The Great Lake Review is open to submissions throughout the year.

Please send your fiction, creative nonfiction, dramatic writing, poetry and visual art as an attachment to:

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The Great Lake Review
Spring 2008 Staff

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brine
KJ Grimmick

ice blue, emerald green
build, build, rise & fall
swift, slow, delicate, strong-crash
white foam rolls
pale horses at a serpentine gallop
onto the sand
midnight blue in the distance	

alightest waves, beautiful bellies
slick & wet, smooth as a seal’s back
closer to the shore
water lightens, sandy blues & silvery jades
clouds shift & sun rays spoke, shine
all tinted warm & gold
air shafts of honey hit
waves light up, glistening, fused, electrified
sea woman
horizon is her home, clouds her hair-
celestial cotton tufts
the ocean is her dress
each night she dances with the moon
pulls the great tide of her skirts-
turquoise & tortoise
waltz & the waters shake, shudder in the wake
of rhythmic steps
she grows weary
lies down flat on the horizon
at last she gives tremendous births
sharks & seaweed
sand dollars & dolphins
night fades to morning
her lover, moon, soon to depart

she weeps
her tears are feathers, gray, white & black
take shape, take flight
sea woman
she cries gulls
My dad stands by the front door, his eyes tearing up, his otherwise tan complexion, pale. He stands still, his concentration on the red swirling lights of the ambulance pulling out of our driveway, taking my grandfather away. My mom stands next to him, keys in hand, looking uncomfortable. She puts her hand on his round shoulder, a movement meant to coax him into the car. He doesn’t wince like I expect him to. His eyes don’t release the tears that have built up. Instead he opens the door and continues on with what he knows has to be done. I feel guilty for not going with them, but I’m afraid my feelings of relief will be exposed. Sad. Uncomfortable. Relieved.

One week before that my dad sat at the kitchen table wondering why his own father couldn’t finish the meal. My grandfather’s hand was shaking as he lifted a spoonful of corn to his mouth. By the time the spoon reached his lips, all the kernels had fallen onto the plate, and the table, and the floor. My mother sat next to him, unconcerned about the mess, staring at my father, questioning her next move. I tried not to meet anyone’s eyes, afraid that they would see how unsure I too was, afraid they would see that I was wondering when it would end. I wouldn’t tell them about that afternoon, coming home from work, finding my grandfather in the bathroom, yelling, crying, and needing my help. I wouldn’t tell them that he hit me, begged for his wife, shrieked in fear. Questioning. Questioning. Questioning.

One week before that my father stood in his suit, the one he had worn to my high school graduation, looking into an open casket. My mother stood next to him, her frail hands clutching his, trying to show her support. My father’s mother lay in her jeweled dress she had worn to her 50th wedding anniversary party, her wedding ring shining on her fingers, her eyes closed, at peace. The tumor that had attacked her thyroid was gone. The extra folds of skin, left behind after losing pounds of weight, were unseen. The black patch of peach fuzz that had just grown on top her head was concealed by a full wig, resembling her appearance in her former life. I stood by the flowers; bouquet after bouquet lined the room and I wasn’t sure if I was upset or relieved, because after all, she had been sick. My grandfather was mumbling in the back. “Did somebody die?” he kept asking. Sad. Supportive. Confused.

Four years before that my father entered the restaurant looking flashy in his new shirt and tie. My mother entered next to him, pleased with herself for fitting into an old dress. I followed them, feeling old and mature in my first pair of high heels. They were brown and matched my purse. We were there for a party and spotted my grandparents immediately. My grandfather looked small compared to my grandmother’s oversized frame. Their matching olive skin tones shone in the bright lighting. While my parents embraced my grandmother as a form of hello, I hugged my grandfather, my tiny arms wrapping around his grey suit. “Do I know you?” he asked and I looked at my family, my parents shifting glances of disbelief at the onset of Alzheimer’s, my grandmother...
Michele Giorlando


A few months before that it was Christmas and we were watching home videos. My grandmother wore her Christmas apron, worn to the point of sheerness, the small holly print fading away. My grandfather’s eyes stayed glued to the screen, laughing at the way we had all grown up. We thought my grandmother just had a sore throat when she couldn’t finish the seven course fish meal, which her and my mother had slaved over all day. “We didn’t know it was her thyroid. We didn’t know it was cancer. My father told her to stick to the shrimp soup. My mother wanted to call over the neighbor, a nurse. I wanted pasta and not fish. Unaware. Unaware. Unaware.

