

The Labyrinth
Literary Magazine
2012

“To sleep, perchance to dream”

We would like to extend our sincerest appreciation to the Brady Family for supporting the Labyrinth and making the publication of Midshipmen talent a possibility. We would also like to thank the English Department for fostering an environment that promotes such creativity.

The views represented herein do not reflect the opinions of the United States Navy or the US Naval Academy.

Contents

Poetry

- 1 **A Confession** Krisandra Hardy
2 **Lunar Absence** Kyle Hanton
4 **A Student of History** Daniele Anderson
12 **David** Jack Gannon
10 **Inevitable Fate of the Mate** Samuel Cogar
11 **The Engineer's Ballad** Hugh Mitchell
15 **Fiddling** Susannah Johnson
13 **Beauty Made** Anonymous
35 **Lost Pines** Carlos Rosende
20 **Bliss** Colin Nevins
14 **Bee** Emily Meyer
21 **The Amateur Poet** Krisandra Hardy
20 **Journey to the Meadow** Erin Edwards
22 **Uncontrolled Masses** Emily Meyer
23 **By Starlight** Andrea Stroke
21 **Light Drops** Bryant Renfroe
24 **My World, My Friend** Kevin Crush
26 **I Used to Want to be a Boy** Jennifer Sandifer
16 **The Traffic Jam Called Life** Alexander King
38 **The Nail-biter** Erica Leinmiller
55 **Weeping Willow** Emily Meyer
57 **That Last Blink** Rebekkah Esquivel

Short Stories

- 6 **The End of War** David Tan
28 **Untitled** James Pearson
18 **Journey to the Meadow** Erin Edwards
29 **Now Open Year Round** Zak Eissler
34 **From Boy to Man** Cheyann Essley
39 **Dr. Plutonin and the Box of Horrors** Alexander King
37 **Two in One** Cheyann Essley
44 **Untitled** Erin Edwards
48 **Further Interpretations of Real-Life Events** Benjamin Etringer
32 **John.** Erica Leinmiller
52 **Untitled** John Fritts
54 **My Mother's Smile** Max Millick
56 **Snake** Jack Gannon

Artwork

Cover	Sponge	Chris Duffy
3	USNA Summer Storm	Colin Nevins
13	Untitled	Alex Dorado
14	Red Eyes	Hope Jones
20	Albero della Vito	Hope Jones
22	Brittle Star	Chris Duffy
24	Chasing Windmills	Erica Leinmiller
53	Winged Victory	Erica Leinmiller
36	The Joker	Luke Walsh
36	John Hamilton	Andrew Felton
17	Corvette	Andrew Felton
43	The Succubus & Trogdor	Ian Remillard

Music

1	A Glitch Bass Song	Nathaniel Brown
2	Brisa Do Oceano	Kyle and Ryan Couillard
3	Check This Bass Out	Nathaniel Brown
4	CrushCrushCrush (Baasik remix)	Nathaniel Brown
5	Dirts	Nathaniel Brown
6	Pirl	Nathaniel Brown
7	Swing Life Away (cover)	Robert Nefzger
8	Take Six	Kyle and Ryan Couillard
9	Tilt	Nathaniel Brown
10	United (Feat. Tyshaun)	Nathaniel Brown
11	Volume Warning	Nathaniel Brow

A Note from the Editor

The inspiration this year was based on those wondrous journeys we all experience when sleep overtakes us. Our conception of the natural progression of dreams is unique perhaps - from a Midshipman's perspective, the first step to sleep begins with the sometimes mundane activity of repetitive military duties. From there, our minds begin to wander to daydreams, small trips to bright, familiar worlds that offer a minute release from reality. Of course, then the equations on the board begin to swirl, and we take a step into the more absurd - the realm of actual sleep. Step too far, and the fantastic turns to the frightening - nightmares. Your mind retreats back with a jolt to the world of the living, and the cycle starts again. In what follows, we hope to recreate this journey for our readers. Thank you to the amazing Midshipmen who contributed to this year's Labyrinth, and we hope you enjoy a journey into dreams.

Pitt Poetry Prize 2012

The A. Stuart Pitt Poetry Prize, awarded in conjunction with the Academy of American Poets, is open to all midshipmen and judged by a panel of English professors. With numerous contestants, it is a true show of creativity and talent to be selected. This year, for the first time in recent history, two poems were chosen to receive this prestigious prize.

A Confession

Krisandra Hardy '12

My life should have ended in a bathroom stall,
but I was too stubborn to go all the way -
the promise of soft, pink hands and feet,
sepia tinted fantasies of bubbled giggles
and kisses goodnight held too strong.
But these were my fantasies.
Giggles don't fit a loveless life,
and how easy it is to press undo.
So I brought my body to the seventh
floor slaughterhouse at 777 Appletree St.
and asked them to finish the job for me.
In the dim waiting room, Tina Fey mocked me on the TV
while the other dead women kept their eyes shut
practicing already how to be alone and silent.
Only one across from me continued to crochet
as if unaware that vacuumed
up babies cannot wear booties.
I was not allowed to see 'the fetus' -
'baby' is reserved for
moms and dads -
so I lay with my pants around my ankles
shivering while I tried to make
up the image myself
until they wiped the jelly off my stomach
and strapped me down.
This is how I died:
naked with my legs spread on a
sterile hospital bed
alone
staring at the pretty purple butterfly stickers splayed on the ceiling
and praying that the more it hurt, the more I'd be forgiven.

Lunar Absence

Kyle Hanton '13

This German rock, cragged with age, centuries
By rivers cut, the sun's color melts past,
Yet still I walk. The rolling dark clouds stare,
Lightning arms tinged with red by immortal
Sun's blood.

The tumbled stones of a broken tower,
Lonely upon a mountaintop sit open-aired;
Moss covered hewn rock, once a collective object
Now each individually
Fallen.

From this vantage point, see the wood –
Verdant in black, a lush shadow stretching
All around, horizon overgrown. Sky
Occluded; Trees below reach above, grab at
The moon.

But it's absent from the sky as you are
From my life; lost. The sharp, sweet tang of pine,
Rotting under low branches among these stones:
Mortar ground to dust through wind, rain, and snow;
Weather

Dominated, monstrous, open:
The stars obscured from my eyes, yet even now,
The wind blows, the clouds drift: there, breaking free
Are Orion and Polaris.

From missing beauty,
The rain begins to fall. No owls or beasts of any kind
Are here, and now the bloody fingers of the sun
Begin to pull the stars down from above.



USNA Summer Storm Colin Nevins, Digital Photography

Black History Month Poetry Contest Winner

A Student of History

Daniele Anderson '13

As I thought of what to say
And what to write about
Perhaps how blacks had lost their way
Or sold each other out
I thought about re-writing history
Starting over on a new page
Going back to a time long ago
Changing up the historical gaze
I found another topic
Though not quite as eloquent as those
As a student of history it crossed my mind
What does history really show
How do I analyze its truths
Even if they don't relate to me
It's a narrative I decided
Based upon recorded facts
To write history is to choose a life
And narrate the struggles
To say a moment in time an event
Is more important than the rest
History isn't written for the sake of progression
Not written to teach a lesson
It's written for those who love stories
Because the endings always keep you guessing
It's no different with Black History
A story about my people
But I began to explore different answers
History wasn't like a book
You can't divide it into chapters
It is wrought with human struggle
Something pages just can't capture
Black history is the narrative of you
Just as much as it is of me
It engulfs our perception of the world
Which shapes how it will be
So then I thought about re-writing history
What if you could change these "facts"

If we could turn back the hands of time
And get all the greats back
What would King say today
Well no one could really know
He might remark on how far we've come
How far we still have to go
Now I'm not so high and mighty to think
I can control space and time
But when you control people's perception
Essentially you control their mind
So what does all this mean
This history and perception thing
We must use our history usefully
Not just interpret facts and what they mean
Because it's only as important
As we each perceive them to be
I could name a list of actors
In the narrative of black history
I could give a select few the glory
It's not how they would want
We all have a part in their narrative
We all must share in the story
Now Rosa, Malcolm, and Martin
Yes they drew a line in the sand
But none so serious as the challenge
Which history must demand
History can't be lost
This generation doesn't need saving
The time for the greats is over
What history must demand
No lack of courage or bravery
Now each one of us must stand
We can't depend on a few to lead us
For even they could fall astray
We must live out this book of history
Each and every day
So no fond words of wisdom
Can I lay down at your feet
Except to challenge all who hear
To shape the world you want to see

The End of War

David Tan '12

“Did you hear the rumor?” Mac asked excitedly as he collapsed his giant, armored frame onto the crate of artillery shells that served as a makeshift seat. He nearly knocked Johns’s off as he slid into place with total abandon.

“What,” Johns replied, finding himself only tenuously seated with just half a cheek resting on the crate, “the one where you get boned by Private Flower?” Mac laughed in response, just before clapping Johns across the back with enough force to knock him off the ammo crate.

“Nah, not that one,” Mac said, still laughing as Johns drew himself out of the dust, “I heard the war’s over.”

Johns shook the dust off his spoon, and sighed as the mixture of his saliva, the extra water at the bottom of the packet of eggs, and the ubiquitous fine-grain sand turned to fetid mud. He was too tired to care; he sent the spoon diving back into the packet of reconstituted eggs and chewed over the contents, teeth gnashing over the sandy grit.

“I heard that before I deployed on my first tour.”

“No, no,” Mac said, gesticulating wildly, “this is different.”

“I’ve heard that one too. I heard it during my second tour.”

Mac looked like he was about to push him off the crate again, so Johns changed his tone.

“Fine, what’d you hear?”

“Well,” Mac said furtively, “Rainman told me the government’s shutting down.”

“I heard that last tour too,” Johns said, just before he found himself in the dust again with Mac staring down at him, annoyed.

“This is different, smart ass.”

Johns looked for his spoon. It was gone. He shrugged and poured the remaining contents of the meal pouch down his gullet. “What, are they serious this time?” he asked as he wiped his face with his sleeve.

“I heard,” Mac said, his voice conspiratorial, “Congress was overrun by rioters.”

Johns froze. “You’re not serious, are you?”

“Yep. The lieutenant’s not saying anything, but he was whiter than usual this morning after the staff meeting. Everybody noticed.”

“Hell, maybe they told him he would have to go on patrol today.”

“No, no, he’s like, walking around talking to everyone and stuff,” Mac said, his voice expressing genuine wonder, “asking them about their families and their plans and stuff. It’s weird.”

“That’s not like him at all,” Johns said, standing up as adrenaline began to pump, “something’s definitely wrong. Did you talk to top?”

“Nah, he’s still outside the wire. Not supposed to get back until this afternoon.”

