

the forum

. in this issue

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The Yellow House on Ontario

by Sierra Blackwell
1st Place Effective Writing Winner

On August 4, 2010, my mother received a phone call from my grandmother. On August 6, 2010—my sixteenth birthday—my mother and I flew into New York from our home in Maryland. We met my grandmother at the airport terminal and drove her back to her apartment on Cleveland Avenue. My mother kept command of my grandmother's silver Kia that August afternoon. Out of the blue, she asked what I wanted for my sixteenth birthday. I shrugged. She smiled and asked, "How would you like a house?"

I hadn't lived in or even visited Niagara Falls, New York in seven years, so its transformation startled me. It used to be a beautiful place; the streets had been smooth and the city bright and clean; flowers and rows of homegrown vegetables used to decorate every block; the trees boasted healthy brown trunks and deep green foliage and every house with a fresh coat of paint, looking like those glossy houses you find in home decor catalogues. As my mother and I traversed the sketchy backstreets that we used to know, I noticed that the splendid houses of my youth had become dilapidated and dirty.

"You don't remember your dad, do you?"

My mother and I had left him just before my fourth birthday. I laughed nervously and looked out of the window to where my grandmother's church stood. The roof was caved in and crawling vines obscured the view of the brick exterior. I did remember my father a bit, a slightly chubby man with light yellow skin and hair that felt like sheep's wool. Basically, he was a stranger whose influence I saw everywhere. His money went towards the sofa that I sleep on and the ice cream and peach pie I eat with my mom. His money went towards my clothes, hair, and cosmetics, the cable television I watch late at night. My father was everywhere yet nowhere at the same time.

"Well, we used to live together, believe it or not. All three of us in this house I'm taking you to. You look just like your dad, have I ever told you that? Both of you are high yellow with nappy hair. But maybe he's changed by now."

"What do you mean?" I inquired with a raised eyebrow.

"Maybe he's fat. Maybe he got real black working around all that

electricity. Do you think so?"

I shrugged again; I didn't remember enough of him to have any opinion. "One thing's for sure; he's still the same Craig that I met years ago."

Who was the Craig that my mother met "years ago?" I only had a few specific memories of him, none of which I really took the time to dwell upon. We passed my grandmother's church and drove down a one-way street flanked by open fields of weeds. The weeds overtook the street and sprang up from cracks in the sidewalk. The silver Kia took a right onto Ontario Avenue and went straight for five blocks. The long stretch of road was by far the bumpiest and most neglected yet. The front yards that had been meticulously pruned in the past were now overtaken with weeds. The wispy white growths of dandelions filled the air and made the street cloudy with white fluff. A trio of stray cats walked out of an alleyway. The largest of the cats was black with a rotund belly; whether it was fat or pregnant I didn't know. The other two cats were in fact kittens; one with mange and the other limping along lethargically. Perhaps in their better days, those cats had glossy coats. Maybe they had only eaten the best food and played with the highest quality toys. Whatever had happened to them in Niagara Falls, something had broken them and destroyed them, leaving them as dilapidated as the yellow house my mother and I pulled in front of.

"Mother of God," my mother exclaimed. She massaged the bridge of her nose with her fingers. The wrinkles around her eyes seemed more pronounced than usual. "This is what your father left us?"

My memories of the house had faded with age, but I remembered enough of it to tell that it wasn't supposed to look so...broken. Charred wooden planks held on to the framework by mere splinters, the rain gutter dangled precariously off of the side of the house. My mom and dad made a family in this? My mother looked at me expectantly; my guess is that she wanted to see a clear reaction from me. Did she want me to frown and turn away? Did she want me to cry and ask about my father? No matter what she wanted, I couldn't bring myself to have any outward reaction at all. I didn't remember enough of the house or my father to have any kind of emotional attachment. The house, the person associated with it, and the feelings I had attributed to living there—if I had any feeling attributed to it at all—had all been reduced to a soundless, colorless, faceless film reel.

I stood at the bottom of the rotted stairs that led up to the slate gray porch. Through the years, I had pushed all thoughts of my father and my old home aside. I had no room to think idly about the family that could have been...until now. As I stared at the stairs, the peeling paint and missing wooden planks were replaced by the hazy memory of a tacky 'wet paint' sign. I had to have been around three years old, standing in the July heat with a tiny red sunhat on, when my father painted that porch. My father

handed me a thick paintbrush dripping with slate gray paint. Instead of painting the stairs, I painted my nose and cheeks. My father smiled fondly at me, as if I had just painted a Renaissance masterpiece. I dragged the brush over his large glasses, effectively reducing his world to nothing but a land of gray.

When a plank of wood gave way underneath my right foot, my fond memory shattered. I looked towards my mother, her arms folded over her chest and her brows furrowed in worry.

“Are you alright?” I nodded, but I didn’t know how to define ‘alright.’

I stepped off of the porch and plodded around the side of the house, ducking underneath the hanging gutter. Just as before, my mind took me back to a brighter time. The faded mustard yellow became bright, the golden rays of a summer sun high in the sky streamed down upon my backyard, and my father held his arms out to a three year-old me who couldn’t wait to run into his embrace. The gate leading to the backyard was rusted. I recollect my father hoisting me over the gate first and then climbing over with his long legs. Then he grabbed my tiny hand and led me down the stone pathway towards the garage.

The thought of holding hands with my father now made me angry, made me feel weak. I had survived for years without his intervention or influence, so I didn’t know how to feel at the thought that there was a time where I completely put my trust in him. In the past, I seemed so happy in his arms. I was willing to paint a porch with him and walk hand in hand with him. He showed no signs of wanting my mother and me to leave him as he laughed at my pint-sized antics. In my mind, the three of us—my mother, my father, and I—were happy. Dare I say it, we looked like a family that had everything together. How could he have held my hand back then with such confidence? How could he have smiled at me like we were going to be a family to transcend time?

In my memories, my father doesn’t get very far with me in tow. I began crying for no reason, fat tears rolling down my chubby cheeks. My father scooped me up and gave my back a few comforting pats before rubbing in a soothing circle. A younger version of my mother leaned against a less-rusty version of the fence and smiled as my father brought me back over within her reach. She wiped the tears from my face and kissed my lips with a smile, telling me, “Go with daddy; he’s going to show you the car! You like the car, don’t you?” Her smile seemed complete and genuine. The only wrinkles on her face were at the corners of her eyes as she grinned.

My mother’s hand snaked underneath the fence and wrapped around my wrist.

She was on her knees and we were eye to eye on the ground. “Sierra, I shouldn’t have brought you here. Let’s go get something to drink, alright?”

“I’ve gotten this far,” I mumbled as I turned to stare at the garage. “Besides, I’m not thirsty.”

“This is just causing you stress you don’t need,” she said with a tug on my wrist.

“Yeah, whatever,” I responded with much more venom than intended, “I’m fine.”

I headed into the garage, and I remembered entering the garage in my past. My father turned and pressed a small red button on a panel, and together, the two of us watched the doors lift upwards. Sunlight slowly flooded the garage and made the glossy gunmetal blue paint job on the Cadillac gleam. My father sat me down on the surface of one of the overturned boxes and lowered himself down onto his back to start working on the frame of the car. The scent of formaldehyde knocked me out of my pleasant memory. A sordid mattress was in place of the gunmetal blue Cadillac. Liquor bottles and used syringes were strewn about the hard packed dirt floor. I found an uncapped beer bottle standing up straight against the mattress. Not wanting to sacrifice the cleanliness of my hands, I limped towards the bottle and kicked it over with my foot. The smell of ammonia mingled with formaldehyde and made me vomit. Some uncouth hobo had urinated in the bottle. I walked out of the garage, putting as little pressure on my injured ankle as I possibly could. I closed the door to the garage gently and kept on walking through the weeds until I reached the gate. My mom stared at me with pity. I suppose that my limp across the small expanse of backyard had looked pathetic. She helped me to climb over the gate and then helped me hobble to the front porch. A bottle of water was already sitting on the top step.

My mother placed my ankle over her lap as she sat down beside me; her shoulders heaved with what I perceived as guilt for bringing me to the house in the first place. The two of us took long swigs from the bottles and stared out at the other houses of the decrepit neighborhood. Some homes looked better than others—the house across the street still had a glossy paint job and a trimmed lawn—but others looked just as broken as mine. The houses flanking my yellow house had chipped paint and hanging gutters, too. But as much as I tried to convince myself that my house wasn’t the worst one on the block, it still looked like it had taken on the weight of the Blackwell family—my mother, my father, and I—and caved in.

“What do you think? Are you alright?”

I glanced at my mom and shrugged, glanced back at the derelict building, and said, “I’m fine.”

Was that really all I could say? The words sounded so heavy and broken that I knew they were fake. I heard a loud crash and looked back to see half of the rain gutter dragging on the ground while the other half was held

up by one flimsy plastic support. I heard the sound of a wailing cat close by. I placed my ear against the porch and noticed that the cries came from underneath the floorboards. I shifted my weight and turned so that I was eye level with the hole my ankle fell through. Three identical pairs of green eyes peered up at me; they were the cats I had originally seen on the street. My mom looked into the hole with me and began to laugh, saying, "At least somebody found a use for this rotten place!"

I silently nodded, but it still bothers me to this day that the yellow house on Ontario was a fine fit for a family of cats but not a family of human beings. Then again, cats don't intentionally break their families apart. Only humans can do that.

Calculating Route

by Emily Lanning
2nd Place Effective Writing Winner

I was in the dark, completely alone. Just me and Matilda, my faithful navy blue and tan convertible top Volkswagen beetle. I clutched my furry steering wheel cover as I focused strictly on the cars whizzing past me. I was seventeen, newly licensed, and had convinced my parents that I was perfectly capable of driving to visit a friend in New York. I had the path memorized, and could repeat each turn as my father had dictated them. I was on my way home when suddenly things didn't seem as familiar as I would have liked. I kept going hoping that eventually it would all click; it didn't. I pulled off I-80 into a rest stop. I had no idea where I was, no ability to differentiate north from south, and no sense of what step I had reached in my Dad's directions. I whipped out my Magellan Global Positioning System and heard the two most comforting words, "Calculating Route."