Six years before that we were piled into a car, traveling to the Catskill Mountains, for two weeks of summer vacation at a family resort. We were crowded together and I sat between my father and grandfather, smudged in between the front seats of the aged Oldsmobile. My grandmother crocheted in the backseat, making a blanket for my mother. My mother sat happily, doing crossword puzzles, anxious for fourteen days of relaxation. My grandfather started singing “The Bear Went Over the Mountain” and I insisted we sang it in rounds. We were singing, crowded together, our arms touching, laughing at how out of tune we sounded. The trunk was full of luggage and we were all ready to escape for two weeks of Bingo, swimming, and family karaoke. Happy. Happy. Happy.

The Willow Tree
Kyle J. Harbinger

There are some things I don’t understand.
I saw the world as it is;
And found we’re forever lost.
We’re climbing a question mark
And that in itself,
I don’t understand.

“I don’t understand!”
I shouted, as I looked up

And the sky looked down,
eyed me around with a quizzical frown,and asked me deep,and as slow,as molasses-

“DO YOU WANT ME TO RAIN?”

I could taste that feeling on the back of my tongue
As I looked at a dry Willow
And nodded slowly.

I then lost my mind in a bizarre cluster of black and white fury and found my brain flopping like a fish out of water.

I dusted it off, screwed it back on,
reached at black specs-
(they were once cackled crows)
felt dead for a minute,
but lost in the flow,
and it's times like this where nobody knows
what I know-

For this moment-

I was a glop of yellow lightning on God's giant brush. Oh my friend, it wasn't in my head.

What I knew (I didn't know) was a feeling in my spine

"I'm forever lost."

I said,
on top of my car
Where I found myself-

Talking to the willow.

I asked him ridiculous questions
like why he only speaks when it's raining
or if he dreams

of licking stop signs

or eating handfuls of batteries.

he responded by crying.

As tears of voltage spewed from his branches in an exasperated moan.
Clunky 9 volts heavy as lead
Poured like raindrops on my bruising head

As he gently ate the questions out of my hands.
Together we wept until morning.

The tree slowly turned
and asked me freakishly slow,

"WHY DID,"

He took a breath and gave a sigh,

"THE SKY

HAVE TO

LIE?"

He shed a huge tear
and looked me in the eye.
"KYLE,"
He said,
"I'M READY TO DIE."

All the bells and whistles of the world
Oozed from his trunk
As he let out a scream
that haunts me to this day.

When I gaze deep into The Willow's roots
there are these visions I get that

I just don't understand.

Inside that Tree, the strongest of everything
humbly nestles inside the branches.
I never cared much for corn. My father and grandfather swore by it, but I am more of a potato man myself. Give me two baked potatoes with salt and pepper and just a little bit of butter and you could close the book on me now because I'm in heaven. In Jones County they look at you like you killed their mother if you tell 'em you don't like corn. In fact, I don't think there's a bigger insult in the entire state of Iowa than telling someone you don't want to try some of this year's crop. I guess they think there are two types of people in this world; those who like corn, and those who like potatoes. I was doomed from the start.

My grandfather started the farm in his late thirties when he came into some money that his father had left him. He bought a small piece of land in Jones County, Iowa, and worked it until it was the pride of the state. When he died my father took over. He had big shoes to fill, but I think he filled 'em well. He expanded our land and doubled our income. We still live in the farmhouse that my grandfather built and still use most of the older tools. The plan was to leave the farm to me when my father died. I bet that's the only reason my father wanted me, even if it was only to run his farm. My mother left a few years ago. I didn't care for her either. She was worse than my father. At least my father wanted me, even if it was only to run his farm. My mother hated me. I never really knew why; she wasn't around long enough for me to find out. After she left us my father became worse than ever. I don't dislike him as a person; I'm just not a fan of being beaten. My grandfather was a hard-ass too; maybe it's a family trait. I made a vow to myself that if I ever had kids I would never touch a goddamn hair on their heads out of anger. It's just not right.