Johns scanned the outpost, squinting in the morning glare. The HESCO barriers

lined the camp, divvied it up into neat squares and boxes, each filled with the rocky dirt of this strange nation. He couldn't have marked it on a map before. But here they were. TIP OF THE SPEAR, the unit motto, was proudly emblazoned on the only crumbling remainder of the government building that their camp had supplanted. Below it, anonymously scratched into the masonry, was the unofficial addition "Touchin' tips."

"What do you think happened?" Johns asked rhetorically.

"Dunno," Mac responded, before nudging Johns with his foot. "Hey. Look sharp. Lieutenant's coming."

"Good morning fellas," the lieutenant said, squinting in the glare, removing his helmet as he arrived. His shaved head glistened with sweat already, even before the real heat of the day hit.

"Morning sir," they both muttered quietly, both subconsciously angling their bodies to stand sidelong to him.

"How are ya'll two doing today?" he asked with forced good humor, smiling at them hopefully.

"Fine, sir," they responded in drab unison.

The conversation hit an awkward pause. The lieutenant seemed unsure of what to do and chuckled for no reason.

"You two take care now," the officer said, putting his helmet back on, "let me know if you need anything. I'm here for ya'll."

"Thanks, sir," they said flatly, watching him as he walked off.

"I don't know," Johns said, once the Lieutenant was out of earshot, "seems like his usual self to me."

"Maybe," Mac said, before quickly changing the subject, "what're you gonna do when you get back home?"

"Get out. Find some chick I can trick into marrying me. Have tons of kids. Whatever."

"I don't know if that's going to happen now," Mac said, his face unusually serious, "what with the government shut down and all. How are we going to get home?"

"They have to bring us home," Johns said quickly. He began to gather his things together. He'd be relieving Jester in a couple minutes on the south wall.

"Well how're we gonna get flown back if the pilots aren't paid? Or if planes don't get fuel?" Mac said, pressing the issue. "I doubt it."

"Are you sure? You know how things are. We don't have enough ammunition. They forgot to send us food last week. A couple pallets worth of water meant for us got sent to the Pakistani embassy instead."

"Yeah, but..."

"And that's all when the system is 'working.' Come on, man, you should know, you've been in longer than me."

"Look," Johns said, "you think too much. You know how I've made it this long? It certainly wasn't because I was good at this whole soldiering thing."

“How then?” Mac asked, irritated, but attentive.

“It doesn’t matter who’s in charge or isn’t in charge. I do what people tell me to. Man the post, Johns! Turn left, Johns! Shoot that guy, Johns! That’s how.”

“I’m not following.”

“Well, there’s always going to be somebody telling me to do something. If not the Captain, it’ll be the Lieutenant. If not him, then it’ll be Top or Gunny. If not them, it’ll be one of the sergeants. If not him, then it’ll be you.”

“But we’re the same rank,” Mac protested, drawing only a cynical laugh from Johns.

“That doesn’t mean a thing,” Johns muttered, checking his watch. It was time. “Gotta go.”

“Hey,” Mac protested, “we’re not done here.”

“Well, I’ve got to be in my bunker, and you have to be in your bunker. That’s about all there is to say.”

Mac gave him the finger and laughed, hefting the M240 machine gun to his shoulder before trudging off to the northern entrenchments. Johns’ head with the breeze, to the opposite end of their postage-stamp sized outpost. It was just one platoon, camping out in the wasteland.

He crouched under the camouflage netting, feeling the slight poke on his jaw from the tourniquet he had strapped to the left shoulder of his vest. He crouch-walked up to the lip overseeing the canyon below.

Johns liked being on watch. He felt a bit like one of his warrior ancestors, standing atop a medieval fortress of rock ripped by thousands of serfs from the bitter wet earth. Shining spear in hand, banners flying, lady’s favor tied to steel helmet. He clutched his rifle a little tighter.

“How long has this been going on?” he muttered quietly to himself, listening to the wind. The strange, narrow trees popped out of the mist at intervals, like strange, massive thorns in the ground. It was relaxing, calm, and tranquil.

“Son,” his grandfather’s voice said, long ago, in the comfort of the warm den in his childhood ranch home, “it’s always the times when it’s quiet, when everything is so perfectly peaceful, when Charlie hits you. You’ll be sitting there, in your foxhole or in your slit trench, eating some slop out of a can, smoking and joking with your buddies, when Charlie rolls in. And they’ll shout, ‘Charlie’s in the wire! Charlie’s in the wire!’”

His grandfather, eyes enlivened with the power of an old, violent memory, leaned in close to his young, trembling face.

“Here’s what you have to understand, son. Charlie’s ALWAYS in the wire.”

Muffled explosions echoed from face to face, rumbling down the narrow tear in the earth like a crashing flood. “South side! Platoon sized force! RPG’s and small arms! Setting up crew-served!” someone yelled out, down the line.

Johns jerked the rifle scope up to his face, cutting through the mists with his thermal optic. Shapes moved on the opposite side of the rift, five hundred meters away.

He adjusted his aim, lifting the muzzle just a little bit, and squeezed off a shot towards the things in the fog.

He found himself suddenly on the ground, entire body absently tossed aside by the concussion of an explosion. He thumped himself in the chest, getting air back into his lungs. He patted himself over. Seemed good. Through a fit of coughing, he threw himself back onto the line, head and ears still ringing.

“Apparently the war hasn’t heard it’s over yet,” Johns cried out over the gunfire. Through the withering chorus of the guns, he could just make out Mac’s laconic reply.

“Shut up and shoot.”



Inevitable Fate of the Mate

Samuel Cogar '15

Standing here on watch all day,
Not a thing in mind to do.
Many of the words, I cannot say,
Just "Good afternoon, sir. How are you?"
Fill in the log, make my rounds,
Watch others have their fun.
Listen for the heavy footstep sounds
That mean I am finally done.
They never come soon enough for sure,
Those shiny black leather shoes.
And so I wait and keep the deck secure,
Here in my Winter Working Blues.
Now an upperclassman is coming my way,
So I ready my verbal salute.
Parade rest! Atten-hut! Wish him a good day,
Yet he seems to fall deaf and mute.
No difference to me, I still stand as mate,
Checking right, then left, then front,
Wishing the next man not to be late,
For his steps I am on the hunt.
Oh a Mid! With a watchbelt and cover, I see,
As I hope not to be deceived.
It is simply those words that will set me free:
"You are now relieved."



The Engineer's Ballad

Hugh Mitchell '12

The warrior bravely stands with the enemy blocking his view;
He grasps at his weapon, his trusty #2.
He struggles to focus, to see the goal ahead.
Now comes the fight! Will he perish, or make it to bed?

Fought on the planes of Cartesian the great,
The battle raged gloriously, and raged very late.
The warrior was weary; his battle was long;
Alas! Our great hero is down! His answer was wrong!

But wait, he's not finished; he still can pull through;
He just needed to go back and divide it by two.
With a rallying cry and a swig of caffeine,
Our hero goes on, maniacally laughing.

With stroke after slash, he wields his weapon well;
Hoping upon hope to escape this living hell.
"Why did I choose Aero?" our friend cries in dismay,
"If I were in English my UNSAT might be an 'A'!"

Nevertheless his path has been set.
He must face his monster and make it his pet.
With bloodshot eyes to greet a dreary dawn,
Our warrior yields to a billowing yawn.

He surveys the battlefield to see how he fared,
(But at this point was there anyone who cared?)
Finding his enemy lying in its doom,
He boxes the body in its rightful tomb.

Tired beyond words, our hero needs a vacation.
Instead, he puts on his uniform to go to formation.
Day in and day out this battle he fights,
Working all day and striving through the nights.

He knows it's all worth it; he knows the final object:
It's not to reach comfort, it's to serve and protect.

David

Jack Gannon '13

Sitting there.
Underwear.
Wearing it only,
Clothes strewn about.
Folding them quickly and
Putting them down.

Two of us in the dark,
Trying in vain to get organized.
Not what you'd expect
From the second night of college.
No booze.
No girls.
Just two guys
In underwear
Folding underwear.

And then the door opens.
The look we shared still remembered
With a laugh.
My face must have mirrored his,
A combination of "Shit, we're caught."
And "Fuck, we're dead."

And that was how our friendship began.
Sitting there.
Underwear.
Wearing it only
Clothes strewn about.



Beauty Made

Anonymous

Legs crossed in front of me,
A grin upon your lips,
As you bait me with your body
And see me closing in
On your skin, soft with creams,
And legs as smooth as your caress.
Your hair curls to perfect ringlets,
And your eyes match your dress.

If beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder
Why does it manufacture so well?
You wear slogans on dresses and lingerie
But don't ask me my thoughts, so I don't tell
You how I love you in sweatpants and t-shirts,
Hair disheveled from the run in the park,
Life glistening on your forehead and t-shirt,
A v-shaped mark directing my eyes.

I love you in the morning,
When your eyes are bright with dreams,
And your sleepiness brings honesty
Of what you think of me.
But by evening you're under control,
Waxed and tanned and polished,
And it's a product I find beautiful,
Just a body, not a soul.



Untitled Alex Dorado, Digital Photograph

Bee

Emily Meyer '12

A buzzing bee buzzed merrily
As it danced among the flowers.
No matter how small or distracted it be,
I will always cower.



Red Eyes Hope Jones, Digital Photography

Fiddling

Susannah Johnson '14

The clouds beckon, as the grass
dances with the wind
Branches motioning you to join, but
You stand there
Fiddling and tinkering

Why do you
Fiddle?
What are you trying
To change?

The stream babbles, calling
You. But you can't
Hear. You don't want
To hear.

The endless sky is
the backdrop to the dance
of the white blooms, they
whisper: come join,
but you stand there
fiddling and tinkering.

The wind's song slows to nothing,
the blooms halt in their dance,
everything looks up with anxious eyes
waiting for what you'll say
But you stand there
Fiddling away

The grass dances no more, it only
Bends and sinks, never rising again
The clouds loom in a gray sea above
The branches motionless, speak no more

Finally
You look up.
Only to be too late.