I was a little blue dot on a screen. I was safe because a constellation of twenty-four satellites had revealed my exact location. These satellites were continuously broadcasting their own time and position. My little Magellan used the signals of four satellites to calculate the delay between the time when the signal left the satellite and when it reached my GPS. That time delay was then multiplied by the speed of light to determine mine and Matilda's distance from the satellite. We had been found. (CBO)

Global positioning technology has evolved to become an irreplaceable component of our society. The GPS program began its development in 1974. The United States Department of Defense received \$24 billion for components of GPS technology and production. The program was first used to send navigation data to military users during the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. It wasn't until 1995 that the system became fully operational, and was launched by the Department of Defense for complete military use (CBO 5). The DOD purchased one hundred and three thousand, six hundred receivers equipping "all 435 of the Navy's major ships and submarines, as well as more than two thirds of the services' aircraft and armored vehicles" (CBO 33). Today "GPS remains critical to U.S national security, and its applications are integrated into virtually every facet of U.S military operations" (National Coordination Office). Twenty-four satellites orbit the earth transmitting two distinct radio signals, civilian and military.

As I sat in my punch buggy, directly adjacent to McDonalds and Lukoil, the very same satellite signals that my Magellan had received were being transmitted to military receivers thousands of miles away. We were worlds apart, but shared a signal. We were both lost, by our own definition of the term, but found by the same process. These satellites tracked the location of squads on patrol in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other cases the satellites transmitted signals to groups of two or three soldiers who were issued receivers for travel (fox news). I was a blue dot on a map surrounded by street signs, highway markers, and civilization. They were a dot, a dot surrounded by open terrain and small villages. A dot that relied exclusively on the information sent to their receivers from miles away.

In 2010 their dot disappeared. There was a technological problem that left as many as “10,000 U.S military GPS receivers useless for days” (Press 1). The Air Force, the unit solely responsible for GPS acquisition, took this glitch as “a warning to safeguard a system that enemies would love to disrupt” (Press 1). For two weeks certain squads were as lost as a seventeen-year-old girl in the dark on route I-80.

It’s a three-step system that requires three distinct segments. The simple creation of a blue dot on a map requires satellites, ground control systems, and receivers. “The satellites, in orbit 12,500 miles above the Earth, circle the planet roughly every twelve hours and pass over the same location on earth about once every day” (CBO). They are spaced in a pattern that allows users with an unobstructed view of the sky to receive signals from a minimum of four satellites. The ground control systems monitor and correct errors in the timing of the satellites signals; “An error of 1 billionth of a second can result in location errors of 1 foot. The clocks can accumulate errors of up to 10 billionths of a second per day” (CBO 2). Without the corrective actions of the ground control systems the calculations would accumulate a 10-foot marginal error daily, rendering their calculations useless. These vital corrective actions are completed in two master control stations located in California and Colorado (CBO).

The final but most important aspect is the receiver. GPS receivers have taken on several different forms in both commercial and military applications. We now have receivers in everything from cell phones and wristwatches to shipping containers and ATMs (National Coordination Office). “At least one hundred U.S defense systems rely on GPS, including aircraft, ships, armored vehicles, bombs and artillery shells” (Press pgl). There are a total number of four hundred thousand operational GPS systems in the military (CBO). We as a society have become dependent on global positioning technology. The military has become increasingly reliant on the system since its debut in 1995 and the commercial market capitalized on its success.

It was a glitch in the system that revealed our military’s true reliance on GPS technology. “Everything that moves uses it,” said John Pike, director of Globalsecurity.org, which tracks military and homeland security news. “It is so central to the American style of war that you just couldn’t leave home without it” (Press 2). In June of 2010 the Air Force installed new software in the ground control stations without testing it with the affected receivers. This defective installation revealed that a “GPS dependent military becomes dangerously vulnerable if the technology is knocked out” (Press 1). If we had interfered with our own technology through human error, the question left unanswered was what if someone tried to block our signals on purpose?

It’s called a Jammer, and the process is fairly simple. Jamming is the process in which a second signal is generated with enough power to mask our satellite signals. Although military GPS signals are encrypted, they are not immune to the power of a jammer. “One reason is that the signal from space—which has been likened to a 25-watt light bulb shining on the Earth from a distance of 12,500 miles—is very weak by the time it reaches the Earth” (CBO 4). Civilian signals can be interrupted as easily as unintentional competing radio frequencies, cell phone traffic and television broadcasts. In military cases the use of a Jammer would be planned and intentional. According to the congressional budget office,

1 watt of power at the appropriate frequencies could theoretically prevent a military receiver 40 miles away from locating and acquiring a GPS signal. Once the receiver has acquired and locked on to the military signal, the same 1-watt jammer would need to be within 18 miles to cause the receiver to lose track of the signal. Such a jammer could be as small as a 12-ounce soda can and easily be carried by an individual. (CBO 5)

The department of defense has taken steps to encrypt and secure the U.S military’s satellite signals. Although the dangers of a jammer are still prevalent, Space and Missile Systems Center spokesman Joe Davidson said in an e-mail to The Associated Press that the system is safe from hackers or enemy attack (Press 2). They have assured the public that “the organizational skills required to jam GPS over a broad area are beyond the reach of groups like the Taliban and most Third world nations” (Press 2).

Military vehicles and squads continue to be a global positioning coordinate. They are a part of a calculated formula in the production of their location. The blue dot does not recognize them as brave men and women fighting for our country, but instead as a position receiving signals from a combination of satellites. The system of 24 orbiting satellites did not differentiate between my blue punch buggy and a military caravan. Our receivers were programmed to pick up our designated signals, military and

civilian. I clutched my Magellan with a sense of urgency that should have been nowhere near as strong as a member of the armed forces grip on their Precision Light-weight GPS receiver. It was time to try again, but this time I had military technology on my side.

I put the car in drive, mounted my Magellan on the dashboard, and started driving along the highlighted path. It was only five minutes into the journey when I missed another turn. This time I didn't even have time to panic before I heard the soothing sound of "calculating route."

My F*cking Problem

by Kathleen Snyder
3rd Place Effective Writing Winner

It all started when my friend's mom graciously drove my friends and me to Fell's Point on St. Patrick's Day morning. It was a silver Jeep wrangler; I sat in the middle back, elbow to elbow with my friends. I didn't mind though—it was going to be a great weekend no matter what. A new song came on the radio and my friend turned it up. I had never heard the song before but I learned that it was called "F*ckin' Problems." Honestly, I'm not sure if I've ever heard a more offensive song. The main chorus line that is repeated over and over—and sounds ridiculous on the radio because every other word is beeped out reads, "I love bad bitches, that's my f*ckin' problem." After the song was over, my friend's mom lectured us not to drink too much—that Fell's wasn't a tiny York Road bar, and we could get in serious trouble. Then she looked at her daughter and asked her why her dress was so tight and so short. *Ummm, did you just hear the song your daughter loves? No wonder she's wearing a dress that could fit a ten-year-old boy!* I sat in the middle seat absolutely dumbfounded at the situation. Obviously I don't think my friend is a "bad bitch," but I couldn't help but see the correlation between the hip-hop music and the things her mom was worried about.

This has been a back-of-my-mind question for years: why—knowing and understanding that rap songs are degrading—do girls continue to listen to and support the genre? For the most part, I've kept this to myself. My friends are aware I don't like it, but I try not to point out the objectification of women in every song that is a little offensive. I've learned I'm perceived as annoying and less cool for doing so. Besides, I'm often in the very small minority, so for the most part I let it be. From my very first dance in sixth grade—when "Get Low" by Lil Jon was still very popular—I found I don't like rap music, and that most people my age do. When "Get Low" plays at a middle school dance, you will see all the girls literally get as low to the ground as they can. The boys stand perfectly straight. *Wait, isn't an instructed dance supposed to be for everyone? Like the Electric Slide or the Macarena?* Apparently, even in sixth grade, girls and boys know what role women play in rap music.

I myself had never listened to it on the radio like other kids, mostly because my parents had always told my older sister to "turn that crap off"

Budget Office Congress of the United States "The Global Positioning System for Military Users: Current Modernization Plans and Alternatives." October 2011 <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/10-28-GPS.pdf>

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whenever she had it playing. My personal music taste ranges from country to classic rock to jazz to 60's pop to folk. That's the way I've always been in a lot of areas. In high school, I was a three-sport athlete and in the play productions. One day I'd wear a dress, the next my Flyers jersey. Some days I'd read *Pride and Prejudice* and some days I'd play Super Mario Brothers with my brother. So it's no surprise to me that I wound up with a pretty eclectic iPod.

Once in a blue moon (speaking of "Blue Moon"—I love that song) I find a rap song a friend plays that I like, but most of the time I'm bewildered that anyone can stand to listen to such derogatory lyrics. It bothers me when a new song is released and experiences instant success by calling women "bitches and hoers" and yet again I'm thrown into a state of bafflement. I'm actually glad I'm in the minority who are puzzled by this phenomenon because it is a torturous cycle I put myself through. If girls want to listen to music that claims "bitches ain't shit but trick and hoers," then who am I to tell them no?ⁱ We're a country built on the right to do whatever you damn well please, right?

Despite our legacy of personal freedoms, somehow I don't think Ben Franklin envisioned upper middle class, educated women of 2013 listening to such demeaning music. After centuries of women being the dominated sex, why is the female youth supporting media that seems to counteract the hard work of our foremothers? I think about some of my favorite women of the past. The Bronte sisters (*Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* are two of my favorite novels) published their novels under the pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Queen Elizabeth—who led the English through their Golden Age—is called "The Virgin Queen." Could you imagine a male ruler being nicknamed the Virgin King? Never! Off with his head! Queen Elizabeth is just one example of the double standard about gender and sex. Men who sleep with a lot of women are seen as powerful, while women who sleep with a lot of men are seen as promiscuous.

Maybe it's that I don't understand rap; maybe I haven't given it a big enough chance. Often, when I inquire about the appeal of rap, I'm given the answer that the beat is what really makes the genre. This got me a little closer to understanding. But doesn't every song in any genre have a beat? That's what music is.

The largest age group to listen to rap is teenagers (ages 12-19). Different studies report different percentages, but most agree it is near 70% of teens who listen to rap. The problem with rap among teenagers is that they are often desperately trying to fit in and are also more susceptible to media's messages. So when the majority of the teen population listens to rap music and hears women being made into sexual objects, it should come as no surprise that they are soaking up the message.

Recently I went onto iTunes Top Ten in hip-hop/rap genre to see if the misogynistic message really was as prominent as I believed. Macklemore filled the top three, with limited curse words and no objectification of women! But further down the list, the lyrics became vulgar. At number five was Lil Wayne's "Love Me" with the main message that "bitches love [him]." One particular offensive verse reads:

She say 'I never wanna make you mad,/ I just wanna make you proud'/ I say, 'Baby, just make me cum,/ Then don't make a sound'ⁱⁱ

In four lines, Lil Wayne has made it clear he thinks women are meant for sex and are not supposed to speak their minds or have ambition. And yet, this is the fifth bestselling hip hop/rap song on iTunes this week.