I like the night. The old man's asleep now, so he can't harass me. Tonight I've decided to lie out in the corn fields, with the crows. They don't talk much, but they listen to my problems and that's more than anyone has ever done for me. Maybe one day I'll get out of Iowa, go somewhere there isn't corn. Maybe those are just pipe dreams. I will probably never get out of this place. Corn country is all I know. I watch the crops move in the wind, almost like waves sweeping over the hills over the house, and on for miles.

Noon is when I take the tractor out around the fields. My father is usually in the house at this time, but not today. Today he is being a pain in the ass and following
Zachary Davis

me around to make sure I am doing a good job. He has this old whip that he used on the horse we had when I was young. Her name was Star Gaze; it was a terrible name, but my mom loved that thing. The only thing in this world she cared for. Anyway, my dad likes to hit me with this horse whip whenever I do something wrong. What a charmer he is.

The tractor is acting funny. I’m not surprised, the thing is ancient. I’m not sure why it hasn’t blown up or something. I open the hood to look at the big greasy mess of engine. I get the tools and go to work on it, my father perched over my shoulder, just waiting for me to mess up. Of course I do. It’s hard not to when your hands are shaking so hard.

“What the hell are you doing?” he yells in my ear.

“It’s the engine, the damn thing is shot,” I say. “I think there’s a hole in the cylinder.” This sets him off into a rage and he beats me for what seems like forever even though I had nothing to do with it. He’s just pissed about spending the money to get it fixed so I’m his punching bag. I smell the alcohol on his breath and his fists become a daze. I don’t think I have ever been more furious in my life. I try to fight back but it’s useless, it just pisses him off more and his blows become harder. Every time he lands one I feel as if my entire body is shutting down. Finally he is finished with me and staggers up the stairs to rest. Beating the shit out of someone takes a lot out of you. The old man is off his rocker. If I never saw him again it would be too fucking soon. He’s always had it out for me. The only time I actually thought he cared for me was when I fell off the tractor as a small boy. I was knocked out and when I came to the look of worry on his face scared me. I haven’t seen that look on his face since. Probably never will.

I tell the crows in the field about my problems. They listen, and give wise advice. I rarely go against what they say, there are too many of them. They give me exact instructions and I listen carefully. That is how our relationship works. I wait for night to come.

I am in my father’s bedroom. I haven’t been in here in years, but not much of it has changed. My mother’s nightstand is still exactly the way she left it, her bible with the bookmark in place as if she was going to pick up where she left off tonight, and the chocolate candies she always ate in bed, smacking her lips together. My father is still careful to stay on his side of the bed. He is sound asleep, drunk of course. I run my fingers through his greasy hair and raise my arm, screwdriver in hand. It’s musty in here. I can’t help but sneeze and this wakes the old man up. He is drunk and in a daze but he isn’t violent.

“What the hell are you doing in here?” he asks. His breath smells of gin and I have to take a step back. I don’t answer. I put my arm down and rest the screwdriver against my leg. There is no moment of apprehension; this is what needs to be done. I thrust the Phillips head into his neck and blood is instantly everywhere. He turns toward me with his eyes open wider than I have ever seen them. He grabs my arm but his hands

Iowa
are weak. I don’t blink. I’m not afraid. I just look into his
hazy eyes as he tries to mouth words.

“I won’t miss you old man,” I whisper, then I kiss
his forehead gently. The Judas kiss, but who’s to say Judas
didn’t have his reasons. His breathing becomes slower and
slow and eventually stops altogether. The crows are at
the window. They sit patiently.

Noon is when I usually take the tractor out around
the fields, but not today. Today I am burying my father
six feet under the corn. It was with his hard work that the
crops flourished in the first place, so I feel it’s the least
I can do. The crows watch, but don’t speak. They know
when to keep quiet.