The Traffic Jam Called Life

Alexander King '13

I can't take it anymore
Two hours of vehicular Hell
Locked bumper to bumper
With the miniscule Nissan before me
And the Toyota that is trying to climb into the bed of my truck
Black ahead
White behind
With my brilliant blue in between

Here, in the depths of winter, I can still see the shimmering heat waves
Rising around the long, marked trail
Of the industrial monstrosities

With the windows down I can feel the cool breeze blowing
From east to west
Left to right
Window to window
Carrying with it the acrid smell of exhaust, construction dirt, and freshly laid asphalt

How I long to be free of this motorized prison
No longer locked between Nissan and Prius
Roaming free and fast on open roads
In the shadows of the Appalachians

I can feel the shuddering throbs of my truck beneath me
Longing to be free and doing what she does best:
Cruising ninety in a race to the destination against the timer on the GPS
Dodging the radar checkpoints of the dickhead Virginia cops
And pacing the bait running ten car lengths ahead

Then
A jarring honk from behind me
The line has advanced and I move the truck forward another six feet
To sit stationary once again

Someday
We'll all be free



Corvette Andrew Felton, Graphite and Ink on Paper

Journey to the Meadow

Erin Edwards '12

“I’ll show him,” she muttered to herself, simultaneously slamming the screen door shut and darting through the yard. The tall thistle grazes her legs as she stammers through the enormous blades of grass – thorny weeds tug at her cotton dress, groping at the lady bug print. “I will not stop until I get to the meadow. That will show him. I can do things all on my own, jerk.” She is too focused to be fazed by minor distractions and remains determined to make her way to the meadow, past the old red shed constructed of splintered wood and chipped paint, beyond the clearing. She exhales sharply with each step, clenched mouth, forcing hard and heavy breaths through her nostrils, growing madder and more wildly dramatic with each breath. “I can do this, I’m going to make it without him.” Her cheeks turn from pale to rosy the faster she pushes through the overgrown field, which is alive with critters, whizzing all around her. A mosquito lands on her arm and she instantaneously smacks with force, unflinching, like a frantic twitch she could not control. Her hair pulled taut with a thick, red hair band while a single strand of straw-colored hair falls free and holds tight to the cotton of her dress, fighting the breeze fabricated by her swift, abrupt movement through the trees, the way a bug hangs onto a window of a car on the highway.

She had to get away from that place, run into the wild and be free - breathe. The idea of one more second in that stuffy living room with him was “boy-cootie” sickening to her. She would not stop to catch her breath until she reached the meadow, past the old red shed, beyond the clearing. Flashes of purple and yellow and green whip by her with each long, consecutive stride. A youthful perspiration shimmers at the edge of the tiny, fine hairs which frame her face, forming a gleaming halo of gold about her head. Her brow stays furrowed and her head tucked, not looking back for one second.

She feels relief from the hands of unwanted plants that no longer fumble against her calves, shins, and dress as she steps into the clearing. Her face and neck relax. No longer does she notice the buzzing of insistent bees nor feel the flies that continually nag her skin. Light shines through the break in trees, glazing a warm sensation over her body.

“No, no, no, mom’s going to kill me when she sees my new shoes are ruined! It’s his fault of course, not mine!” Her brand new white Keds are now marred with brown and green stains, reminding her again she is angry at her brother. The only noise she hears is her steady, deep breath which she focuses to calm. Her sprint has turned into a gallop as she takes in the view of the open space before her, left all to herself, to conquer alone. The thought of reaching the meadow soon enchants her and inspires exaggeration in her step.

A beautiful, vibrant blue butterfly catches her eye and she reaches for it in stride. “Come here little butterfly! Wow, look at your wings. I wish I could fly like you. Fly away and never be stuck having to play with my mean brother again. Teach me pretty butterfly!” She spreads her arms mimicking the butterfly. It flies back and forth in front of her, teasing

her as she swings her arms in hopes of catching it. It floats high to low and all around as if circling the girl while bringing her towards the meadow. She skips and twirls, erupting with naïve, childish shrieks each time the butterfly is in reaching distance. “You’re so silly! Do you like my dress? It’s one of my favorites. Robert says my hair matches it. I like that. What do you think?” But the blue insect only flies higher and higher into the sky, up past the point on the tree where she can see no more. “I can’t fly that high, pretty butterfly.” She looks down at her dyed shoes planted firmly at the edge of the swampy meadow where water rests full of rare intriguing creatures. A frog sits on a wet rock poking out of the water and she points to it with excitement, turning to look behind her, “Look, at the frog! Our favorite kind, Ro -. Oh.” Her eyes span ahead, then right and left as she feels a cool breeze spread bumps down her skin from head to toe. But she is completely alone.



Bliss

Colin Nevins '12

Leaves dancing in the sun,
Showering shade onto
The oasis of fresh grass
Around its aged trunk.

I lean back
Supported by its wisdom,
Close my eyes,
Breath in the splendor
And dream



Albero della Vita Hope Jones '14, Digital Photograph

The Amateur Poet

Krisandra Hardy '12

Harrows trailing pebbles and fine print,
delicate phrases upturned in sod
with flecks of dirt caught on the vowels.
I walk slowly with my plow, guilty with each heavy step
of boot that breaks the brittle letters.
I wish that I could turn around,
but I'm trapped in a fragile mine field –
to walk away would leave a small massacre of syllables.

So I tread softly on, leaving tiny seeds of clumsy prayer behind me
and imagining those words stretching
longer and deeper in the rich soil that I have tilled.
I see them blooming, blossoming,
burgeoning with powerful stalks
and rich, clean fruit, ripe with meaning.



Light Drops

Bryant Renfroe '15

Light drops little
Golden rays of peace
On gallant hearts while
Watching innocence sleep



Uncontrolled Masses

Emily Meyer '12

Diving and Weaving,
These uncontrolled emotions
Aren't really emotions at all,
Just uncontrolled masses
Like stars and their gases
That burn wildly out of control.



Brittle Star Chris Duffy '12, Digital Photograph

By Starlight

Andrea Stroke '12

All those memory-thoughts
Treasures, swirling

Holding on, taking on
Another chance to
Trip and fall

Under the moonlight
Find us by starlight

Sorting out, figuring out
What goes where
Do I belong here?

Time in an open space
Our sky lit by starlight



My World, My Friend

Kevin Crush '15

Step into my world, my friend
That I might make you see

You've stared at me, while I stared somewhere nowhere
You watched me making useless gestures with my hands
I loudly laugh at jokes that are not heard
I sing songs whose tunes are strange and many
And look at things that no one else can see

A-fok-a-lok-a-dee, a-lok-a-lok-kunum

I seem alone, apart, aloof
But really, I am all here
But I do dwell in another world as well
And the only person there is me

Say-a-dont, say-a-dont, baw-aw-aw-aw-ah

This world of mine, it has no words
For of words I have no need
When there are whistles and groans
And clear-the-throat tones, and
Their meanings are what I make them be

The colors here, they have strange names
As do shapes, and sounds, and places
A joy-world is mine; a woe-world is mine
But the only one there is me

I know of things that no one else does
My secrets and dreams are my own
A universe of gold, and dirt, and air and ice
Where horror and mirth are side-by-side
On the highest peak, in the deepest gorge
They're all my own, I am alone
The wind whistles through every tree

Step into my world, my friend
That I might make you see

That you might set me free

Ah-eee, Ah-eee, ben-ah-sahr

(Notes: This is a tribute to my little brother, who has autism. In italics are noises he makes.)



I used to want to be a boy.

Jennifer Sandifer '12

I used to want to be a boy,
Not because I wanted a sex change or any extreme exchange like that,
But because life would be easier
As a boy.
No boobs, no bras, braziers or pretty pink panties I had to buy
For no one to see.
I could have ESPN, NFL, NHL, MLB, NBA and any other three letter grouping besides
the dreaded monthly one belonging only to my kind.
A boy's acronyms come weekly,
Sometimes everyday,
And they're usually accompanied with nachos, queso, beer, and salsa
Not in that order, but definitely leaving the cramps, mood swings, and menstruation behind
without the help of medication by Midol.

I used to want to be a boy.
I wished for it on Christmas, on birthdays, upon a star:
A dream upon a dream when I was 5 and wanted my Tonka truck instead of a tutu.

I used to want to be a boy
Because I liked blue,
Not pink.
No! I would yell at my mom who was deaf to my wishes.
I want to wear jeans!
No! she would scream back and slip the silky sweater only belonging to my sex over my
head.
Even worse,
It was scented with flowers and honey.
I was repulsed.
My mother beamed.
I "looked like a girl again."
I looked like a doll again.
I was another fake twin to my prettier, pinker, older, better sister.
She looked like a doll, too, and cried when I laughed because
I broke her dolls when she married them to my GI Joe's.
I wanted band aids and bruises, not ribbons and curls.
I wanted fresh air and tree swings, not tea time and tainted toe nails.
I wished for the dirt between my toes and the bark of the tree under the soft calloused
hands of a 9 year old.

I used to want to be a boy.

They even called me a tomboy

Because I looked like a little boy with long hair.

Now I look like an older boy with short hair.

I get funny looks from old ladies in wheelchairs and walkers who try to convince me that I'm not in the right bathroom.

I try to laugh it off, but I remember that it was a simpler thing being that tomboy with scraped knees

Than it is being that woman in the right bathroom with the wrong looks.

I used to want to be a boy.

As I grew up,

I grew into my body.

Now I'm just waiting for everyone else to figure that out.



Untitled

James Pearson '12

Strangely, the photograph wasn't faded at all around the edges. Rather, it exuded a lifelike glow which struck me as quite unnerving. The woman in the picture wore a bright yellow dress, the color of an early spring tulip poking through the frost. She was standing in front of a white house, clearly brand new— the sidewalk cut an unfinished swath through the short grass behind her. There was even a big radio sitting on the porch. Ruth said she and Al would listen to swing three nights a week on it before they started having kids. Of course I remember those times.

The Forties were supposed to be black and white, even a little grainy still. That was how I tried to keep it in my mind, anyway. There were no colors in World War Two, only shades of grey death, far removed from the neon lights and plasma screens of the 21st century. Yet there was an image even the bratty grand kids, iPod Touches clutched in their grubby hands, could comprehend. Bright and clear as one of those new digital photographs people are so into these days.

“A picture is worth a thousand words,” or so they say. I don't know. Seems like a long time ago. None of my pictures do it for me anymore. The dull shades of that first '47 Chevy... Damn, I KNOW it was bright red as a fresh apple when I got it. But this picture: the earthen brown of freshly laid bricks, the seductive hue of Ruth's lipstick, the blinding white paint. Maybe it's not the picture, but the color which makes me almost hear the lively bass of those frequent swing nights.



Now Open Year Round

Zachary Eissler '15

“Don’t talk, don’t say nothing, I’ll just pack my things and head blindly towards something, but where I’m going, well I don’t really know, the road is calling so I’ve got to go.”

