
the soul I see in you is strong.  
Repent here now. Repent! Be naked.  
You inner spirit will live on."

"Alas, my Prophet, I am sinking.  
I feel weak, and full of dread."  
"Then come with me, for just like you  
I'm staggered with a heated head."

Then they stood, helping each other,  
struggling till they found a dune.  
Both collapsed and closed their eyes,  
taking rays from Sun's high noon.

Crashing waves meet sand on shore,  
and seagulls scream from overhead.  
The mouse retired to his home.  
The Poet and the Prophet—dead.

## "Picking Pecans"

Mr. Courtney's split-rail fence leans against the county line,  
his purple larkspur dazzling, parading along the edge  
like a flash of Presence greeting passersby.  
In his absence, the property holds the Space,  
the kind of awareness that enables us  
to hear wind wash through high-born branches  
and to find frogs burrowed among tulip bulbs.

In the back Dad points out the pecan tree,  
plucking a nut from the ground and pressing it open  
with a sudden pop between his palms.  
Peeling back the outer layers,  
he presents us with a whole pecan,  
perfect and unbroken, protected and unspoken,  
a fine example of life force made manifest—  
the very same that occupies us all.

"8K race results, November"

mischievous leaves lick our ankles  
as the earth slides, slick with last week's rain.  
on mud-streaked legs, we leap and slip  
among felled oaks and low-lying foliage,  
oblivious to three-leaved greens  
leaning out along the trail.

days later we discover a band of red bumps—  
ankle-high, itch-swollen  
and oozing with triumph, giving us reason  
to show off our newly acquired grotesquery:  
a token reminder of the recklessness  
required to be fully alive.

with morbid fascination, we watch,  
scratching, scratching, until we bleed,  
as the inflammation intensifies  
and, inevitably, subsides.  
left in its wake, we find a ridged, discolored scar—  
unsightly, unladylike, and decidedly unabashed  
in its honesty as proof of our misadventures  
and of the exquisite vulnerability of being human.

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