It has been weeks since my father left me. I
continue to work in the fields but they are going to shit.
I never had the knack for taking care of plants. I had a
small jade houseplant in my room once, but it died. I was
never sure why; I gave it plenty of sunlight, and watered
it like instructed, but I guess I wasn’t made to take care of
things. The police questioned me a little about my father’s
disappearance but not much. I told them that he packed up
and left. I think I was convincing enough, but who knows
with those guys. You couldn’t get them to crack a smile if
you threw ‘em a bag of money. The whole force around
here is a bunch of middle-aged tight asses with something
to prove. The crows never leave me alone now. They are
always giving instructions but I try my best to ignore them.
Sometimes I give in, but most of the time I can talk them
out of it.

Zachary Davis

Officer Swanson is at the table today. Here to
talk about my father. He keeps looking at me funny and
trying to read my face. He looks worried about my lack of
emotion about the whole ordeal, but I can’t help it. I have
never been much of an actor.

“I know you have told us before what happened,
but is there anything else you remember?” he asks.

“I’m sorry Officer Swanson, but I’m afraid I told
you all I know,” I say with my usual straight face.

“Ok, Ronnie,” he says, looking unconvincing.

“Ronnie,” I whisper.

“What’s that?” Swanson asks.

“Oh nothing,” I say quickly. “It’s just I haven’t
heard my name in years. My father always called me ‘boy’
or ‘you.’ I’m not used to answering to Ronnie anymore.”

An odd look comes across Swanson’s face and I
know that I’ve revealed too much. I try to backpedal but
that just makes it worse and before I know it Swanson is
making little notes in his book.

“I think I should get back to work,” I tell him, my
hands shaking.

“Yes, yes, of course,”” Swanson says, closing his
book. “Just do me a favor, call me if you plan on going
anywhere.”

“Am I a suspect?” I ask nervously.

“No, no, of course not,” he says. “Just protocol,
that’s all.”

“Ok,” I answer meekly. “I should go now. Take
care, officer.”

“You too Ronnie,” he says, and then leaves out
the back door.
I run to the fields where the crows are waiting. They sit on their usual branch, but look past me and focus on the driveway where Swanson is brushing the dust off his cruiser. They already know. They are already judging. “I know, I know! I made a mistake!” I tell them. “How do I fix it?” They always give the same advice. Nothing is ever different around here. I settle them down. I know what I need to do. I go to the barn and grab my father’s old rifle. It hasn’t been used in years but it will do the job. I go to the front of the house.

“Officer Swanson!” I yell as he is getting into his squad car.

“Yes, Ronnie, what is it?” he asks.

The kindness in his face turns to worry when he see me take aim with the rifle. I steady my hand and pump one round into his chest before he can get his gun out of the holster. He falls slowly; the blood from his wound leaves a long streak down his car. I go to the front seat and notice his radio is going off. The bastard already called for backup before I came to finish him off. He must have been snooping around the property when I was in the fields. There is nothing I can do now but drag him out to the corn. I drive his car to the back lot of the property and return to the house. Jones County Police are already at the front porch and they can see it all over my face. I deny it up and down, but they see the blood on the dirt leading to the corn. They cuff me as they search for Swanson. It doesn’t take them long. The crows wait with me, perched on the front porch staring deep into my eyes, too deep. They stay until I am loaded into the car. They try to give me advice to get out of this, but I don’t listen. They are angry but I hold my ground.

“Do you see what you made me do?” I yell to them. “Are you happy now?” I ask, but they don’t answer.

The cops are all looking, judging. They exchange looks with each other. I know they think I’m crazy, but I don’t care anymore. I know I’m not crazy.

“I think we have enough evidence here,” one of officers says to the other. “Let’s get this boy some help.”

“I don’t need help!” I yell at him. “I need to get out of Iowa. I need to get away from these crows.”

There’s water all over my face. They don’t say anything. They help me into the car and I take one last look at the fields. I see the crows on the roof, and I almost feel sorry for them. They will have nobody to talk to.