-Matt Costa, “The Road”

These lyrics are all that accompany me as I leave the city of brotherly love, cross the Walt Whitman Bridge, and exit into Camden. The digitalized dash flashes 3:42 a.m. It’s early, cold, and depressing. It’s Jersey. The road is empty except for the one state trooper and an old Infiniti fleeing towards the opposite horizon. The drive on the Garden State Parkway is full of wonderfully mundane scenery consisting of trees, a field, a barn or two, and some more trees. Every so often I see the ghost like eyes of a young deer pierce through the thick shrubbery and the darkness, scanning the gauntlet for the opportune moment to schizophrenically dash across the parkway. My hands tighten on the steering wheel each time I approach a sign for an exit. As I travel further down the road I pass signs that say something about Somers Point and Atlantic City, but I don’t see any signs for my destination. Where is my sign? Have I gone too far? I must have gone too far. I reassure myself that I’ll see it shortly. And I do. My headlights just barely illuminate that neon green sign with my favorite alphanumeric combination tucked away in the bottom right corner. 7S. My exit. As I cross the 34th Street Bridge, I roll down my window with that manual handle that squeaks with each rotation. The cool June wind awakens my dreary senses. I can breathe fresh air not yet tainted by the mainland and I can smell the salt water of the ocean mixed with that mild sewage smell of the bay. It’s low tide. A large, flashy “welcome” billboard looms at the top of the bridge, reminding me that Ocean City was voted America’s number one family resort by the Travel Channel, and that Uncle Bill’s Pancake House is now open year round. On the other side of the billboard is a giant Fox real estate ad for all their new open houses and condos. Ocean City, New Jersey: my once hidden island home.

As I finally drive onto familiar soil, I am met with unknown sights. The old Dairy Queen at the corner is now a bank, the local beach rental store has been turned into a Crye-Leike realty headquarters, and the wooden Sandcastle Park playground has been paved over to build a new, safer playground that won’t exceed height standards or give kids splinters as they sprint across the wooden bridge playing “the ground is lava”. I speed by the way-too-early-to-be-crowded WaWa, and turn into my alley. Randazzo’s Pizza boxes lay eschew in front of a toppled garbage can and seagulls dive out of the darkness to pick at them for a midnight snack. I cautiously pull into my narrow gravel driveway and turn the dangling keys toward me. In an instant the engine shuts off and all around me is quiet and still. The world has halted, allowing me to put my head back and take a deep breathe. The car door is awkward and heavy, but I manage to swing it open. My knees are stiff and locked from the long drive so I resort to slowly shuffling across

the sand-covered white rocks to reach the garage. Holding the keys at my waist I shuffle through the jingling mess until I find the one that unlocks this old garage standing before me. The lock is a dull gold color, and I remember to put the key in upside down to unlock it. The hinges are rusty from the salt air and they moan with age as I force the door open. Once settled dust flies in front of my face and white paint chips slowly fall to the thin layer of sand covering the rough concrete floor. I cross the threshold into the darkness and manage to find the thin string dangling from the ceiling. The lights flicker for a second until finally turning on for good. They make a barely audible buzzing sound, similar to the one that a muted television makes. Arms fully extended, I reach up into the rafters and wrap my fingers around the black leash of my 8 foot Nat Young Custom. A slight tug on the leash causes particles of sand and old wax to fall into my face. I finagle the board out the open door, slip into my worn in wetsuit, and instinctively head for the nearest working sandbar.

The grass underneath me is thick and it tickles the bottoms of my bare feet. When I get to the front of my house I gently open the waist high gate of the white picket fence, and as I step into the street I hear the faint click of the latch behind me. It's still dark. I take a deep breath as the cool sea breeze brings a welcome shiver down my spine. The salt air makes my feet coarse, and I can feel the gritty asphalt that is Central Avenue imprinting itself into my toes. As I calmly stroll across the street, I stop right in the center of the double yellow line and take one big look around me. All the traffic lights are red, and not a soul is out. The shoobies are in their warm, generic rental houses, and the summer partiers with their "Senior Week 2011" shirts are finished with their bong rips and beer pong for the night and are most likely passed out on a couch in a cramped condo that reeks of cheap weed and spilled Steel Reserve. These people, deep in their ephemeral slumber, miss the golden hour. I pity them, for they must leave this timeless wonderland in five hours to return to their dead end lives and stuffy cubicles. Not me. I am free to take a walk around, see what there is to see, and enjoy the tranquility while it lasts, because it too will be gone soon. Yes, even the intangible peacefulness will eventually be paved over by real estate agencies and building companies. I may be a dreamer, but one day these companies will show up at this town's doorstep with their checkbooks and bulldozers and they will be beaten back, far and away from here. Maybe one day. As I cross the parking lot I notice graffiti on the back of the visitor information hut. In scribbled block letters the words "Locals Only. All groms fuck off or drown" are spray painted at an angle. The once dripping black paint has dried below each letter. Ocean City, New Jersey: America's number one family resort.

The sun is just rising as I walk onto the beach, and I dig my toes into the cool, soft sand. I am overcome with a feeling of warmth as Apollo's arms welcome me home. The lifeguards are still asleep with the rest of the world, and the day-trippers haven't yet intruded on the holy land. However, I am able to make out three dots in the lineup. Three locals are out enjoying the wonderful gift that Mother Nature has presented to them. I

wade out into waist-deep water, and the Atlantic's early chill lets me know I am still alive. I paddle out with the other locals and join the lineup. We make our silent, subtle greetings. No words are necessary; in fact, any unnatural sound would ruin the serenity of the moment. I recognize one of them. His name is Mark. He is probably in his early forties, very tan, and has shoulder length dirty blonde hair that just barely conceals the back-up joint that he keeps behind his left ear. He owns his own little landscaping business. He cuts some grass here, trims some hedges there. He does just enough work to make ends meet but not enough to technically work for a living, and he still surfs whenever he wants to. I've seen him cutting grass, stop right in the middle of the person's lawn, and look out towards the ocean with this look of indescribable hope on his face. A hope that maybe his lawnmower will break, or his car won't start, and that he will have no choice but to head to the surf and search for that moment of perfection that all surfers dream about. He drives this old, beat up yellow Volkswagen shaggin' wagon. It has brown rust in a few spots and looks like an aged banana. There is no board rack up top so all of his boards just stick out the back window. The most interesting part of the car is the side of it. On the left side is a spray painted black cross with "Jesus Surfs" written in, with the one word written horizontally and the other vertically. He surfs on an old longboard and has this swagger about him that is straight out of 70's Dogtown.

I sit in the lineup for a bit until I catch my first wave. It is gradual and building and I catch it well before it breaks for a good twenty second ride, but for all I know it lasted an hour. I pump as hard as I can as the wave dies, hoping to prolong its strength for a little bit longer and ride until I can feel my fins start to graze the ocean floor. I paddle back out past the breakers this time and sit on my board so I can watch the other surfers take their turn. I look down and notice my feet naturally gliding through the water. And as I look ahead of me at the shore and behind me at the endless horizon, I can't help but smile, and I roll off the side of my board into the dark blue water, look up to the blinding light penetrating the watery surface, and watch my air bubbles slowly surface.



John.

Erica Leinmiller '13

In the evening, John graces the hallway, an abnormally large book in his hands. From such a skinny man, a booming, angry, teasing voice. "Come, come, you wasp; i' faith, you are too angry." Then high and haughty, challenging: "If I be waspish, best beware my sting." He turns each time his voice changes, a dialogue monologue. I can almost imagine exactly where the characters stand, and their stances. His eyes never leave the page to track those who pass him by; they do not exist in his realm. His feet cannot stay still; they dance along with his animated reading and staccato interjections as he interrupts himself in a fury of ancient, fixed conversation. He wears a bandana about his shaven head; a grey button-down, short-sleeved shirt from the Coffee Mess with only 3 buttons fastened- revealing a very white chest with more blond hair than one would expect from a man so unformidable; straight leg, somewhat loose jeans that emphasize how his thighs are only as big as his calves. He reminds me of a sparrow- hopping back and forth with such animation. Low and teasing: "Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail." High again in quick reply: "In his tongue." The Shakespearean contentions sound so out of place as others in the hallway call to each other with "What's up, dude?" and "Just chillin', bro," but he seems completely at home, the look on his face one of enraptured intensity. He continues his dance, set to iambic verse, until the Scene, the Act is finished. Only then does he look up, as if seeing his surroundings for the first time, turn slowly on his heel, and exits the public hallway.

Entering his room is like entering a humanities haven: a full bookshelf stands higher than my head, a candle burns on the corner of the desk while an espresso machine takes up the left half. We sit on cheap office chairs, and in the sacred silence he hands me a few sheets of paper. He swivels slightly to let his eyes scan the shelves as I reverently read poems so apparently written as an expression of the deepest kind of love. She becomes the rocky crags of Alaska in their awe-inspiring wonder but also the reason why he yearns to return from such sublime nature, for just saying her middle name evokes more of a thrill than even the glaciers are capable of inspiring. I know that only a few people have ever, or will ever, be permitted to share in the delicate pleasure of these sonnets. Only after I place the papers on the desk will he look at me, waiting for my judgment because his face implies it is valued, but also secure in the knowledge that his work is beautiful. "You must really love her," I say. "I did," he replies softly, "but it's all over now." And my heart grows sad, because the world has lost something beautiful now that the earnest passions of this innocent man have lost their object, their reason for existence.

We enter the silence of an empty theater, and he points at a particular chair four rows from the back and seven seats in- "That one"- then proceeds to march towards it and sit down, satisfied that this is the perfect, and only, spot of the hundreds available that would have satisfied him. We slide down and prop our calves on the chairs in front

of us, languid and comfortable but thoughtful. His jeans pull up to reveal black leather boots laced up his calf with an inch-high, chunky sole. His green felt jacket looks vaguely Russian. As he talks, his face grows more animated until it contorts in fits of passionate emotion that I am unused to seeing. Even so separate from events and humanity, he cannot minimize his frustration, his disgust for the evils that men do to one another. His jaw drops as he speaks the word “evil,” his eyes shut tight against the world and skewed as he moves his entire head in the effort to eject the syllables from his lips. The intense anger over his personal inability to end all of the evil in the world surprises me; here is a mellow, if slightly melancholic, man now ready to fight to the death. He acts the same as always: cordial if not extroverted, genuinely concerned with others’ well-being. But his reasons are different – act the gentleman because that’s the way a man should act, or because no one else will; have faith in the world because it’s a beautiful place, or because despair only leads to misery. I can’t notice the difference unless I look at his face when he is not consciously doing anything, only thinking and staring off; then, the slight downturn of his mouth and the corners of his eyes suggest a deep sadness.

I cannot help smiling when he walks into a classroom with his books in a brown leather belt. “What are you doing?” “Well, this is how they used to carry their books, so I wanted to see how it worked.” He sits down contentedly and unstraps his books, prepared for class without pencil or paper since he cannot bear to write in a book and taking notes on literature seems inadequate for the depth of discussion. Cappuccino in hand, bent slightly forward, he looks like an eager, if tired, little boy who is trying to be a good man in a world with too few of them.