I can't say I haven't learned a lot about hip-hop and rap from researching. There are girls known as "hip-hop honeys" that Dr. Vann from the Sociology department exposed me to. She explained them as a "male's booty-shaking fantasy." I found numerous sites that rank these "video vixens" in terms of their sexiness, and even more worrisome is that I found numerous sites on how to become one. Askmen.com explained hip-hop honeys' roles: "These girls may not be household names (or even talented, for that matter), but they are certainly some of the sexiest ladies around."ⁱⁱⁱ So, these nameless girls are not valued for on their talents, but rather how much sex appeal they display in music videos. How is this even an issue in the twenty-first century?

President Obama has talked about rap music many times in interviews. He is a fan, for sure—but he makes a clear distinction between liking the art of rap and despising the message. Between the misogyny, racism, and materialism, Obama has spoken to big name rappers before on the positive message they could send to children.^{iv} And he is not the only one. Oprah has said many times that she will not host someone who degrades women in his music. She was criticized for overreacting by artists such as Ludacris and 50 Cent. Her response to these rappers was, "I'm not opposed to rap. I'm opposed to being marginalized as a woman."^v It is great to have such strong figures speak out against the message rap sends, but we need more manpower to resonate with the teens; I'm not sure how many of my peers, or teenagers younger than I, are reading up on Oprah's opinions of rap.

Now, is it fair to blame the attention-seeking, objectifying behavior of modern day teens on rap music? No, I don't think so. Here we face a chicken and egg dilemma: did rap music adapt our culture's misogyny into its message or did rap's misogynist lyrics influence our culture's view of women? On the basis of my research, I believe it's the former, though rap music has played a major part in escalating the problem. This was a big realization for me. Suddenly, the anger I felt at rap music, turned into

confusion—and a little disappointment that this had never occurred to me—that our whole culture is injected with this toxic profanity. Rap isn't the problem; rap is just broadcasting the problem.

And the problem is tremendous. It's everywhere and it's directed at vulnerable teens. Victoria's Secret has recently taken hits from parents who are mad at a line of underwear called "Bright, Young Thing" that seems to be targeting preteens. Some of the underwear reads, "Feeling Lucky?" or "Call Me."^{vi} Not only affecting especially self-conscious preteens, this year the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show boasted 10.3 million viewers.^{vii} My personal Twitter feed was loaded with vows to be skinnier or praise about how hot a model looked. And the sad part is, I mostly follow hockey beat writers on Twitter. My room, for some reason, was chosen for the viewing party for the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. I defiantly read a book while my friends oohed and ahed at Miranda Kerr, who had recently had a baby, strut down the runways at 110 pounds. I heard numerous jokes about how many girls were going to be at the Loyola FAC the day after the Fashion Show. It's funny if you don't think too hard about it, but it seems pretty wrong that a "fashion show" (which is really just girls in bras and panties and high heels—there is no fashion) can have such an effect.

When I go out with my friends, they'll often comment on why I'm wearing my cowgirl boots again or suggest that maybe I want to take off my tights and show some leg. No thank you, it's thirty degrees out. I don't see boys walking around in a mini dress and high heels. My friends pity me for not looking "my best," while I pity them for needing attention so badly. I'm not sure how I got to this point. It's not that I don't do girly things; I still straighten my hair and own plenty of skinny jeans. But it's unusual for me to change my outfit or ask my friends if it looks good, whereas those seem like daily occurrences for many of my friends.

I can only attribute this clear line that separated me from my girlfriends to my parents and my education. Growing up, I always played sports. Not only that—my dad was my coach for a good eight seasons of girls' volleyball and basketball. There was very little sympathy for the "fragile female" in his coaching style. He had this line that my friends from home still throw out when reminiscing about middle school basketball: "The ball means everything, your body means nothing." To my father, we weren't female athletes; we were just athletes.

I'm the youngest of three children. My mom had very little tolerance for attention-seeking behavior. My poor sister must have heard, "Pull your shirt up!" at least once a day during high school. My parents' attention was always much more focused on how we were doing in school. I went to the best private school in Delaware, but only because my dad worked double shifts at the police department and my mom got a job teaching at

my school. They didn't tell us how important education is; they showed us. Without even knowing it, I was taught that I was valued for my brains, personality, and kindness, not for the clothes or makeup that I wore.

I've been told many times that I was meant to be born in a different time. And I completely agree. My favorite movies of all time are "Casablanca," "A Christmas Carol," and "It's A Wonderful Life," in that order. Yes, all three are in black and white. I loved my English classes in high school: 19th century British novels, Shakespeare, and American lit. Of course, women were much more oppressed in those times, but the emphasis and themes of the great novels revolve around human interaction and purpose. And I love the real romance displayed in these classics. They revolve around something much deeper than the shallow message media sends us today.

Organizations like MissRepresentation "expose how American youth are being sold the concept that women and girls' value lies in their youth, beauty and sexuality."^{viii} They follow the mantra: "You can't be what you can't see." I watched their video senior year of high school and instantly loved it. It asked questions like, if "the media is so derogatory to the most powerful women in the country [Hillary Clinton], then what does it say about media's ability to take any woman in America seriously?" I've asked myself the same question many times. I remember a couple years ago, Hillary Rodham Clinton was photographed without makeup after traveling overnight and it was big news. Many big-name news media were reporting on the picture. Shouldn't we applaud her for the relentless effort she puts forth to get her job done and do it well? A male politician's appearance is never an issue. Yet, articles after articles are written on Ms. Clinton's appearance, not her politics. Bill O'Reilly once asked Marc Rudov what the downside was to having a woman president and his answer was, "Oh, you mean besides PMS and mood swings?"^{ix}

Even in the rap world, there is an emerging feminist icon, Nicki Minaj. She has broken down sexist barriers in the genre and, at the same time, has had many top Billboard songs in the past years. Best of all, she despises the limits set for girls by media and culture. In a brilliant (and curse-word-heavy) rant, Nicki Minaj says, "When I'm assertive, I'm a bitch. When a man is assertive, he's a boss ... When you're a girl, you have to be, like, everything. You have to be dope at what you do but you have to be super sweet and you have to be sexy... And I can't be all those things at once. I'm a human being."^x Minaj's comment echoes that of Sheryl Sandberg's opinion in *Lean In*. Sandberg relied heavily on the Heidi/Howard Study. Heidi, a real person, started her own business and was very successful. As an experiment, Heidi's story was handed out to a college class, but on half of them she was referred to as Heidi; on the other half her name was changed to Howard. What the researchers found was a direct correlation

between likability and success; a positive correlation for Howard, and a negative correlation for Heidi. This is a huge double standard at play. If a man is successful, he's generally well liked by both sexes, but when a woman is successful, she is viewed as selfish "not the type of person you would want to hire or work for." This is a huge reason women aren't as powerful as men across the workforce. Everyone wants to be liked, but when a woman is successful, she is often disliked.

Model Cameron Russell recently gave a TEDtalk on the power of image entitled, "Looks aren't everything: Believe me, I'm a model." Her advice for little girls who want to be a model: "Why? You can be anything in the world. Modeling is not a career path. And if still you want to be a model, be my boss." She went on to explain that our culture's perception of beauty is tall, white, and skinny women and that being a model is simply winning a genetic lottery. One thing she said that particularly struck me was that what her modeling pictures do not show who she is. The person in the image was constructed by a team of professionals—hair, makeup, photographers.^{xi} Girls need to know that this constructed version of beauty is not attainable, and shouldn't be valued.

Media and technology have been the greatest industry of my time, and it only continues to grow. Teenagers consume, on average, 10 hours of media a day.^{xii} The confusing message the photographers, writers, editors, and directors are sending is trumping whatever parents are telling their sons and daughters. Which leads me to yet another double standard: it is normal for a twenty-something male to degrade and objectify women, but as soon as that male has a daughter, he no longer wants the harsh cycle to continue.

If there is one conclusion I've come to, it isn't that girls should not listen to rap. Rap is just one part of the esteem-lowering machine our media has created. It's all about the image of "beauty" our culture is selling to young girls. It's that we are so deep into this phenomenon of objectifying girls and weighing their value based on appearance, that we barely question it anymore, almost to a point where we accept it. We are accepting it when we listen to misogynistic lyrics; we are accepting it when we buy the push up bra that is sexier, but less comfortable. And while I blame rappers, the modeling industry, and most media directed towards teenage girls for creating this ideal image, I blame us for allowing it. That's what my f*cking problem is: that we know the message is one of inequality and we are accepting our place as the inferior sex when we submit to the rules this message sets down for us.

We need more women who are okay with being labeled a crazy feminist, and fewer women in the hip-hop honey world. But will they have to sacrifice being liked, as Heidi and Howard showed us? Maybe. If behind-the-camera people and computer editors would change the message they

are sending out, then maybe "cool" could one day be defined as being a supporter of equality and then a woman's success wouldn't be negatively tied to her likability. Since the majority of people behind the cameras are men, our culture needs them to take a stand. I found a great quote on Pinterest once (yes, very stereotypically girly): "Men of quality are never threatened by women of equality." I would love to see a turnaround—a point where my peers have had enough and decide we need a change in how we view women, beauty, and equality. I think this revolution has to start from the youth, like most movements. I'm not sure how likely this is, for I haven't seen many signs that my generation is becoming weary of manufactured images and pervasive disrespect; however, I am very sure we have the power to do it. Until we do, I'm just glad I am able to see the problem.

i <http://jwww.azlyrics.com/jlyrics/jdrdre/bitchesaintshit.html>

ii <http://jwww.directlyrics.com/lil-wayne-bitches-love-me-lyrics.html>

iii http://jwww.askmen.com/jtop_10/entertainment_300/302c_top_10_list.html

iv http://jwww.youtube.com/watch?v=pF5VG7jRp_g

v http://jwww.alternet.org/story/37815/rappers_aren't_feeling_oprah's_love

vi <http://jwww.theblaze.com/stories/2013/03/24/makes-me-sick-minister-dad-implores-victorias-secret-to-not-target-tweens/>

vii <http://tvline.com/2011/11/30/ratings-victorias-secret-fashion-show-ringer1>

viii <http://jwww.policymic.com/articles/4439/are-women-in-the-media-only-portrayed-as-sex-icons-statistics-show-a-massive-gender-imbalance-across-industries>

ix <http://jwww.foxnews.com/on-air/foreilly/2008/03/11/he-said-she-said-what-downside-having-female-president>

x <http://jwww.mnn.com/family/family-activities/blogs/watch-nicki-minaj-on-feminism-and-bossing-up>

xi http://jwww.ted.com/talks/jcameron_russe!looks_aren_t_everything_believe_me_i_m_a_model.html

xii <http://jwww.kff.org/intmedia/jentmedia012010nr.cfm>

Tom

by Patrick Dorr
4th Place Effective Writing Winner

The F-250 veers over the double yellow line as Tom spits the thick brown saliva into an empty Gatorade bottle. This easing into the next lane would usually be alarming, but the country roads we are cruising on rarely see many cars. Still, I wish Tom would resist the urge to drive with his knees. It is a testament to his intelligence (or addiction) that he can smoke a cigarette in one hand, dip chaw in his left cheek, chew gum in his right check, and take sips from a Red Bull while driving. It is the second time today that Tom and I have made the excursion to hunt deer during the final day of the Maryland firearms season. The last twenty minutes of driving have been silent, but it's normal for Tom to be quiet.