I don’t like it here. I miss the outdoors. I miss colors. Everything’s white. They tell me it’s supposed to be calming but I don’t feel calm. I feel anxious. They feed us a lot of corn here, never any potatoes. I tell them I don’t care much for corn but they don’t listen. They don’t ever listen to me. I tell them about the crows and that I need to talk to them but they don’t seem interested. They nod and tell me “someday, someday,” but I know they are lying. This place is full of liars. I spend my days thinking, thinking, and looking out the window. I wait for the crows to come pay me a visit, maybe give me some advice. But they never do. They never do.
I whispered for a cookie
Jonathan Boo

Age 3
My 8 year old sister gave me a bath...my mom fixed
dinner
My dad took me to get my haircut...mom was surprised

Age 4
I found audio tapes under the playroom couch...I
brought them to my mom, she told me to put them back
quietly
My dad was ripping the phone from my mothers
hands...policemen took him away
for the night
My mom and I gave away our dog, Lady...I cried all
the way home
We lived near the water now and I saw my dad every
other weekend

Age 5
My mom punished me for cursing...my sister called me
“dumbo”
My mom introduced me to Ed

Age 6
I whispered “Can I have a cookie?” to my mom because
I didn’t want Ed to hear

Age 7
Punched Ed’s daughter in the nose for making fun of
me...Ed was furious

Age 9
Mom couldn’t yawn or eat very much...we laughed
because her jaw was wired shut from slipping on the ice

Age 10
My father is happily re-married
We moved down the street and Ed still came by every
few days to talk to my mother

Age 11
Jessica left to go live with my father
My mother prevented me from seeing my father
Jonathan Boo

Age 12

I had to walk to the bus stop every morning for school…One year since I’ve seen him

Age 13

I was cool, but I still cried in my mother’s arms because I missed Jessica…Two years since I’ve seen him

Age 16

I was even cooler because I was legally allowed to drive…with my mom

Almost 5 years when I was at soccer practice and a teacher told me that my dad was in the hospital in ICU…I later found out, I was lied to just so he could see me.

I started to talk to him again…he even came to one of my games

Age 17

Moved in with Ed

I started opening my eyes…stopped talking to my father again

I whispered for a cookie

Age 18

Life was great

I have a girlfriend

Got used to seeing Ed pour himself a drink before noon.

Age 19

Couple years since we stopped talking again I miss him a lot

My mother told my father I didn’t miss him and I want nothing to do with him.

Found out those tapes were phone conversation recordings of my mother that my father had taken.

My mother told me she cheated on my father when I was younger…Flipped my life upside down

Found out my mother didn’t slip on ice that day

My father is still happily married

Realized my mother made a huge mistake

Clinging on to the world by my finger tips and trying to hold on
I have always wanted to fly. The thought alone makes my skin prickle. Dad says that if I eat enough chicken skins, I will grow wings and turn into a chicken. Then I will be able to fly. Tonight I am having Mom make chicken. Lots of chicken.

I sit at the table quietly, just the way Mom likes. The smell of chicken is so strong that my mouth begins to water. She puts all of the chicken skins in a separate bowl for me. I eye the bowl with a growing hunger. I can already see myself tearing through the skin with my teeth.

“Katie,” Mom says, “you can’t have any of your chicken skins until you eat your vegetables.”

I look at my plate and frown. Bright orange carrots cover my plate. There must be a million carrots there. How can I eat my chicken skin if there are so many carrots?

“But Mom, I won’t be hungry if I eat all of these carrots.”

Mom gives me one of her serious looks. “If you don’t want to eat your carrots then you can’t eat your chicken skins. Those are the rules.”

“Stupid rules,” I say quietly so she can’t hear. I pick up my fork and shove as many carrots as I can into my mouth, trying to ignore the taste.

“Ok Mom,” I say once I’m finished. “All done.” She smiles at me and I know she’s proud that I have eaten all of my carrots. Dad smiles too. He’s been quiet this evening. I think he’s upset about having to eat so many carrots as well.

Mom hands me the bowl of chicken skins and my eyes dart about, trying to take in all of the glazed uncious-
I eat the entire bowl, each bite making me feel more full but I don’t care. Tomorrow I will be a chicken and then I can eat whatever I want without Mom telling me.