From Boy to Man

Cheyann Essley '13

A chubby boy with a baby face trails behind me, dragging his favorite blanket, or rather what is left of it. He only knows one word – “Why?” His curiosity is never satisfied. Years pass and the chubby boy develops a gift for making others laugh, and a talent for causing me to feel burning rage. His new favorite words are “it’s her fault.” A tall, lean and mean young man emerges from the boy. He doesn’t play with me anymore. He doesn’t hold Mom’s hand anymore. He’s brave enough, or stupid enough, to fight with Dad now. Four words fly from his mouth – “just leave me alone.”

I love the young man as much as I loved the chubby babe. Now he is a protector, fighting for those who can’t fend for themselves. He willingly sacrifices being with the people he loves so that someone else can go home instead. He is the man I hold closest to my heart. However, there are times when I wish the chubby boy with his blanket and the big smile missing baby teeth was beside me again. He would be holding my hand, and I would pray that he will never let go.



Lost Pines

Carlos Rosende '12

Ten years ago on an oven-baked day
In the mottled shade of loblolly pines
A boy scratched his name in parched, cracked clay
A whittled stick scraping jagged lines.

Drifting dust wandered in rays of sunlight
As green canvas tents flapped in the breeze.
Tall branches rustled with grackle flight.
Time had no meaning beneath slender trees.

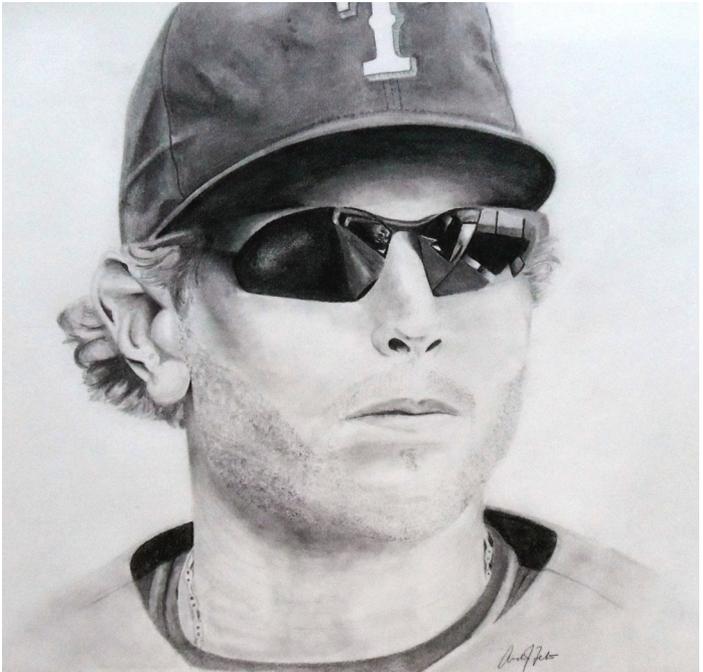
A brittle limb snapped off in a gust
And fell on electrical wire.
Cascading sparks, the inferno's first thrust,
Ignited a ravenous fire.

Ten years later a moonscape remains
Burnt black poles rise across charcoal plains.





The Joker Luke Walsh '14 , Watercolor pencil



John Hamilton Andrew Felton '14, Graphite

Two in One

Cheyann Essley '13

Lisa walks with a slight skip in her step, as if springs are attached to the bottom of her lilac purple sneakers. She waves and smiles at everyone as she walks down the blue and white halls of her high school. With every smile she gives, Lisa reveals the dimples God gave her. Lisa is the type of girl you want to be with, the typical teacher's pet, and everyone's friend from the jock to the acne-scarred geek in the corner. Lisa has no enemies.

Lisa has a secret. There is something about her that makes her different from her peers, something that makes the smiling girl with the purple shoes no longer exist. Lisa has an enemy, a person she fears more than the most poisonous snake or the hairiest spider. Her name is Veronica.

Veronica is the opposite of Lisa. Veronica does not smile, period. She has dimples, but one would not know it, for she hides them under ghost white foundation and a grim expression. Veronica would not be caught wearing purple, or any color for that matter. Veronica chooses black for her wardrobe. The black clothes cause Veronica to become a shadow, a shadow that is never far behind Lisa.

Lisa's friends have never met Veronica, nor do they even know of her existence. Lisa prays daily that this remains unchanged. Lisa is glad that Veronica has not walked down the blue and white halls of her school, at least not yet. Veronica walks down dark alleys after she climbs out of Lisa's window, leaving hours after the moon has risen. Veronica smokes at the corner where Lisa waits for the bus, and she gets into fights behind the Payless where Lisa bought her purple sneakers.

Veronica has never done bodily harm to Lisa; has never caused her to bleed or fear for her physical safety. The reason Lisa fears Veronica is because of how mysterious she is. Lisa is never quite sure of the details in Veronica's life, who she has met or what she has done. Questions pop into Lisa's head throughout the day. What did Veronica do last night? Who did she talk to? Was it anyone I know? Did she reveal my secret?

Lisa fears that she will never get rid of Veronica; she will remain to be her shadow. Lisa cannot escape Veronica. No matter how fast Lisa runs or where she hides, Veronica is always there.

Lisa drags her feet on the stairs on her way to her room, seeing Veronica in every school picture and family portrait. Lisa gets to her room and opens her closet to put on her running shorts. She folds the black jeans and black sweater that were thrown on the floor and stows them away with the black combat boots.

Lisa is about to close the closet door when she spies someone in the mirror hanging inside the door. Veronica stares back at her. Lisa takes a few steps towards the mirror; Veronica gets bigger. Lisa retreats from the mirror; Veronica shrinks. Lisa wants to cry because she knows Veronica will still be there when she leaves. Veronica will be there in every reflection, wearing Lisa's purple sneakers as Lisa races past the store windows of her street for her afternoon run.

The Nail-biter

Erica Leinmiller '13

Skin in teeth,
catching, pulling.
Dead cells of a cuticle
stick between my teeth.
Firm edge of the nail
butts against enamel,
rubbing edge on edge
until it catches,
Ripping along-
A thin slice of protein,
poking inner cheeks,
Glides around my mouth.
Lingering remnant of childhood
In a woman otherwise grown.



Dr. Plutonin and the Box of Horrors

Alexander King '13

I turned my head this way and that, taking in the chaos all around me. Massive tents comprised of brightly striped canvas covered the vast expanse of the field, each with a large, hand-painted sign out in front, telling the spectators what attractions they could expect to see within. Thousands of people milled about, making the paths between the tents seethe like a shifting sea of bodies which seemed impossible to navigate. Waves of colorful performers splashed along within the sea, becoming visible for brief moments before being engulfed again by the more drab colors of the circus patrons. The rich and the poor rubbed shoulders with no concern for social standing, treating each other as if things had always been this way.

There was something mystical about this place. Whether it was due to the sickly-sweet aroma of popcorn, sugar, and body odor wafting through the air or the incredible volume of chattering voices and shouting carnie's though was impossible to tell. Or perhaps it was the nomadic, gypsy-like nature of the performers that held the magic which enthralled those within the circus confines. Within days, an enormous section of flat, featureless land had given rise to a festival of colors, people, noises, aromas, and animals unlike anything that many of these people had ever seen before and, by the end of the week, it would all be gone again with nothing but the worn, muddy paths created between the tents remaining to show its passage.

Throughout the joyous insanity, one particular sight caught my eye and held it. The enormous board stood out among the others for both its size and the absence of vivid color that it held. In a constantly shifting world of bold oranges, fiery reds, and shockingly bright greens and blues, this sign had the audacity to be different, standing out merely for its contrasting black background and white letters, letters which read "Dr. Plutonin and His Box of Infinite Horror."

Apparently, I was not the only person attracted by this oddity, for surrounding this tent was a massive gathering of patrons, anxiously awaiting something. Upon closer inspection, I realized that the crowd was surrounding a small stage upon which rested a large wooden box in the shape of a standard coffin, as well as a thin, wiry man who was obviously getting along in his years. He wore a beautiful, violet coat and tails with a large, well-shaped black top hat upon his head.

From under the top hat stuck several wild shocks of wispy silver-white hair, each sprouting out in a different direction. A thin, golden, wire-framed monocle hung in one eye, sitting just above a frothy, white mustache that seemed too large for his face. That monocle was what drew me to the oddest feature of this strange man. Behind that monocle lay one sapphire-blue eye, the color of the sky on a bright summer day. Next to it, however, was a piercing brown one that seemed to move of its own accord, gazing into the soul of each man, woman, and child who happened to pass within its swiveling gaze. The effect

was unnerving.

As I watched, a noise started from within the coffin. At first, it was just a muffled voice, calling to be let out. Then, it became a thumping noise, as though someone would punch their way out from within the box's confines. Finally, the muffled voice became a shriek as the person within the box called out for help. He couldn't take it anymore. Through all of this, the crowd watched, silently, expectantly, waiting to see the man come out of the box. Not a sound was heard besides the man's pleas for release and not a single person took their eyes from the stage.

Eventually, after the screaming and banging had gone on for a while, Dr. Plutonin clapped his hands and two large, thug-looking men in black vests and bowler hats stepped out from behind the curtain that was the backdrop of the stage. They moved forward and lifted the mysterious box off of the table it lay upon and stood it upright, much like one sees a sarcophagus in pictures of museum exhibits, only far less pleasing to the senses. Then, three locks were undone and the door of the plain, black box was swung wide open, revealing the man who stood within, shaking violently.

The man stumbled forward towards the edge of the stage. Still, the crowd was silent. Finally, when the man caught his breath, he looked at Dr. Plutonin expectantly. Plutonin merely shook his hand and informed the man that he had only lasted six minutes. This part confused me until I saw the other sign, which I had missed before, leaning against the stage. This one read: "\$2.00 to enter the Box of Horror, last 20 minutes- receive \$40.00.

Forty dollars!?! Surely that was a mistake. Nobody in their right mind would hand out forty dollars for someone just lying in a box for twenty minutes. Then again, the last man had only lasted six minutes, not even half of the required time. What was in that box that was so damn horrible?

Eventually, the large thug-men helped the last contestant from the stage, rather gruffly, and Dr. Plutonin began calling for the next contestant. To my surprise, not a single person approached the stage. Not one person raised his hand. Nobody was going to compete for the forty dollars. Immediately, I began scrounging through my pockets. I had exactly two dollars and I was not going to pass up this opportunity. Forty dollars would feed me and my brother for two weeks and there was no way that I wouldn't be able to lay in that box for a mere twenty minutes. Twenty minutes was no time at all.