My hunting opportunities would be severely limited if my family did not know Tom, but, luckily, he lives across the street from my house. Tom has always been my neighbor. My family knows Tom quite well now, but that was not always the case. My parents moved to a small suburban town in Maryland in the fall of '93. My father had received orders for an assignment at Ft. Detrick, which was a godsend from the previous assignment of South Korea. My father, mother, sister, and brother made the transition easily, and I was born midway through '94. My parents both decided to continue with their careers and were in dire need of a babysitter willing to watch an infant. The last place my parents expected to find one was in Tom's house.

I call it Tom's house, but in reality it is Joan's house, Tom's mother. But it isn't just Tom living in his mother's basement. Tom's wife Laurie and Tom's six-year-old son also live in the basement. My family had been living in Walkersville for almost nine months at this point, and my father had talked to Joan several times, but he would only catch glimpses of Tom as he exited his car and entered the house. Then one day my father got lucky, Tom went to his mailbox. Tom was wearing his work clothes, which were the same then as they are now: brown-stained leather boots, light washed denim pants, a raggedy, hole littered shirt, with a red bandana around his forehead. The complete opposite of what my father was wearing: dress greens complete with shiny black shoes, shimmering belt buckle, and a green cotton beret. From that day on it was decided that Laurie would be babysit me for five days a week. And that's exactly what happened for four

years.

My mother got home the same time as Tom, and for four years she picked me up at four thirty on the dot, and for four years Tom did not say more than "hi" to her. Around the four-year mark of Laurie watching me, Laurie decided to leave Tom. Tom didn't seem to mind, besides the fact that half of his paycheck went towards child support. He was never bashful about mentioning that.

I look over my shoulder and into the backseat of the truck to see Tom's shotgun on the seat. Its light tan wood stock has a slight gleam to it, enough to contrast the black metal bolt and scope. Then, on a whim I turn and ask Tom, "What is your favorite memory of hunting?" He swivels his head and stared directly at me as a smile emerges on his face. His large golfball eyes seem like they are popping out of his head as he searches his memory, searching for that single moment that he enjoyed the most. Then he begins.

He was hunting with his father in the mountains of Pennsylvania. He was only fourteen and had just gotten a lever action .30-30 from his father. They entered the woods at nightfall and trudged through the mountains for a cold and dark hour until they stopped on a hillside that overlooked a grassy meadow. Then his father took out a large spotlight and scanned the meadow. Once a pair of eyeballs appeared in the light, he would center the eyeballs above the front sight and fire. He didn't know that it was illegal, but he said it was a ton of fun. They dragged out over a dozen deer that night.

I have been Tom's hunting buddy for the last six years. I have only harvested two deer and several squirrels, but the man is teaching me to hunt. Something my father doesn't have the time nor interest to do with me. Yet Tom has taken me with him each time he goes hunting. Even though I initially made too much noise, moved too fast, and got cold, all of which made hunting unsuccessful and cut hunting trips short. Tom was always ready to improve my hunting skills. He taught me to pay attention to the wind, to search for the white flicker of a tail or ear, and most importantly, to be patient.

Tom finishes his story just before he pulls into the rough dirt and gravel driveway of the farm we hunt. The two whitewashed barns that sit on the hill wilt and lean, similar to the mares that wobble and brace with each step in the fields that run parallel to the driveway. We park the truck in front of the barns and walk the five hundred yards to the wood line. The woods on this property haven't been cut or trimmed in the last century; most of the trees are well over a hundred years old. We crawl under a barbed wire fence and begin walking at a slow pace in the hopes of sneaking up on a deer taking a midday nap. After two hours of searching through thick stands of brambles and walking alongside a snaking creek, we have not seen a single creature. There is only one place on the property left that may hold a deer.

We refer to it as the *backside*.

The *backside* is on the far side of the property, on a ridge that overlooks a valley of the farm on one side, and a set of railroad tracks on the other. Both sides of the ridge are extremely steep, but the deer are able to navigate with ease. Tom lights a cigarette and begins walking the ridge top. He stops every five steps to gaze down on each side of the ridge; each stop is accompanied by two puffs of smoke that exit his nostrils and dissipate into the air. This action continues until Tom suddenly stops and drops to one knee and motions for me to crawl forward. He points to the back of a doe's head, her eyes facing down towards the rail tracks. We wait. An hour later the train bells begin dinging and the rumble of a freight train can be felt beneath our feet. The doe rises, fearing the sound and vibration. I breathe twice and squeeze the trigger, just as Tom taught me.

As I stand in Tom's garage sorting the dark red meat into roast and stew piles, I see Tom pick up a thirty pack of Busch and place it behind his workbench. I smile as I see him hiding it. Every night I see Tom pull in to his driveway, open his trunk, and look over his shoulder. If a person is walking by, he grabs a single Safeway bag. If he doesn't see anyone, he grabs the thirty pack and enters the garage. Then around ten or eleven, it will all end up in the recycling bin.

Tom has his problems. He never graduated high school, is addicted to far too many substances, and is going through a divorce with wife number three. However, despite his faults, Tom gets up Monday through Friday at 4:30 a.m. to do a job that most Americans refuse to do. He picks up trash and paves roads, drives a dump truck, bulldozer, and snowplow, all for no glory, no thanks, and a small paycheck. I am glad I have known Tom. Tom has taught me how to fix an engine, sharpen a knife, and use a chainsaw, knowledge that is not included in the core of any college. Other neighbors only see Tom's yellow nicotine-stained fingers, the taxidermy deer heads hung in his garage, or hear his frequent cursing and don't know what to think of him. I see Tom and I know that he is hard worker who does a job necessary to live in a civilized society, but even more so, I see Tom as the man who taught me to hunt.

Diversity in Public Health

by Megan Vaux

5th Place Effective Writing Winner

Each week I head downtown to the University of Maryland Medical Center, ready to assume my position behind the family resource desk on the Labor and Delivery floor of the hospital. The first thing I do is check our online referral system for clients that have been seen by the social worker, Catherine, and then sent to me. Catherine is the only social worker assigned to see patients on this floor as well as three other floors of the hospital. Given that there are four wings, each with sixteen to twenty rooms, on the Labor and Delivery floor alone, Catherine's daily duties involve seeing and working with many more patients than she alone can handle. This is where I come in, as an advocate for HealthLeads, which is a nonprofit organization that operates within the hospital. HealthLeads has a goal of connecting all patients, regardless of socioeconomic background, to the health care that they need and deserve. There are usually around five to six referred clients from Catherine given to each HealthLeads shift. All of our clients are new mothers who have demonstrated a need for one or more resources that we are able to help them obtain—meaning anything from health insurance to fitness and nutrition programs to finding a crib for their new baby to sleep in. My job includes educating these women for the better care of their baby, along with assisting them in accessing any outside help that they may need. Something that has become shockingly clear to me through my experience is how the health care system is skewed in such a way that works against impoverished people.

As I enter each hospital room, I introduce myself to the exhausted mother lying in bed after just giving birth hours ago. My next step is to survey her needs. Many of these women are young—in their late teens to early twenties, and most are not first time mothers. They are usually African American or Hispanic. All of them reside in the impoverished areas of Baltimore City, and most are already enrolled in some kind of government program such as SNAP (food stamps), WIC, or public health insurance. Very rarely are they interested in the questions I am asking them—“Do you have a crib, bassinet, or other safe place for your baby to sleep? Are you interested in enrolling in a home visiting nursing program? Do you have enough food to last until the end of the month?” They generally write

me off as another bothersome nurse or interrogative social worker, which can be discouraging at first. However, I don't ever blame my clients for the way they initially treat me. Most of them have experienced some form of discrimination from health care providers based on their race, income level, insurance status, or language skills that has led them to distrust and doubt the people who are meant to help them. Depending on their level of maternal experience, they may or may not know anything about safe sleeping habits for infants, breastfeeding, how to find pediatric care/ or how cigarette smoking and secondhand smoke can affect their baby's health. If the woman I am talking to agrees to any of our services, she automatically becomes one of my clients. I gather as much information from her as I can and immediately begin to prioritize her needs as I walk back to my desk. There are different protocols that we follow for each unique need that a client expresses to us. I spend anywhere from half an hour to an entire three hour shift finding effective resources to meet each need, and some, like applying for a specific insurance policy, are more difficult than others, such as finding food pantries that service a particular neighborhood.

The remarkable part of working with a new client is how quickly her interest in what I am doing will heighten as soon as I return to her room with helpful information. Seeing that for once someone is taking an individual interest in her wellbeing is generally enough encouragement to engage a positive response from her, much different from the initial mundane reaction I received. Unlike the other Healthleads desks in Baltimore, UMMC has a program where we only work with our clients in person once, and do follow up with them on the phone after they leave the hospital. Because of this, it is especially important for me to establish a positive relationship with my clients right away, so that they leave the hospital with confidence knowing there is someone more accessible than a busy doctor or social worker dedicated specifically to helping them and their new baby. At any hour of the day or night, I may receive a call or text from a client who has a question, needs help, or just needs someone to talk to.

A few months ago, I worked with a woman named Rashona. Rashona had just given birth to her third child and lived in a small, crowded apartment with her sister, who had four children. They were all exposed to lead paint in the building they lived in, and they had shut off warnings from their heating and electric companies hovering over them from not paying the bills. Her oldest son, Jeremiah, was suffering from lead poisoning already, and all of her sister's children had asthma. She worried about the new baby, and her sister's and her own health. Her kids had state-funded health insurance, but she had fallen off of her plan after giving birth. I became something like a counselor to Rashona, whom I could barely understand on the phone because of her heavy urban vernacular and quiet, defeated voice.

"How's his 'scription from the clinic 'sposed to help 'im with the poison when 'e breathes it in e'ry night? And now he got the asma too? Kid can barely sleep, 'e coughs and coughs through the night!" She said to me one evening. "And what's about the new baby? Those teeny lungs won't handle the lead! We gotta get outta here and do it soon."