My stomach is big and round when I am done and it hurts to move too fast. I want to go to bed early because the sooner I go to bed, the sooner I will be a chicken. Mom tucks me in. Dad comes in afterwards and kisses me goodnight. I can’t sleep; I’m too excited.

I lay in bed thinking about the next day. I will go to nursery school like I do every day but this time I will be a chicken. I will fly around the room, looking down on my classmates and they will all wish that they could be a chicken like me. Even Teacher will want to know my secret. I will spend the entire day doing tricks for them, like flying, and pecking, and making funny chicken noises. The thought makes me smile and I squeeze my eyes tight.

The next morning comes and I am not a chicken. I feel my arms and they are human. I feel my back, no wings. My feet have toes. Even my voice sounds human. I must not have eaten enough chicken skin. Or maybe, Dad was wrong. This thought makes my stomach sink low and I want to cry but I won’t because I am too old for that. Mom comes in my room and helps me get dressed for nursery school. She doesn’t say anything about being a chicken as she slides on my dress. She’s probably glad I can still wear dresses, this one’s her favorite. We go out into the living room, she makes me breakfast, and then we get into the car. I am on my way to nursery school and I don’t have any wings.

They intertwine, tangle and lock, swinging in summer’s hazy heat.
Perspiration building in between the crevices offer a soft rhythm as
They slip and grasp again.
Adorned in large gems, pushed passed the wideness of
knuckles,
They reflect flashy lights during obscene gestures and
coy hellos.
Calloused palms pass plates that over flow with succulent
smells,
While savory gravy drips off un-manicured tips that linger
on thick lips.
Chance meetings in bowls as small children grab handfuls
of popcorn,
Before they begin to trace letters on never ending lines,
just like the ones found on their pale palms.
In attempt to sleep she plays with the wrinkles on top of
my hand.
Letting the skin gather and fall on veins
that have pumped gallons of blood daily for decades.
Her fingers are pudgy. Agreeing that our palms fit
perfectly,
She slaps our hands together measuring the difference
in size,
Allowing the slow caress of my nimble fingers lull her
to sleep.
what i learnt from god
Elena Schermerhorn

i talked to god last night,
he said you’re ugly, he hates your voice,
stop praying so much.
he said that mothers should wake up and free their
children
that america was doomed and the old world was due to
rise up
i heard him recite ginsberg
whitman fell from his lips with indescribable intent
i told him of hypocrites and he told me of absolute
faith,
and how hard it was to have faith in mankind
god rolled a j to match mine and we talked about things
we can’t remember
like peace love & harmony. of things quiet.
i broke out my vinyls to temper the mood with the
melodies of the few good souls we had (and lost).
we heard real pain & suffering
and we suffered with them.
i let god see the tears i show no one else
and he told me that if i grew up i wouldn’t cry anymore
he told me to go to Europe
there i might fit in
he told me the real truth of love,
which is something no human will ever understand.
i asked him if the snake was framed,
and he hung his head and said yes
(i could never understand the danger in wisdom, anyway).
he made few comments on my soul,
She disappears every night.

Sometimes it is in a puff of gray smoke. Other times it is after stepping inside a tall glittering box. Every time the audience is pleased. They gasp and applaud, thrilled that this lovely young lady is gone. She sometimes stares out at them as they stare straight back at her, the angled mirrors in the box making it appear empty. The blinding lights glare in her eyes and she cannot quite make out any individual faces in the crowd. Occasionally when the lights shift she can see a shining child's face, their eyes aglow with awe and wonder. They poke their mother or father's arm to ask, "How did he do that?"

She used to wonder that too. But after she took the job as the lovely assistant to "Maurice the Magnificent", she learned all the secrets; the trapdoor in the floor of the stage, the mirrors, the hidden platform that raised her into the air when she "levitated." She wore the flowing, wispy dresses to hide any mechanisms or pulleys, and she was beautiful in order to distract the audience from any sleight of hand Maurice performed. She was responsible for pushing the button once she stepped inside the box or laid down on the platform so the mirrors would spring out or the platform would rise. One time she had drifted off lost in her thoughts, and forgot, so that when Maurice opened the box again she was still visible. The audience had broken out in whispers and confusion but Maurice covered the awkward moment up with a joke and re-did the trick. Luckily Maurice was quick on his feet and kind. He understood her daydreaming and drifting mind, often telling her that that wistful look she wore was the reason he had hired her. She reminded him of his own dreamy
Andrea Ruggirello

daughter. Besides, the audience had loved the trick as if nothing had gone wrong.