I clenched my two dollars tightly in my fist, waving them in the air above my head as I approached the stage. Dr. Plutonin pointed to me with his cane and summoned me onto the stage in his best stage voice. I leapt gracefully onto the raised wooden planks, handed over my two dollars, and approached the coffin-like box. As far as I could tell, it was empty except for the soft, thick velvet that lined the inside. I really didn't understand what the man had been so upset about. The last thing I saw as one of the thug-men closed the door was the crazy Dr. Plutonin, bowing, bending slightly at the waist and starting his watch, grinning at me wickedly as his one eye continued to swivel over the crowd, search-

ing the souls of each individual.

Initially, the darkness inside was comfortable. I stood with my arms at my side, relaxed in complete darkness and silence, even if I was slightly amazed at how well the coffin-like box kept the outside world at bay. Then, I felt the coffin lifted and placed upon the table. Now it was just me and my thoughts within the box for the next twenty minutes. Easy. Or so I thought.

At first, I counted the passing seconds: 1... 2... 3... 4... 5... 6... and so on. Somewhere around forty-three seconds, I noticed the box beginning to get stuffy and it hit me just how hard I was breathing. I felt relaxed, but my heart must have been pounding away like a locomotive at top speed. I tried to calm my breathing, but the harder I fought to control it, the worse it got. I would just have to think about something else.

Instead of my breathing or my pounding heart, I continued to focus on the counting. I was at eighty-something now. Or was it ninety? I really wasn't sure. When had I lost count?

I kept counting anyways, figuring that I would only be a few seconds off when I got to the end. No big deal, right? At least I had something to look forward to. Speaking of which, what was I counting to anyways? How many seconds were there in twenty minutes? Let's see. Two times sixty was twelve, carry the one, tack on another zero...

Damn it was getting hot in this thing! And now I had lost count again. What had I been at? One-twenty? One-thirty? Yeah, that sounded right. One-hundred and thirty seconds, plus fifteen. Hell, I was almost a quarter of the way done. No sweat.

It was at that time that a bead of sweat began running across my brow and down my cheek. Wow, it was really warm in here. The little, watery bead of sweat began to move more quickly. I blinked and reached up to brush it away, but forgot just how limiting the complete darkness around me really was.

It didn't hurt, but the feeling of my knuckles banging against the door of Dr. Plutonin's box wasn't exactly comforting. I tried again to reach up and brush that tiny bead away, but it was no good. I just couldn't reach it within the confines of my prison void. I felt buried alive. Trapped. For a few seconds, that little piece of condensation on my face was all I could think about. It was kind of cold, and it tickled as it rolled across my cheek. And not being able to reach it was driving me insane.

I could smell my own body odor now, permeating throughout the coffin and it scared me. I was breathing awfully fast and my heart was pounding away like a bass drum. I really did want to get out of here now. It couldn't be much longer now, right? I had lost count again.

I tried rearranging myself since lying on my back had become uncomfortable, but I banged my knee and shoulder, hard. The confines of the box felt extremely restrictive now, and the more I thought about it, the worse it got. I almost felt as if the coffin was tightening around me, constricting me like a giant snake, squeezing every last breath from

my sweat-drenched body.

I tried to think rationally now. How long had it been? Fifteen minutes? Yeah. It had to be at least that. I couldn't breathe, couldn't move, couldn't see, and couldn't smell anything besides my own soaked armpits. This was miserable, but I'd be damned if I wasn't going to hold on just a little longer. I just wish I could see something besides blackness.

But the sweat kept beading. The coffin-box was extremely stifling now. I couldn't stand it and I couldn't move, couldn't get comfortable. Parts of my body were going numb from laying so still. And from panic. There, I said it. I was panicking. I couldn't take it. I was trapped. I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe. I felt the effects of the sensory deprivation, like the world was closing in around me. My heart was pounding and I felt as if a massive weight was sitting on my chest. I had to get out. My time had to be up by now. What was Plutonin playing at?

I began yelling for Dr. Plutonin to open the box. Still no light. What the Hell? I had to get out. With all the strength I could muster due to lack of leverage, I began banging on the underside of the lid. I wanted out. I was going to die in here, there was no more air to breathe.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, I felt the box begin to shift under me. Slowly. They needed to hurry up and let me out of here. I kept banging as hard and fast as I could. Now. I needed to get out now.

Eventually, the door creaked open and light flood my eyes, carrying with it all the glaring colors of the circus all around the small stage. I had forgotten that it was there. I stumbled forward a few steps, then fell to my hands and knees, my lungs taking in all the clean, fresh air they could handle. I guess I had been far more panicked than had realized though, because my body wretched and I vomited onto the stage before me. When I had finally purged my system and refilled my lungs with air again, I felt embarrassed. I knew everyone around the stage was watching me, their eyes focused only on my meek form. I had forgotten about their existence as well. But why should I be embarrassed? I was certain I had made the time and that the bastard had tried to kill me. I glared at Dr. Plutonin with as much hatred as I could muster, but as I leered at him, he simply shook his head and showed me the face of his watch. I had lasted four minutes and fifty-eight seconds.





The Succubus & Trogdor Ian Remillard '15, Graphite on Paper



Untitled

Erin Edwards '12

On July 15, 2010, I was sitting on a train traveling from Baltimore, Maryland, to Wilmington, Delaware. The train was loaded with casual riders, most likely businessmen on their way home from the usual work day or young adults visiting friends they had not seen in a while. Whichever the case, the destinations I imagined for the other passengers seemed pleasant. I, on the other hand, struggled to avoid picturing the reality I would soon face. My eyes began to water, and the people around me grew quiet, distant. I was surrounded by people, but in that train, on that particular summer day, I was all alone. I sat still the rest of the trip; unable to move or think. I was paralyzed with fear and it would not be the first time.

Finally, the train reached Delaware, and I hustled through the station to the nearest exit to find my older sister's green Saturn Ion, passed down from my father to me and finally her, parked out front. She and Nicole, a family friend, sat in the front seats and laughed about the usual boy gossip and song lyrics that blared on the radio. I sat in the back, quiet, with those dreadful tears forcing their way to the surface once again.

When I entered my house, I failed to greet my mom and Noreen, Nicole's mom. I barged in and planted myself at my dad's side. His eyes were heavy and opened just wide enough to recognize who I was, and his dry lips parted just enough to whisper an exhausted, "Hello, Erin" in a barely audible tone. I crouched down and clasped his hand. A chair was set behind me, and I sat level with him and rubbed his arm in smooth, slow repetitions, mesmerized by the freckles and hair that sprinkled his weak forearm. The other four fell silent, staring at me as I lost the battle with those persistent tears that fell down my face. Neither tears nor stares mattered, though, because I could not take my eyes from his pale, sunken face. I wanted him to look at me and smile and tell me it was going to be all right. I longed for him to squeeze me tight in his arms like the little girl I used to be and the strong man I had always known him to be. But those days were gone. He knew it, and I knew it. As much as we remained positive throughout the chemotherapy treatments, we would be fooling ourselves at that moment to think life could go back to those natural roles of father and daughter.

I spent that month before summer school babysitting my dad, something most children, including me, would not expect as a summer job. At the age of twenty-one I never imagined that I would be helping my father change, assisting him in the bathroom, feeding him, or rubbing his back as he vomited everything I had just fed him. I am unsure of the effectiveness of the time we spent together, mostly because he was asleep or overmedicated for the duration, but it was beneficial at least. Despite the feeling of being a prisoner in my own home, I felt lucky that I had that opportunity to share those intimate moments at his weakest hours. I learned most about the man he was during those sessions. Perhaps he in turn saw the woman I was becoming.

We carried all ninety pounds of my father's flesh and bones to an adjustable bed that the hospital supplied for hospice patients. We sat there on the couch for a while - all five of us, my mom, my sister Maggie, Nicole, and Noreen - watching reruns of "The Office", momentarily taking our minds from the man in the hospital bed. Noreen and Nicole left when the show ended, and shortly after my brother arrived home from work. I was glad because I wanted it to be just the five of us, my immediate family in the house that night.

Like the nurses we had become, after spending countless hours cleaning bedpans, delivering trays of food, prescribing medicine, and draining stomach fluid, we assembled and delegated duties for the night and the next day. Maggie and I were assigned "night duty" and therefore slept downstairs in the small television room where my father had been living for the past month. Before dispersing, we said goodnight. His breaths grew shorter and less consistent. I tried to place the oxygen mask, a newly acquired piece of equipment that I was not familiar with yet, around his head, but he fearfully grabbed at it. I spoke to him as I would a baby: "I know, I know. It's no fun. All right, it's okay, calm down. We won't use it then." I wrapped my arms around him to place his head gently on the pillow. His body resembled the pictures I saw of Holocaust victims, bones protruding through a sheer layer of skin with sunken eyes of anguish. This was no longer my father. Maggie slept on the couch while I claimed the recently purchased air mattress that covered the remaining portion of floor space. The only light that remained was the flicker of the muted television screen and small fluorescent green numbers shining the time across our Verizon cable box. I stared blankly at the screen for a while, but it was too hard to ignore the loud exhales coming from the hospital bed above me. Maggie was dozing in and out by now.

I reached for the remote to turn off the wasted electricity, something I knew would usually bother him. Suddenly movement came with the unforgiving breaths, and he was signaling to me. His arms waved at his legs, desperately trying to grab them as if to check they were still there. Maggie woke as I interrogated him, trying to decipher his motions and help the best I could. She told me he wanted his legs to the side of the bed. "Trust me," she said, "this has happened before." I turned on the light, grabbed his legs, and swung them over the side as quickly and painless as possible. I held his body as he caressed his legs and relaxed for a moment, realizing his stick-like legs were still intact. When he looked satisfied and ready to get back to sleep, I carefully placed his legs back on the bed, treating them like mom's favorite Christmas ornaments that she affectionately smothered in bubble wrap to keep from breaking. His body, a fragile stained glass window resembling the many he pointed out to me as a young girl in mass, caused me to fear that by moving him, I would kill him.

I turned the light off and slid back down onto the unnecessarily loud air mattress. I lay on my stomach and intently watched him. Sleep was not an option when a simple breath could not come easily to him. I stared with tense eyes at his rib cage and chest, counting the moments that passed like minutes on those beady, green digits in that small

television room until he would gasp for air again.

My sister whispered my name, “Erin. . . Erin, you can’t sleep either?” I continued to stare forward and replied, “Listen to him. I can’t look away.” She rose from the couch and turned on the lamp by his bed. He woke too and flailed his bony limbs about reaching for his face. Maggie squatted down, nose to nose with him, “What’s wrong, Dad? What’s wrong?” No answer. His eyes rolled from the front to the back of his head. He sat groping his cheeks and scalp as if worried he was not inside his body any longer. “Where are you, Dad? Are you here? Are you leaving?” She pressed on with the questions though she knew it was a lost cause. “I love you, Dad.” She kissed him on the cheek and walked past me to the kitchen towards the bathroom.