The distress she was feeling was evident in her voice, and it weighed heavily on my heart as I replied: "We've got you on the waiting list for housing, Rashona, you've even been moved up because of the new baby. You'll be moving in somewhere new before you know it. Just make sure Jeremiah takes his medicine exactly as directed, and get him outside with the younger kids playing in the fresh air as much as possible."

Part of my job, unfortunately, involves having the ability to sound extremely comforting in a situation that makes me very uncomfortable. Rashona's predicament is not uncommon in the city of Baltimore especially, as Baltimore has led the nation in cases of lead poisoning in children for quite some time.

Another recent client of mine, Casey, suffers from severe epilepsy and asthma that have kept her from working for a long time. Her application for health insurance has been turned down multiple times because of these preexisting conditions, which certainly exemplifies the discriminatory nature of the health care system. She has three children, only two of whom she is receiving support from their father for. She has to pay all of her medical expenses out of pocket while raising her children. If she could regularly see a specialist for her ailments that would prescribe her medication, she would most likely be able to maintain a steady job. However, seeing an asthma or epilepsy specialist just once a month would cost well above the amount of her entire monthly income, let alone paying for the medication that the doctor would prescribe without the assistance of health insurance. Instead, Casey continues to visit free or sliding scale general care clinics around the city that can only give her temporary medication. She cannot get healthy without insurance, she cannot get a steady job without being healthy, and she cannot get insurance without getting a job that will provide benefits. Many sick people become the victims of health insurance discrimination like this and eventually find themselves stuck in a similar cycle to Casey's.

In both of these clients' cases, asthma is an issue that affects their lives. This is also true for much of the urban population of America, with disproportionate effects on African Americans in the United States. "Black children have a 260 percent higher emergency department visit rate, a 250 percent higher hospitalization rate, and a 500 percent higher death rate from asthma compared to white children" (Russell 2). It is highly unlikely that genetics alone can be the cause of this. Asthma is just one of many problems that stem from the lack of proper, sufficient health care that is

seen in diverse areas. It is not only an issue of race, but of poverty as well. The World Health Organization categorizes these types of issues under Social Determinants of Health: the “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system” (World Health Org). The impact that racial, cultural, and income-level diversity has on these social determinants of health is very clear and can be very disturbing.

The socioeconomic background of patients and their families influences the way they interact with, and the quality of care that they receive from physicians, surgeons, nurses, and other clinical staff. The WHO writes that “these circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities, the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within cities in countries” (World Health Org). In my experience working for Healthleads, I have seen firsthand the way that differences in race, language, income level, and other social factors hinder the access to quality health care that certain people have. Through the relationships I have built with my clients over time, I have found that diversity does play a big role in health. All people deserve to be treated equally and deserve equal access to different kinds of health care. Differences between people should definitely be observed, but should be used to better treat an individual, rather than decrease the quality of their care.



artwork

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by Meredith Lackey



by Jillian Alonzo



by Rebecca Heemann



by Rebecca Heemann

Scavenger



by Jilian Alonzo



by Brianna Sheppard

Jubilee



by Beth Caruso



by April-Ann Marshall

The Effects of the War and Fear

by Halah Hussein

“A room without books is like a body without a soul.”—Cicero

I was born in Baghdad, Iraq and lived for 12 years in a small house with my family. I left Iraq in 2006 and went to Egypt. Why did we leave our country, family, friends, and the lives we made for ourselves?

I was in the fifth grade; I woke up every morning by the singing of my birds, who lived down the hallway from my bedroom. I put on my school's uniform, ate my breakfast and then left the house for school. My life was usual and simple without any adventures. In the afternoon, I finished school, went home, and ate dinner together with my family. In the evening, I started my homework. My mother always told me, “Education is your power and the way to get to things.” Our house was full of books and my mother's teaching. She helped me study after I got home from school. My mother, herself had wanted to finish her education and be a doctor. She could not because she had to take care of her young sisters and also she did not have the opportunity. Therefore, she wanted to put her dream in me. She now wants me to be a doctor, and I want to see her dream come true.

Schools in my country were different. My school was hard and my teacher chose questions for tests from the cover to the cover of the books we read. We had no make-up exams, and I only had one final exam in each class. We also had tiny assignments along the way, but they did not decide our final grade. It was reinforced with whatever we did that we study hard and do well. School was and still is the most important thing in my life, so that was exactly what I did. I studied for hours and hours. I remember that once my history teacher said, “Today, our assignment is due.” The assignment was to read and memorize 15 pages; then we had to recall the parts she asked, which could be a page or a paragraph. I was afraid that I would forget what I had studied, that I would recall the wrong part or my classmates would laugh at me.

The sixth grade is very important stage in life because it is when we start to grow into the person we will be. It was especially important in school because it would decide which high school I would attend. It is like the transition from high school to college in the U.S. For the week of tests, I had a little of sleep, I was studying day-by-day and night-by-night. These

tests were for every subject I had: math, Arabic, religion, history, geography, and science. Getting an A on any of my assignments and exams or when my teachers were excited about my work, made me feel like a princess when she gets what she wants. My mother taught me to get an A, so I wanted to meet her expectation of me. My schooling was a preparation for what was supposed to come next. After taking the tests, I was eligible to attend the advanced school, but the war took this opportunity from me.

When I was in the sixth grade, I started to see changes in the world around me. I wanted to see change at my advanced school, but the changes I saw were the beginning of a new life. Instead of starting classes at the advanced school, I started classes in Egypt. This was when the war came to us: my family, my friends, and my school. The war that took the life I had built. The war killed many innocent people; I wished the war to be over. Suddenly, we saw people entering the city with huge cars, carrying guns, and wearing uniforms. As a child, it was very hard to understand what was going on. Was it a game or not? But seeing the suffering in my family's eyes, seeing the things that I used to do, but was no longer able to. We started to wither like plants without enough light or water.

One night I was sleeping, curled up in my blankets, when some people knocked powerfully on the door. It was the middle of the night. I was afraid like a star that you can't see because I was not able to realize what kind of fear I was feeling. There are different kinds of fear. The only fear that I had experienced to that point was the fear when I had exams and assignments. I had never experienced this kind of fear before. It was the kind of fear that I wish to never experience again. While my father was opening the door, soldiers broke in searching for something.

“What do you want?” my father asked.

They did not answer and kept going through our possessions. By the time they left, we were made vulnerable. We were just a family. They did not find what they were looking for, but they left us with questions, they left us with fears, and they left us asking “why?” We'll never know the answers.

You often ask yourself: Who are the most important people in your life? For me, it is my family: my mother, my father, my sister, my brothers, my grandparents, my aunts, my uncles, my cousins, and my nephews. These are the people that will be by my side when I need them, no matter what happens. The war took them from me; it took my family and the life I had planned.

I used to visit my grandparents every weekend. I loved spending time with them. We would talk, play, eat, laugh, sing, and joke. Even now, it's hard to mention because of how powerful my feelings are. I remember one

day when we went to visit my grandparents' house. It was like any other weekend. My grandfather took my sister, my brothers, my cousins and me to go fishing. Once we got to the lake, the water was so clear that you could see all of the fish roaming around. It was such a sight to see all of them together. When we got our fishing poles into the water I was so excited I felt like I was going to explode, not only because I was fishing, but also because I was spending time with my grandfather. But nothing happened. Hours and hours passed with nothing happening. In that moment, I felt how beautiful it was to be next to the people that I love. My life was like the water. It was so clear that I could almost see my life reflected back at me. Until you cast the line and the water ripples. Suddenly, something very strong pulled and pulled on my fishing pole. It was so strong that I almost fell into the water. That was another type of fear, where you almost feel yourself dying, but everyone helped me. And now they're gone. The war stopped me from fishing with my grandfather and seeing my grandmother. They are still in Iraq, but the distances between us seem to ripple like that water. How to learn from them? How to love and respect others? Why do families matter? My grandmother once said, "There is nothing like family." I feel her words and find comfort in memories.

I heard my parents talking.

"We should leave. What if we send our children to school and someone kidnaps them or even kills them?" my mother said.

My father said, "Where should we go?"

Then there was silence and each one of them was thinking deeply facing the window. I hid around the wall, out of breath, not wanting them to hear me so I could hear the answer. I was scared. My mother said it's important for our education, that she would sacrifice seeing her parents for a while. Our travel was meant to be short-lived. We would stay in Egypt for a month, and then we would return home to Baghdad.

On a dark day, my parents called my sister, my brothers, and me to the living room. I was scared that they would confirm what I had overheard. I was waiting and looking at their mouths hoping not to see the words I dreaded hearing.

My mother said, "We have made a hard decision for all of us. We have to move." My siblings were younger than me so they were not absorbing what my parent was saying.

I said, "Mom, what about my school, friends, my family, grandfather, grandmother, what about..."

She stopped me and said, "I know it is hard, but we do not have any other choices."

I had to face the reality that yes, we were moving. This decision brought

tears to all of the people that I love. We had to pack our stuff and say, "goodbye." I knew this was an important moment, so I began capturing images behind my eyes. I would not forget them, the other half of my heart. "It's time," I said slowly. We left for Egypt.

A war is not just a war; it is something more powerful than the meaning of a word. Through war I realized that there is more than one kind of fear. Some of the fears are okay; they drive you to be better. You take a test and get your grade back with an A, you feel happy. And then there are other fears, the ones you can't describe, like when strangers make you afraid for your life and those of your family. My house still has books and I still have a goal of becoming a doctor. The water, the fishing line, the fears. After the ripples clear I see my face and a new life.

Drawing From Life

by Jean Gillingham

It is not until the end of the portrait that you pick up the 8B pencil, held delicately against your palm; once the darkest darks are added—the harsh black of the pupil, the vacuity of the nostrils, the darker tufts of hair that the light forgives—there is no returning to the pure white of the paper. The pencil will have embedded its black smudge and even the best eraser will leave a faint gray remembrance. The lightest lights also come at the end, as you add the speckled whites to the iris with a white pencil. These whites that you add are the only reminiscence of the beginning; everything else has been smudged, marked, and deliberately drawn to create the portrait, a shaped mixture of blacks, greys and whites.

Two years ago, a young woman commissioned me to draw a portrait of her infant sister so that she might have a present to give to her mother for Christmas. Still under the instruction of my art teacher, I began, with a photograph as a reference, finding the placement and proportions of the child, who grasped at a patterned blanket with her tiny fist.

“Don’t go too dark in her face.” My art teacher cautioned. “Otherwise, you’ll risk her looking old.”

Following instruction, I touched the darkest pencil to the pupils, the nostrils, the back of the child’s open toothless mouth, and the background and the patterned blanket. The child’s face was done only in the lightest grays.

This is not to say that children have an innocence that aged persons do not. The child’s face is drawn lightly, because the child’s face is light. With age, comes a physical darkness—the face elongates, creases in the cheeks deepen from years of smiling, baby fat disappears and the face sits closer to the bone, the brows cast more of a shadow over the eyes, and wrinkles form. This darkness should not necessarily indicate a hardened soul or the remnants of a difficult life. Darkness is added in a portrait to create depth, contrast and interest.

In our early years, we are depicted almost entirely in light shades: our skin is smooth and our cheeks are round with baby fat. Our hair, though it may not necessarily be blonde, or there at all, is often lighter than it is as we grow older. We are wrapped in white blankets as we lay in the hospital nursery and we are later garbed in white diapers. We bring some of this

lightness into our young adult lives, but most is forfeited. In our old age, just as in the portrait, we are granted the darkest and lightest physical changes to our appearance: crosshatched wrinkles, shaky ravines of darkness, form and mark our face, and our hair lightens to pure white, even lighter than the blonde that we may have begun with at birth.

A stigma surrounds old age in which we associate senescence with the loss of youthful beauty. We tend to dread the sagging skin on our cheeks and the deep laugh lines at the corners of our mouths, even though these indications of age were produced from years of happiness. Why do we underappreciate the beauty of old age? In the end, when the darkest and lightest shades are added to the finished portrait—this is when the likeness to the subject shows through and when the portrait truly gains life.

Origin

by Mary M. Glosenger

At doctors' appointments, no words come when asked of my family's health history. There are answers that will be left permanently blank. However, I know the thread tied around my neck on that winter day so many years ago will forever connect me to those two individuals who brought me into this world, mistake or not. Moreover, it will forever connect me with the two individuals that nurtured and loved me when those other people could not.

"An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstances. The thread may stretch or tangle but will never break."

—Ancient Chinese Proverb

I was born to my birth mother and father, but who they are is unknown. They are Asian, yet there is nothing more that I know. I am unaware of how much I weighed at my birth or if I have any siblings. No record was kept of my first word. I possess no baby picture of myself.

It is trying when people ask questions about my origin. My answer always reflects disappointment, both for me and for the person inquiring. If I ever had the chance to meet my parents, would I? *No* is always my response. Still I had fantasized about us meeting. In my dreams my mother was beautiful and kind in spirit and my father strong, handsome; or so I had wished.

Resentment built inside as I thought more about what I did not have. I have only this connection with them: my genes, my flesh, my blood. This connection as fragile, almost invisible as it may be really is nothing. I have always wished there were more: a connection, a bond, or even basic knowledge of who they are would suffice.

As I pondered the situation relentlessly, I came to a realization. My real parents are Carl and Janis Glosenger: the people who have given me everything I have, and those other people are not.

On January 21, 1997, my parents were unfamiliar with the red thread proverb; still that evening they made a discovery. When they changed me into a nightgown, they found a red thread tied around my neck. That was the day my family was born. That was my adoption day, my connectivity day.

I am a child to a husband and wife who look nothing like me. As I grew in life experience, I came to an inevitable truth. The red thread will always link me to that past, but it also has always and will always connect me to my present and lead me to an unknown future. This thread has stretched in times of trouble, it has tangled in times of confusion, but the connection will never break. It will always tie me to my homeland and my heritage.

I know not that I have my mother's smile or my father's sense of will.

Stargazer

by Rachel Christian

You are a child. The sun has long been set, dinner is done, TV time finished. Now for your bedtime routine. You eagerly change into an oversized t-shirt and comfy sweatpants. In the bathroom, you brush your teeth—a tedious but necessary chore. Kiss mom and dad goodnight with a ‘love you, too.’ Nonchalantly stroll down the hall to your bedroom, hiding your inner quiver. Close the door and switch off the light. Moonlight illuminates the room. The only sounds are your thoughts. You make your way to the window instead of the bed. This is the secret part of your routine. While everyone else thinks you are asleep, you can privately consult the stars.

You kneel at the white window, as if in prayer. Your arms greet the sill with friendly elbows. Your cheek takes its seat on the warm skin of your crossed forearms. Beyond the glass, the night is dark and calm, quiet and cool. The blue-grey winter snow reflects the light above, like her sister the river, quietly sparkling. The moon and stars peek through the silhouette of bare tree branches. They say hello. Tilt your head up and let your eyes launch into space. Suddenly, you are no longer contained by anything—not this house, not this room, not even your own body. Your soul is free.

The universe fills your vision. Your eyes are not big enough to capture all its vastness. You focus on individual stars so you can appreciate their unique beauty. People tell you how stars twinkle, but you hunt for a more worthy depiction. This star radiates. Extending, retracting. Like an infinite pinwheel of light. These perpetual beams of light whisper words of comfort to you. You turn your gaze to the three aligned stars. Orion’s Belt, they call it. They say these stars point to the North Star, a beacon that would lead you home if you ever wondered too far. The three guiders are like old friends to you. You don’t have to talk to each other; you just enjoy being in each other’s company.

You can’t help but notice the moon. He illuminates a disproportionately-large mass of sky. You see him as bigger than the distant stars, although, in reality, a single star’s size could probably eat up all moons and planets in the universe and still have room for more. But still, the moon is earth’s closest brother. Tonight, he appears as a crescent. The sliver of light is deceiving. The moon has not been bitten like some cosmic apple; he retains his entire

spherical shape. Part of him is simply hidden, like he has pulled a blanket over part of his shine. You look closer and see how perfectly circular the shadow of the earth falls upon the moon. The darkness only blends with the empty spaces of the universe when you blur your vision, like when you cross your eyes and everything loses its sharp borders. But, when looking with clear, focused eyes, you notice the moon’s mysterious craters in the light and shadow alike. He reveals his secrets only to those who take the time to get to know him.

Who else is looking at this moon as you do now? People you have yet to meet, friends you are missing, long-lost relatives, foreign strangers. The moon will introduce us to each other. It seems that, the longer you stare at the moon, the further you travel from your lonely bedroom. You step from star to star, like rocks in a river. Then, you jump into space, sinking closer to earth. As you drift, you catch glimpses of an Indian marketplace, closed for the night, and a little boy hanging his head out a window. A rush of gravity pushes you over an African village at night as stars guide a father home after work. Whoosh, and now you see a Mexican mother singing her child to sleep. You reach the bottom of this galactic pool and find yourself back in your own room. Although the journey is over for now, you feel connected to these far away strangers by a shared celestial admiration.

During the day, the sun looked even bigger than the moon does now. You wonder at how the sun is also a star, like these tiny specks you see now. Could some extraterrestrial being out there be gazing at your sun like you stare at these stars? The universe is vast beyond your understanding. You are smaller than the ants you investigated earlier in the afternoon, smaller even than the brinks of their anthill. How could this earth, in all its smallness, exist all alone? Somewhere, somehow, the possibility of other life forms is quite likely. Not green skinned Martians or short ET-like aliens, but living creatures. Maybe the things you need to live, like water and oxygen, would be toxic for someone on, say, Saturn. Just because you would die from their gaseousness doesn’t mean everyone else would. Do they ride around the rings of Saturn like a carousel, breathing stardust instead of oxygen? Do they even have lungs or eyes or bodies? On the other hand, maybe they are just like you. Could there be an identical world somewhere out there? Are there other beings that look like you, with your exact hair, hands and fingernails? Who knows! But whoever they are, wherever they are, whatever they are, they are your fellow universal citizens. You are not alone. All you need for proof is a clear night of stargazing.

This thing called the “universe” it literally encompasses all things—the earth and each of the stars, planets, black holes, comets and the idea that everything belongs to part of the same thing. When people use the word “universal,” they mean all-inclusive. You ponder this word and how

people use it for non-celestial ideas. Universal truths—shared realities between all humanity. University—a place to learn all things. Universal Studios—producers sure chose that name to appeal to a wide audience. Even the Catholic Church’s name comes from the Greek word *katholikos*, meaning “universal,” and therefore declares itself as the religion for all people. Perhaps all people do in fact have one shared spirituality, although perhaps not a singular religion; maybe God is too big, like the universe, to be simplified into any single interpretation. Could each religion be like a puzzle piece in the mystery of God? You experience His presence in these nights when you admire His creation. You feel a tingle like the chill of a winter breeze; only the wind is in your soul. Your spirit stretches and yawns as it is awakening from sleep and then it seems to stretch so far that it might break free of the skin that entraps it. That is what peace feels like; that is why you stargaze—because, every time your soul stretches, you get closer to your God, closer to the universe, closer to unity. It connects you to everyone and everything. It gives you meaning beyond yourself.

You hear a door close down the hall. Mom has gone to bed. You begin the journey back to earth. You slowly become more aware of your room, your body’s tiredness and the time on the clock. But, now, you also feel the wideness of your spirit. You remember you are an individual person but appreciate your role as part of the universe. You know you are connected to people you don’t know, people you don’t like, people who have died, people who are not born yet. You are not going to doze into lonely hibernation like a grizzly bear. Your body sleeps as your soul awakens. You say goodnight to your old friend Orion. Goodnight room, goodnight moon, goodnight cow jumping over the moon. Now, your bedtime ritual is complete. Clinging on to that tingle of peace like a teddy bear, you drift into dreams.

Finding Silence in the Sky

by Jean Gillingham

The silky moonlight slipped through the crisscross netting of the trampoline, yielding a halo in my boyfriend’s eyes as he surveyed the cloud cover. The wind smelled like the pine needles that blew over us and scraped along the black canvas. My head was nestled safely into the scent of his leather jacket. The wind stilled, settling over us. As Jesse shifted his gaze to me, the moonlight kissed his cheek, and then he kissed mine.

Threaded across the evening sky were bolts of blue and purple lightning. It was heat lightning, Jesse told me, as it flashed on and off, emerging through the clouds in different shapes: deer antlers, tree roots, scribbled letters, loose strings. It was like watching fireworks on the fourth of July on a muted television. We had the show without the storm.

With the wind stopped, our breath held and the soundless lightning overhead, the world was silenced. When Jesse spoke, he was the only one speaking. It was as if the only things left in existence were he, I, and the lightning.

What I knew of heat lightning at the time was no more than Jesse’s whispered memories of the heat lightning in Georgia, where he had seen it while visiting family. I later learned that heat lightning as a phenomenon was something of a myth.

Often, the name is described as a misnomer, as the temperature of the lightning has nothing to do with the lack of sound that accompanies it. Rather, the name heat lightning was erroneously given to distant thunderstorms (Panovich par. 6). On warm, summer nights, the lightning from these storms can be seen from up to one hundred miles away. However, the sound of the thunder doesn’t travel that far, leaving the lightning soundless (McRoberts par. 2). This distant lightning has also been termed “Silent Lightning.”