I was crouched at the bottom of his bed like the little knobby-kneed, blond-haired, hazel-eyed girl who rode atop his shoulders at amusement parks and who shot for hours outside on the basketball court he handcrafted in our driveway, hoping he would be watching from the window, somehow impressed with my work ethic, if nothing else. I stayed at the end of his bed and rested my hand on his right shin. I whispered in a shaky voice, “I love you so much. I’ll always love you.” I paused for a moment, nervous that Maggie would come back into the room, “You’re the best, Dad.” There it was. I relieved myself of words I longed to say for years but could not.

We switched sleeping positions, Maggie on the mattress and me on the couch. Perhaps we thought it would help us sleep. Maggie gradually fell asleep as I lay there awake still watching Dad’s chest rise and fall enormous amounts with each deep pant. The intervals grew further and further apart, and the breaths became slower. I could no longer watch the struggle and averted my eyes but desperately listened. Between each breath I begged for another to eventually follow.

Breathe. Breathe. Come on, breathe. Please breathe. Please breathe. Breathe. Breathe, Dad. Please breathe. Damn it, just breathe. Each inhale had the potential to suck the life right out of him. The pattern became constant, and it was not long before I found myself turning to the figure Catholic school taught me to be my last hope of an instant miracle, God.

“God, can you hear me? I need you. It’s important.” His wheezing intensified and my prayer took a turn. “God, don’t let him die. Please don’t let him die. Please, please! He doesn’t deserve to die. Not now, not yet.” Subconsciously, I told myself I would change my ways and be more like my devoted Father for the rest of my life if it meant he could stay in this world to see my family grow old, or at least older. These thoughts whirled through my mind until exhaustion invaded my body and I unwillingly slipped into unconsciousness.

I began to dream and in my dreams, there was a party...we all wore black and white and danced. Dad walked through the door in his mailman uniform, which resembled more of a military uniform. He was all smiles, youthful and healthy. He showed me his ribbons and patches. He even let me wear his cover and I was proud to show it off although it

was a man's hat -- old-fashioned and too large. I pedaled down the old neighborhood street where I used to ride my bike and deliver newspapers every morning. I remembered the cracks in the side walk that I avoided stepping on daily. The details of the road and homes were impeccable. I briskly rode down the street, pedaling with ease and comfort. As I went on, my vision became narrowed and everything blurred into a tunnel so small that all my eyes could see was the road ahead of me going for miles.

I jolted awake gasping for air. Maggie woke at my shriek. I immediately looked over at the bed. It stopped; his chest stopped. I waited, hoping I was in between breaths and it was just taking a while. No luck. He was not breathing anymore. "His chest, Maggie! His chest, it's not moving. Get Mom!" Maggie went up the stairs, slowly. I did not want to go over to him. I did not want it to be real. I had no choice. I stood and walked with my hand stretched out. I placed it right in the middle of his chest. Nothing. Motionless, he was. I checked his pulse, giving it one last attempt, maybe I had missed something. Nothing. He felt wet and cold. I overheard Maggie gently waking my mother and saying, "I think you should come downstairs." I yelled in anxiety, "MOM! MOM!" I knelt down next to the bed, closed his eyes, and kissed his damp cheek. We stood around him. Silent. I burst out into tears. Oddly, I do not remember needing to cry at that moment but rather wanting to cry because it seemed like the right thing to do. I stopped soon after as we continued to stare.

My mom moved closer to him and held his hand. Maggie went to the other side of the bed and stroked his arm. She began to speak, "Dad, I'm going to miss you always telling me what to do." My mom interrupted her, "He's not there, Maggie. Stop saying goodbye. He's gone." There was nothing left of him but the outer casing in which his soul had lived.



Further Interpretations of Real-Life Events

Benjamin Etringer '15

“Hey, Mister!” Will cried, “Mister!”

A tall man in a beige overcoat looked over his shoulder to see where this high-pitched voice was coming from. “Well, hey there, little guy,” he said softly. “What can I do for you?”

“Mister, I really want one of those bouncy-balls in the machine,” Will replied. “My mommy gave me enough money, but it don’t work,” he continued as he held up his smudged dollar-bill as if it were a prized trophy.

“That’s a lot of money you have there, little guy. What’s your name?” the man asked.

“Will,” he replied rather sheepishly.

“That’s certainly a nice name to have.” The man smiled down at Will and began fishing around in his front pocket. “You’re in luck, Will. I just got out of the store, and I have a shiny new quarter for you.” The man handed the shiny coin down to him, but Will shook his head no.

“I can’t just take it—that would be stealing!” Will exclaimed. “I was just wondering if you might could trade my dollar for some quarters,” he went on as he looked up hopefully to the tall man who was grinning down at him.

“I’ll tell you what,” the man kept smiling. “I don’t have any more change on me right now, but I bet I can find some in my car for you. Can you wait right here until I return?”

“Sure thing, Mister!” Will replied jubilantly as he sat down on the curb, still holding his prized dollar-bill in his hands.

Minutes later the man came back and spotted Will sitting down. “I thought you might like a variety of coins, so I brought you a little bit of everything.” The man grinned as he walked over to Will. He held out his palm to reveal a small handful of change that was easily over the one dollar amount.

“But I only want the quarters,” Will replied as he looked away from the man’s eyes. “I just want quarters.”

The man withdrew his hand and began digging through his small pile of change. After a few moments, he pulled out the four quarters and offered them to Will, “Well, here you go, little guy. Don’t spend it all at once.” The man winked down at him.

“Gee, thanks a lot!” Will smiled happily as he handed over his dollar-bill and took the four silver coins. “Thanks!”

“Now I think you have a new bouncy-ball waiting for you inside,” the man smiled. “It was sure nice meeting you, Will.”

Will rushed off smiling with new life in his eyes and yelled back, “Thanks again, Mister!” As the door closed behind Will, the man pocketed the bill, still grinning to himself, and made his way back to his car.

It was the first time John had smiled since his wife left him three months ago. As he climbed back into his four-door sedan, he couldn't help but wonder why this boy had so patiently waited for him to return with the quarters. There were plenty of other people entering and exiting the store—why not ask them? Was there something that made him stand out from the rest? Surely the cashier at the counter could have made change. He couldn't help but wonder, why me?

As John drove back to his small apartment on the east side of town, he thought about his marriage. How his wife, Kristine, had left him for her boss. He knew he should have seen it coming. All the signs were right in front of his face. They had no children together, and any attempts that he made were futile. During all those nights of sex, he could remember seeing her look away from him when she should have been climaxing. When he finished, she would just button her flannel nightgown up in silence and go to sleep.

“Fucking bitch,” he muttered to himself as he turned the volume up on his radio. He seemed to find comfort in talking to himself when he was alone, which was often the case since he had disconnected himself from all of his old friends.

“That’s gonna be six dollars, John” the parking lot manager said with a grin as John pulled into the familiar garage.

“Sure thing,” John replied. He had never taken the time to ask the man’s name, and figured it would be useless to do so now. He had enough problems as it was and didn’t need to bog himself down with others. As he flipped through the bills in his wallet, he paused for a second and ran his finger over the smudged dollar. “Here you go,” he said as he handed the manager a different bill.

John climbed the stairs to his fourth-floor apartment and settled into his cold bed. He figured that he would be used to being alone by now, but he still felt awkward with no one there beside him. As John tossed and turned in his bed, trying to find a comfortable position, he thought about Will. Slowly drifting off to sleep, he found comfort in how innocent and oblivious the little boy must be about the outside world.

“That little guy—” John whispered to himself, “he’s got it all figured out. That’s how we all need to be...ignorant of how horrible this world really is.”

John woke up to the rays of sunlight splitting the blinds of his one window. “Oh, God, what time is it?” he rushed out of bed to get his clothes on. “Great, already thirty minutes late to work.” He always wanted to have an exciting career, maybe traveling around the world as a biologist, or exploring underground caverns. However, when he married, he relinquished his dreams and settled into a more stable routine at the power plant.

The traffic to work was miserable, and he had been arriving late to work a lot lately. So, it was no surprise to him when the boss fired him. John just nodded his head and remained silent while he packed his belongings into his cardboard box.

“I had it coming, you know,” he said to himself, “I had it coming.” He knew that he could hold off for quite some time unemployed. Fortunately he was never a spend-thrift and still had a substantial amount of money saved in the bank.

He thought once again about Kristine. How only three years ago, the two of them had been the perfect couple. The two lovers had just returned from a night at the movies. They didn't even make it all the way up to their apartment before they were both undressed on the stairwell. Her body could have been sculpted by the gods. The small dimples on the low of her back popped out with intensity as she arched backwards. Her bronze skin beaded with sweat droplets as he penetrated deep inside of her. The sweet moan of passion reverberated down the hall.

"Ay, man, you gonna go or what?!" some guy in a red sports car yelled after honking his horn numerous times. A small train of cars had piled themselves behind him, and all of them were honking fiercely.

John instantly snapped out of his reverie and proceeded through the stoplight. He continued to drive into that same lot with the same manager whose name he still didn't know.

"That's gonna be six dollars, John" the parking lot manager said with the same grin.

"You know, I never got your name." John said as he handed him the money.

"It's Will," he replied, still smiling, "You have a good day now, y'hear?"

"We'll see."

As John made his way into his apartment, he sat down on the edge of his bed and opened the newspaper. He flipped through advertisements and useless articles until something caught his attention.

Buzz...Buzz Buzz.

He had not received a call in over a month; in fact he was rather surprised it still worked.

"Hey, John," he recognized that old familiar voice. It seemed like ages since he last heard that sweet pitch. "I heard about your job," Kristine continued, "and I left Arnold. I realized what a stupid mistake I made, and I want you back." After a few minutes of no response, she came again, "I know you're there, John. I can hear you breathing. Please answer me."

"Yeah," John finally responded, noticing his heavy breath. He could tell the clouds were clearing up, as the sun began to lighten up the words on the newspaper, but it was still cold in the room. A breeze came from the window as the paper fell to the floor. His eyes ran over what he could not believe. Young Boy Tragically Killed. John read how the boy had been playing in the parking lot. Witnesses testified that they saw the boy wander into the street, but John knew what had happened. How the bouncy-ball had made one bad bounce into the road. How that innocent boy had so innocently followed. How that bus driver slammed on his brakes just a second too late.

As John read into the article he realized how his life had been nothing but bouncy balls drifting into the road as he chased after them. He paused for a moment, why me?

“Yeah,” Kristine repeated. “Listen—let me come up there now. We have a lot to talk about.”

He then smiled. It was as though everything became clear to him in that one moment. “Hold on, Kristine, let me get ready.” He reached for the necktie Kristine had given him two Christmases ago. As he tied it so carefully around his neck, he couldn’t help but keep smiling. He headed to the sink and shaved for the first time in weeks, his handsome facial features no longer covered by the filthy scruff.

John picked up his phone, and answered, “You can come up now.” He reached into his wallet and pulled out the smudged dollar bill. He reached with the opposite hand and felt the soft strength of the silk as he tied the end to one of his belts.

As Kristine opened the door, her stomach dropped when she saw his body hanging lifelessly from the ceiling. She opened her mouth to scream, but vomited instead. His body swayed in the breeze of his apartment, the dollar bill still clinched between his fingers. The only thing that John left behind was the same smile that he gave the little boy, which remained fixed upon his face.

In the police report that followed, Kristine stated that it was her fault John killed himself. She explained every detail of the affair she had and the troubles he was having at work. At the end of the session when she had no more to say, the officer dismissed her.

“Go on home, now. Get some rest.”

“Thank you.”

As she departed the station, she heard the voice of the officer behind her talking to his deputy. “Ya found a newspaper up there? Naw, you can go on and throw that away. It don’t mean nuthin’.”



Untitled

John Fritts '12

Charles McIlroy did not know he had less than thirty minutes of life left to live. The eight drinks in the previous hour had begun to take effect and even standing upright was becoming difficult. The waitress he had smirked at three hours ago when he came in was now beginning to look striking. He ventured a smile at her, and when she blushed and looked at the floor his mind began to visualize having sex with her in the cabin he was holed up in. Maybe even in his car parked outside.

He did not know that in twenty four minutes and eighteen seconds, when he walked into an alley next to the bar to relieve himself, a piano wire would be wrapped around his throat. He did not know that he would struggle vainly as the wire would slice through his neck, releasing ebbing spurts of blood. He did not know that he would try to recall some point in his life as the light in his eyes in his eyes began to fade. Before the end, he would try to remember that point where he had veered onto a path he would bitterly regret everyday afterwards; and if he could only return to that place in time he could do it all differently and he wouldn't have ended up in a rundown pub in rural Oregon, drinking himself blind. That would be the final thought of his forty two years, eight days, and 31 minutes of his lifetime before the piano wire mercifully jerked back and snapped his neck; a thought of regret. Regret at the mistakes he had made. Regret at the road he had gone down. And regret at not noticing the quiet man with shockingly bright blonde hair sitting in the back of the bar while Charles was flirting with the waitress, the man who soundlessly slipped on a pair of surgical gloves as he followed Charles out of the bar and into the shadows of the alley.

As Charles' body began to stiffen the quiet man stooped down and rolled him over. He removed a small flashlight from his own jacket and checked both of McIlroy's eyes to make sure they were not moving. He put his right hand to his neck and waited the better part of a minute to confirm there was no pulse. Once he was satisfied that Charles was deceased he removed the wallet from the corpse's pocket and picked out a few loose bills. He unzipped Charles' jacket and rifled through it for a few moments until a shiny glint caught his attention, light bouncing off a small pocket watch with the initials C.M. engraved on the back side.

Tomorrow morning, when the news broke that a former Mafia accountant living in hiding under the assumed name of Charles McIlroy had been murdered in a botched robbery a dozen men would take credit. Four were goons, wannabes hoping that posing as hitmen would help them get laid. The remaining eight were professional triggermen who were down on their luck and needed a prominent job to resurrect their careers. Of these eight, five would try to contact Semion Mogilevich to collect the \$500,000 bounty that had been placed on McIlroy's head. But only one of these men would have the proof; something personal, a token of the kill.

The quiet man would take one last look around that night to make sure no one was in sight, then slowly walk back to his car and drive to the budget hotel he was staying in. Five minutes would be spent creeping through the parking lot and making sure no one else had vehicles with out of state plates. He would spend ten minutes in his room to make sure no one had entered in since he had left. He would place the pocket watch inside his travel bag and retire to sleep for five hours with the assurance that, when he woke up the next day, he would be \$500,000 richer.



Winged Victory Erica Leinmiller, Digital Photograph

My Mother's Smile

Max Millick '12

My mother has such a beautiful smile. Her laugh sounds like machine gun fire, but I like the intensity. It's such a funny laugh – infectious like the most pleasant disease. It sounds forced to some, fake, but I know it isn't. I know she likes my jokes. She tells me I'm the funniest kid.

On Tuesdays she drives me to tennis practice. We have to wake up early during the summer, and she makes me breakfast and we watch the news. I pretend to understand, but current events don't really interest me. Dad goes to work before we leave, and tells me to play hard. He says he loves her, and kisses her goodbye.

We clean up and I grab my orange hand-me-down duffle bag with my tennis racket and clothes and we head out the door. She locks up and we get in the car. I always forget to buckle up, but she always reminds me. I see her face in the mirror. "Safety first," she says. I roll my eyes and buckle up. It's uncomfortable.

We roll out of the driveway and pass by the neighbors' houses, and she beeps and waves to familiar faces. I see my friends playing in nearby yards, and wave to them. I can't wait to be done with tennis, so we can go play in the woods and pretend we're characters from Dragon Ball Z. I want to be Vegeta, even though he always loses to Goku in the show.

My mom notices the small things, at least most of the time. My least favorite song comes on the radio.

"Max, your favorite song!" She leans over to turn the music up. She knows I hate this song; this is her idea of a joke. I groan.

"Come on, mom." The machine gun laugh fires away. I try to be mad, but I can't help it; I laugh, too. She starts to sing along, but she's not very good. I laugh harder.

The blue Jeep Cherokee feels like a freight train as it crashes into the driver's side door. My mom is thrown to the right; her hands come off the wheel. I can't see what's happening, or where the car is going, anymore. Everything is blurry – we're spinning and the force is holding me against the seat. I can feel myself screaming, but I can't hear a thing beyond the sound of the two hulks of metal: tearing, crashing, smashing, ripping, burning. Glass shattering in surprise. Tires squealing in terror. We start to roll, and the world blurs again. Everything is so loud, everything is moving in every direction. And then everything stops. The car is rocking slightly. I see my mother's hair soaked with blood. Her limp hand rests on the dash. The radio is still playing.

The dream doesn't come every night anymore, only every once and awhile. When you wake up, it doesn't happen like it does in the movies. You don't jerk upright, drenched in sweat. You don't shout "no" to the air. You just open your eyes. The room is quiet. You can feel your heart beating, and your hand is clenched so tightly around your blanket that your knuckles hurt. A tear falls onto the pillow, then another. The sobs start small, but before long they rip through you like tornado winds.

I want her back.



Weeping Willow

Emily Meyer '12

Branches are dripping, dripping down
without a sound,
slowly sliding to the ground
like tears upon a child's face,
heartbreaking, and out of place.
By water do these giants grow?
Or with their tears, rivers sew?



Snake

Jack Gannon

As she awoke, she felt him wrapped entirely around her, and he was crushing her. Her ribs cracked, her neck began to twist, her breathing became labored. She struggled. She spit and swore and stabbed him with her eyeteeth, but she was finished. She never had a chance. Her last breath was in the arms of one she thought she loved. As he felt the heat leave her body, the heat began seeping from his as well, but it was not a problem.

The python released his tight hold and began the slow, steady process of swallowing her whole, having recently stretched enough to accommodate her entirely. She loved the feeling of sleeping next to him. Every time he slid into bed, he was cold, but she soon warmed him up. And she sometimes liked the feeling of a cool body slowly pressing against her. After the initial shock of touching his skin, warmth slowly seeped between the two parties, and the world beneath the covers reached a comfortable, cave-like atmosphere. Damp and fertile. A shelter from the outside, blankets and sheets trapped the two of them together, just the way each of them wanted.

She was slightly taller than he, but in the past week, it seemed he'd been stretching, willing himself to become the larger partner, wanting the advantage of size over his bunkmate. Maybe he was simply still growing, or maybe it was purely mental, but he seemed to be approaching her exact height. It must be a male thing, this burning desire to out-size any female in the room, and any other male for that matter. So silly, she thought. But if he needed to be larger to feel like a man, to be able to wrap himself completely around her, she could understand. That is, after all, how it is supposed to be. Male wrapping around female, total protection, total envelopment.

This was their relationship, their time in bed. When she saw him throughout the day, it was through glass. He was trapped, and she moved freely around him. It was only at night when they were truly together. She wished they could be together all day. She wished to let him out at all times, but it simply wasn't feasible. She couldn't really trust him around others. He had a reputation for swallowing them whole, drawing them in with his mouth and his quick tongue, ending them then and there. She'd seen him do it, she'd even brought him victims in the past, but she never suspected he could have his eye on her. They were much too close for such unpleasant acts.

Every night, he just kept growing. In one week, it seemed he'd added half a foot. It felt as though he now dwarfed her in bed, the bones of his chin now even with her lower lip when before she'd looked over his head. And he was thicker too, it seemed. He took longer to warm up, and she had more trouble getting her hands all the way around him, which had been easy in the past. She didn't know why, but something was different about his demeanor as well. He seemed to be after something. He seemed to look at her

with a different type of lust than usual. She was unsure of the meaning of this change or his intentions, but she decided not to confront him directly.

As she climbed in bed to sleep that night, she could feel a difference, and she looked at him with a questioning eye, eventually deciding to let her questions wait until morning. Turns out, they were answered sooner.



That Last Blink

Rebekkah Esquivel '15

The window dribbling my head like a basketball
My teeth chattering as if I were freezing
My legs vibrating from the bottom up
It is impossible to escape the discomfort
With every bump my organs hurdle and
With such force my skull against the window is released and pulled back
Suddenly, beneath my dreams,
My elbow takes a dive off a cliff
I immediately realize how I am lost
Stuck in an unfamiliar place and all alone
Why wouldn't they help me?
So many people just walked by and stared
The bus...
Is a terrible place to fall asleep





The Labyrinth Staff

Pictured (l-r): Alex King, Max Millick, Kris Hardy, Mike Diaz,
Raymond Sudduth, Susannah Johnson, Erica Leinmiller

The Labyrinth's Fabulous Editors



Krisandra Hardy
Editor-in-Chief



Erica Leinmiller
Assistant Editor-in-Chief



Max Millick
Poetry & Prose Editor



Mike Diaz
Poetry & Prose Editor



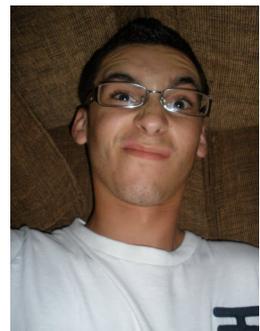
Susannah Johnson
Poetry & Prose Editor



John Williamson
Treasurer, Editor



Alexander King
Poetry & Prose Editor



Raymond Sudduth
Junior Editor