The origin of the word “silent” can be found in the Latin word “*silentem*,” meaning “still, calm, quiet” (*etymonline.com*). In this way, the name Silent Lightning becomes an oxymoron of sorts, because lightning is anything but still. It is there and then it is gone, like the brush of lips on the cheek.

In his time, Beethoven had a strong appreciation for silence and used

it intensively throughout his work. In his article, “Beethoven’s Uses of Silence,” Barry Cooper notes that Beethoven’s use of silence “is highly unusual, and its powerful evocation of a sense of ineffable stillness and contemplation provides a good illustration of how inadequate the phrase ‘absence of sound’ can be as a description of silence” (25). Although stillness can be seen as a causal factor, the true root of silence—in that standing still or stilled wind or still fingers, lingering tenderly above piano keys will result in silence—Cooper seems to find another correlation between the two. He believes a sensation of stillness can be evoked by silence. Synonymizing this sensation with contemplation, Cooper implies that silence results in some sort of stillness within us: a stillness of the mind, a stillness of the soul. As if, when enveloped by silence, our minds and souls slow down to match the peace and calm aroused by the still silence that our bodies were already contributing to. Perhaps, like us, time cannot help but fall into harmonization with the silence. Perhaps that is why the heat lightning seemed to go on for eternity that night, even though each flash existed no longer than an instant.

Thomas Carlyle once said that “silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together” (112). Upon witnessing heat lightning for the first time, I garnered a connection with it that might have been impossible in the presence of its accompanying storm. The lone lightning, free from the masking noise of thunder and rain, is emphasized in the relative silence. Without the concealment of thick rainfall, the lightning speaks in the pictures that it sketches in the sky, the scribbles and scrawls. The young poet “Elliot” Davisburg describes heat lightning as: “it was not so much a storm but more of a light show” (24-25). For me, it was a conversation: the lightning said it knew about beauty; I said I knew about love.

I fell in love with Jesse five Augusts ago in 2008.

It was storming. Rain poured outside hard and fast; the thunder was deafening. Jesse had to run outside to put his bike in the shed and while he was out there, an enormous boom of thunder shook the house. He stayed longer than usual that night in order to give the storm time to pass. We sat side by side in a soft seated khaki colored chair with a back that rounded into armrests, playing an online game of Family Feud. The chair that we shared was not so large, so he laid his arm along the curve of the chair’s armrest. As the night went on, whenever I leaned back from the keyboard between categories, the back of my right shoulder rested closer and closer to his chest. His arm that had been laid on the chair’s armrest was around me, the warmth of his unfamiliar fingertips just barely grazing the skin of my arm, and my back rested close enough to his chest that I could feel the pulsation of his slow, steady heartbeat through his shirt. Somehow, feeling

his heartbeat, calm and strong, told me more about him than all the answers that he gave to the family feud questions, more even than the sound of his laughter mixing with mine.

In her poem “Love’s Language,” Ella Wheeler Wilcox believes that love speaks “like lightnings that precede the mighty storm; in the deep soulful stillness” (35-36). Often, vocal communication is esteemed as the key to relationships; however, many forget communication’s counterpart, silence. Love manifests itself in the quiet, in the comfort, in the warmth, in the knowing. In the same way that the beauty of the lightning is emphasized by the silence, so too is he or she—your partner, your lover—raised up, unmasked by sound, revealed to you in the marvel of soundlessness. Perhaps something about the calm that the silence instills—the steadiness, the serenity—causes the silence to occasionally result in such phenomenon: beauty, love, heat lightning. I have decided that heat lightning is a phenomenon after all, as it is profoundly distinguishable from the lightning that hides behind the racket of a storm, even if there is no more exceptional explanation to the heat lightning than its distance.

In an interview, novelist Sara Maitland was asked “In your pursuit of silence, you’ve moved farther and farther away from civilization. Where do you live now?” (23). She answered, in a “ruined little house in western Galloway,” which is an area in the southwest of Scotland that is “extremely isolated” and “has the lowest population density in the United Kingdom” (23). Maitland, it seems, associates silence with solitude, distance from the ruckus of people. Although one does not necessarily need to be alone to find silence, it is not surprising that Maitland felt the need to get away from society in order to do so. We are a culture of noise: rumbling engines; the relentless backdrops of television or iPods; mindless chatting done only to fill the uncomfortable, awkward silence.

In her article “Steps Toward Solitude,” Debra Bendis too searches for silence by getting away from society, spending a couple of days by herself at a retreat center many times a year. She reveals that she doesn’t “settle automatically into the silence of solitude. At first the silence can be as startling as noise” (Bendis 28). Perhaps we find silence to be uncomfortable and awkward only because we are so unused to it? Appreciation for the quiet must be cultivated through practice and performance. We must take the time to find and enjoy silence by making an effort to get away from constant noise, even if only in small intervals.

I found silence on the trampoline in my backyard where Jesse and I stargazed all that summer and fall and winter, snuggled under blankets against the cold wind, and in all seasons to follow, refining our comfort with one another in the quiet. Silence resonated in the lightning that lit up the sky for us, asserting itself in the moments between the rustling of

the trees, the scraping of the pine needles and Jesse's steady breathing just beside my ear.

Unless You Are a Matador, Do Not Mess With a Raging Bull

by Marco Rima

I was cramped up with barely any legroom, and the only thing that played through my mind was *why in the world is the back of this cop car so damn small?* Until this point, I thought that the guests the police of New York City regularly entertained in the back of their cars were of much greater stature than I. I was only fourteen and a mere one hundred forty pounds. Still, I struggled to stay comfortable while the six police officers discussed my future with my parents. The back seat of the squad car quickly turned into a stage, and the people outside had front row seats to the worst production I could ever perform.

Recently, I had found out that my father was bi-polar. A light bulb in my head went off, and it shined brighter than any diamond Rihanna could have ever envisioned. Everything started to make sense: his mood swings, the rapid and dramatic attitude changes, even the slight drool that would slip out the corner of his mouth when he got mad. He could be like an angry pit-bull. The doctors and psychiatrists told us to be patient, especially when he missed taking his medication. My father is like a twelve-year-old boy; you tell him one thing and he does the opposite, so seeing him at his worst was quite often. We would always butt heads with our strong personalities, especially as I entered my teenaged years. I started to feel as if I were a matador—no matter what was charging at me, I could escape unscathed.

When my father took his medications, we were like brothers. It was as if we were both fourteen and he was Batman and I, Robin. We were best friends. But when he called the police, screaming, "My son is chasing my daughter around the house swinging a baseball bat!" I came face to face with the ugly truth. You can spend a lifetime building trust, but it only takes one second for it to wither away. The side of him that is uncontrollable—was *so* uncontrollable—is like the image of the Spanish bull running the streets of Pamplona. He runs, he tramples, he is fixated on the matador and his red cloth. They meet in the arena, where the rage that overcomes him cannot be stopped.

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“Hey, Marco, can you help me clean the garage?”

When my father asked me to assist him with chores that day, I thought it was my best friend who had asked. Little did I know, it was the other side of him, the bull, and all he could see was the red shirt that hung from my shoulders.

At first, we worked together flawlessly, no turbulence. I couldn't have asked for a better way to start my morning. The garage was spotless by the time we were done with it. Then my mother came down.

“Could you take that old cabinet out?” she asked for one last favor.

It sounded like a quick and easy job. However, to the bull, the request ran parallel with the sound of the pulling of the trigger that signified the start of the running of the bulls at Pamplona. His posture changed, and even the sound of his voice was off. He clearly thought he was done for the day. Frustration was written across his face.

We tackled the task of moving the cabinet. Though blinded by his anger, my father came up with a plan to move this five-by-four foot cabinet out of the tight space between the Suburban that blocked our only exit. I was brave. After all, I was now a *young man*. I recommended to my dad that we take another approach, rather than taking a chance of damaging the Suburban.

I calmly asked, “How about I get the keys to the truck and move the car up a little bit. It will make our lives so much easier.”

I could immediately tell that he was not having any part of it. He was angry, no longer my best friend but rather the bull. I left. I cursed his name. I swore.

“I am not some stupid little kid anymore. Why don't you ever fucking listen to me, this is *bullshit*. I am not going to do it your way. If you want it done your way go and get your daughter.”

I tried to make the biggest scene possible, living in the moment, taunting the bull. I was *The Matador*.

I ran inside the house to get my father's kryptonite, my sister. She is the only one who can tame my father's beast, with or without medication. But that morning, she screamed and hollered about my work as the matador. So I did what any other big brother would do: I screamed back. My father walked in on us fighting and took defense of his baby girl.

“You better go outside Junior. The police are going to be looking for you.”

I didn't pay much attention to his comment. Who would call the cops over some sibling rivalry? However, five minutes later, three squad cars pulled up in front of my house, and before I could blink twice, those freezing ice-cold silver handcuffs were slapped against my wrists. I thought

to myself, this is real, this is really happening. My attention was strictly focused on the situation at hand.

At fourteen, I was in the back of a squad car for allegedly attempting to strike my sister with a baseball bat. It was my word against that of my *best friend*, the adult, the raging bull of my father. Luckily enough, the police offered me a deal. No booking, no jail. Just probation and reports that I'm seeing a psychiatrist. It's crazy how quickly a bull can pull a fast one, even on a matador.

Vodka Is Not the Only Intoxicant

by Rachel Christian

In place of the door stands a curtain; inside are two chairs, dim lights, a bed, and a beeping machine. I'm in an unfamiliar place with a stranger and a person I met only a month ago. The Graduate Residence Coordinator studies material from a chemistry textbook while we wait. I have nothing but my phone and my room key. My roommate lies in the center of this small room, unmoving, pale, mouth ajar, and dressed in a thin aquamarine gown. Her favorite giraffe-print blouse and dark skinny jeans are folded neatly beside me. They reek of vomit. When they put her on the stretcher she was not wearing shoes, her heels must have been back in the apartment, somewhere. Her straight dark hairs stretch across her pillow, but I envision my blonde curls resting there. I could use a hospital bed.

I check my phone for the time—2 a.m. Just a few hours ago, I was in different dimly-lit room. We had gone into his room for privacy, but I still felt vulnerable. We sat on his bed and the conversation began.

"I don't think we're on the same page anymore," he admitted cautiously.

I still wonder if we were ever on the same page.

While he pled his case, my eyes surveyed the greyish dorm room where I had spent most of the last month. The navy curtained window, the maroon carpet, a white door and a trash can. I held my breath.

We had met during orientation, the first week of September. On September 12th, we went on our first date, and by the 16th we were 'official.' Today is October 8th. This relationship was a like a bad roller coaster. The ride started out fun, but soon the high speed jolts made me sick. Now we're reaching the end. These past few weeks have felt like a year, but the calendar does not lie.

Funny how much can happen in only a month.

I knew I should end this destructive relationship before it killed me, but I wanted us to work. I wanted to be in love again. But how could I tell a stranger that I loved him? How could I believe him when he said he loved me? Why did I trust him? I barely even knew him.

He finished his explanation. Yes, I understood the problems. But what should we do about them? I already spent the last two lonesome days tormented by this question. After hours of hysterical sobbing and painful

confessions to my roommate, sister, and mom, I came up with a reasonable ultimatum.

"Look, we can either try to make this work or we can just let it go," I offered. I waited for his choice. He took a breath and studied the ground.

"I think we should just be friends," he said with pain in his voice. My heart screamed. I had heard those words before, and he knew I had, but this time was different; we skipped over being friends. How could we go backwards? I wanted to slow down, not turn around.

"I don't think we can. It doesn't work that way." I could not look at him. Not again. Why won't he fight to keep me? I could feel my throat closing and my emotions swelling. All that time, wasted.

"Maybe we can be the exception," he hoped, trying to catch my eye. I wanted to believe he was right, but I trusted my experience more than his words.

Now, only hours later, I must face reality again. No time to rest, no dreams to escape into. The hospital air-conditioning stings my laboring eyes. The well of my tears has been pumped dry. I look at my roommate, her frail, thin body lying motionless. How could she have been so careless? They were only gone for an hour or two. So much damage done in such a short time.

But who am I to judge? Vodka is not the only intoxicant.

Will she be all right?

With nothing to fill the silence but my thoughts, they haunt me: She's lying on the hallway carpet, we are dragging her limp body to her bed. She's laughing and blabbering, then throwing up on her favorite shirt. We get her to the bathroom, but struggle to hold her over the toilet. I am holding her up with all my strength while trying to brush her hair out of her face. She's not talking anymore. We need help. I began to think of him. A panicked phone call goes unanswered, of course. I wandered the halls, knocking on doors to empty rooms. I am scared and alone. Back in the room, she doesn't look good. There is a knock on our door, but not from him. At least someone is here. Two acquaintances carry her body to the couch. Recovery position. Now what? One checks her eyes they are red and her skin is getting paler. She's hardly breathing. "She needs to go to the hospital." The other calls campus police. I search her room for identification and I cannot find anything. Police arrive. EMTs are being called. My phone buzzes. He called back, but he's too late. The stretcher is coming in.

They would only allow one of us to ride in the ambulance and stay in the hospital with her. I volunteered. I figured that since I was the only one who hadn't been drinking, I would be in the best shape to take care of her, but I was not in good shape. Compared to everyone else, I was probably in the worst shape. I was like an alcoholic in mid-withdrawal. How could I

take care of her when I needed a stretcher for myself?

We waited outside while the EMTs prepared the ambulance. The siren lights painted the world red. I was shaking, but the night was not cold. Some lady with glasses and a notepad talked to campus police. She took notes. I thought she was some damned reporter, but she was the GRC. This was the stranger who had to stay with us until my roommate's family arrived. She knew nothing about us, yet she would be monitoring my roommate's recovery. Having her there was like getting cold Brussels sprouts when you want warm apple pie. I knew she was there to help, but I could not help resenting her.

After a few minutes, I saw him approaching with a few of our friends. Once they reached us at the top of the slope, they hugged me and spoke gentle words, but he stood stiff, mute, and distant. In that moment of crisis when I needed him most, he had nothing to say. Even his jerk of a roommate was being a better friend to me! Why did he even come? Some friend he is proving to be.

The time came to say goodbye. I got in the ambulance. The stranger in the driver's seat did not speak to me while we whizzed through the streets, siren roaring. The scream sounded different from inside.

Here in the emergency room, the nurses are acting like this sort of thing happens all the time. It probably does. They poke and inspect her with routine rather than urgency. Drunken, passed out college kids aren't a big deal to them, but this is my roommate. I feel like I'm screaming in the middle of a crowd and no one hears me. My fingers cup my temples and I exhale. When I inhale, the stench of her vomitus clothing taunts me. I can smell the last time I threw up—in his trash can. My body had both craved and rejected the carnal intimacy like a drug. The vomit should have been a clear sign that our secret addiction was unhealthy. It was too much too soon. Now our roller coaster of a relationship has reached an abrupt halt, leaving me nauseous, but relieved.

4 a.m. A young doctor comes in, about time. His relaxed manner parallels the nurses, but his white coat demands more confidence than their scrubs. He's got a clipboard, too.

"It's a good thing you brought her in," he assures me.

"What's happening to her?" I ask.

"Her tests show a high level of alcohol poisoning. Her BAC is actually three times the legal driving limit. How long was she drinking?"

"She was only gone for a little over an hour, I swear. She couldn't have had much, but I guess it didn't take much."

"Yeah, she probably drank too much too fast. She should really be more careful in the future."

He checks a neon blue screen and jots down some notes on his

clipboard. "We're going to keep her here for a couple hours to make sure she doesn't get dehydrated. She'll be feeling sick for a couple of days, but after that, she'll be fine."

She will be fine. Time will heal her.

Finally, she starts to wake up. She's muttering in French, so she's still drunk, of course, but back to herself. The doctor explains what happened to her, and I am just relieved to see her conscious again.

Soon her family arrives from Philly. They will be able to take care of her now. I say goodbye and get a ride home with campus police. The driver is the same officer who came to our apartment and helped put her on the stretcher.

"How is she?" he asks with concern. I wasn't expecting him to ask, let alone care.

"She's awake now. She had pretty bad alcohol poisoning, but she's gonna be all right."

"Well that's a relief."

The kind stranger drops me off outside my dorm. I ride the elevator to the ninth floor, leaning against the wall for support. I stumble into my room. I feel like I am the one with the hangover.

As I finally get back to my own bed, the sun is starting to peek through the window shades. The time has nearly reached 8 a.m. My sense of time is totally skewed. What is an hour? What is a day? A week? A year? Nothing, but a measure of the sun's movement, yet everything that makes life change. I crawl into bed and stare. The days ahead will be hell, but thank God hangovers are only temporary. She just needs a little time.

No Need to Speed

by Chris Cardone

I checked down at the speedometer with a grin as the needle climbed past 105. I quickly pivoted my head to see the GTT's headlights fading 3 car lengths back. My eyes jumped to the rearview, those blue lights glowing like the Fourth of July in the mirror. Now my mind was racing too, I just wanted to melt away in that seat; my heart was in my stomach. I stomped on the brake pedal and the Brembos dragged me back to earth. *Game over*, I thought, *this is it*.

"License and registration please," the officer asserted.

As a little boy I can remember crawling up on the couch and watching "The Dukes of Hazard" with my Dad. It was our weekend ritual. The last 10 minutes of each episode were always my favorite, as Bo and Luke raced the General Lee all over Hazard County. Through every improbable jump, turn, and getaway, it was like I was there with them in the back seat. As I grew older our weekly shows matured as well, from fictional backcountry racing, to the technical Saturday morning shows like Horsepower and Muscle Car. Through all those years, on any given Saturday morning, Mom knew exactly where to find Dad and me. We wouldn't have wanted it any other way. From talking about the classic cars, or the latest models, or just comparing and discussing drivetrains to rear axles, it was what we lived for.

I slammed my alarm clock at 6 that morning. It was Monday, but I quickly rose from my bed with extra pep in my step on that crisp November day. I could still hear my dad snoring upstairs; I was tempted to wake him up, but I decided to wait. I knew my family would be able to celebrate with me that night. I grabbed my school bag and ran down the stairs to catch the bus. As the old garage door slid up, I had to pick my jaw off the floor. No more chasing buses for me; parked out in the driveway was my very own 2011 Chevrolet Camaro, its chrome rims shining in the sunlight.

"You can get into a lot of trouble with that machine Chris, there's no need to speed," my Dad said as he was wearing his goofy plaid NY Jets pajamas, but his stern look was anything but.

He knew my temptation; he could see it in my eyes. I pretended I didn't hear him. I just gave him a big bear hug, and never wanted to let go. I was

so thankful.

She was jet black; I sat low in my seat under her low-slung roofline. A General Motors LS3 powerplant lurked under the bulge in the hood. 426 horsepower controlled by the right foot of an "invincible" 18-year old. Ray Bans, brown boots on the pedals, right hand on the pistol grip shifter, left on top of the deep-dish wheel. I was piloting my very own piece of American muscle. The pavement would shake as it approached, but only after you heard the sweet soundtrack those eight pistons made, speaking through those twin Magnaflow pipes. The windows were always down; Florida Georgia Line was always up, blasting through Kicker 10s in the trunk. I always left a trail of Pirelli rubber behind me, just in case you couldn't hear me leaving. I drove stoplight to stoplight, burnout-to-burnout, sprinting out of my high school parking lot—never going slow, and never without a smile.

I would say my least favorite phrase in the whole world back then was "please slow down Chris." Who knows why; I was never in a hurry. There was just something about dropping a few gears and mashing the gas pedal like I was Dale Earnhardt that never got old to me. Whether it was my sister, my friends, or my girlfriend in the car, I always heard some variant of my favorite phrase, and it always went in one ear and out the other.

I still remember that day; it plays back in my mind like an old fashioned movie, frame by frame, second by second. My phone lit up; it was the kid from my auto tech class, George.

"Man, you have to come down to the school parking lot and check this out!"

"2012 Volkswagen GTI Stage IV K04 turbo, bro!"

It was all black, from the tints to the rims, to the metallic flakes in the paint. I knew the "R" word was coming soon, and I thought to myself, *I should have driven my Dad's truck over here!* Before I knew it, the taunts started.

"What are you chicken, you think you're going to lose big baby?" I convinced myself that American pride was on the line; I was doing it for muscle car fans everywhere. We went to the Ole Glenside by the reservation, with a straight strip of runway you could land a 757 on.

I revved the V-8 up to 2500 rpm, as I could hear the GTT's turbo scrolling up, boosting those 4 cylinders. As the towel dropped, I thought to myself, *am I actually doing this?* I let out the clutch, and the rear wheels hooked up, quite magnificently, as the GTT's front wheels could not put the massive power on the ground, screeching and spinning. I was out in front, by a lot.

Soon enough, the blue lights appeared in my rearview, and I wanted to melt away in the bottom of that seat. My car wasn't the only thing racing

now, as my mind thought about how I let down my dad, all those lives I put into danger, and how this is the last time I'll be in this car. To this day, when I touch a gas pedal of a car, I feel the sensation of my heart in my stomach, putting on my suit and tie appearing in court, getting my license revoked, scared from that night forever. There is no need to speed.