They do not applaud quite as loudly when she reappears. It is almost as if they had hoped she had truly slipped into some alternate dimension from which she could never return. Or maybe she represented that person or vice they could not get rid of in their own lives. They wanted a box and a wand to make them disappear forever.

She wondered what it would be like to truly disappear, if all this magic were real. Where would she go? What would that place be like? Sometimes in her mind it was a black void, nothing and no one but the other girls who had disappeared. They would talk and exchange stories, bond over their shared experiences. They would discuss what they had left behind but most of the time it would not be much; a cat maybe, or a boyfriend.

Sometimes that place was the exact same stage she disappeared from, only the audience, Maurice, the stagehands, everyone was gone. The lights were dim and the empty seats stretched on for miles. Here, she did not have to hide in the box. She could allow her hair to fall loose and wild. She could wipe off the makeup and shatter the mirrors and she did not have to smile. She was the star of the show, the one making the calls.

One evening, Maurice told her he was testing a new trick; “The Red Ribbon Escape” he called it. He would bind her wrists with a red ribbon then lock her in a trunk. She was then to slip out of the trick knot he had tied, drop through the trapdoor to the bottom of the stage and then as Maurice rambled on, come out from the curtains and tap him on the shoulder, startling him and causing the audience to burst into laughter and applause. It was simple but amusing, just the kind of trick Maurice had become known and loved for.

When they stepped out onto the stage that evening, just as predicted, the audience was thrilled that they were going to be the first ones to view this new trick. Maurice tied the ribbon and she stepped into the trunk. As soon as the lid was closed, she dropped down to the cushion below the stage and closed the trapdoor so that Maurice could move the trunk around the stage with feigned effort to show the audience that this was really magic. Then she hurried across the room to the stairs. As she ran up them, the toe of her pointed pink shoes caught on the front of her dress. She stumbled, falling on her hands on the stairs. Her knee hit the step and the dress tore. She lay there for a moment, trying to catch her breath. She could hear Maurice trying to keep the audience engaged but any minute their disbelief would no longer be suspended.

She got to her feet shakily and looked down at herself. There was a large rip in the front of her dress and her knee was red and scraped. She could not go on stage like this. Instead, she just stood there and listened as Maurice opened the empty trunk. As the audience cheered, she knew he was looking around, wondering what had happened.

She climbed the rest of the stairs slowly and stood in the wings, just out of view of the audience. When she took this job she had thought she would love being on stage, entertaining and amazing an audience, but her favorite moments were the ones like these, where no
Andrea Ruggirello

one could see her. And for someone who enjoyed being invisible, being a magician’s assistant was only enjoyable about half the time.

Maurice looked over and their eyes met. She knew he understood. Maurice turned back to the audience to bow. Someone in the crowd yelled for him to “bring her back.” He smiled sadly and replied that it was impossible. In this trick, she disappears forever. Even Maurice the Magnificent does not have the power to bring her back.

As she turned and left the theater, she pulled her hair loose, letting it whip around in the wind. The street was empty and she took in a cool breath of fresh air, thinking about all those stifling moments being locked in a box or trunk.

She turned to face The Golden Show Theater and took her final bow. The applause was deafening.

Nightly Battles For Superior Sleep Settings
Brynn Gillen

A blue glow emanates from the corner of the room.

Its alien invasion of flickering rays assault me.

I turn back toward the wall and cocoon deeper into the soporific depths of my false-light free haven but the canned laughter intrudes still, and Leno’s distinguishable voice leads the brigade of dream killers.

I consider getting up, fighting back and pressing the little button that would let me get some peace,

but then my problem would be someone else’s-the softly snoring girl in the bed across from mine to whom onyx silence is disruptive at best.
Peter Pan Complex
Jen Blye

One thing I always admired about Peter Pan was his refusal to grow up. He saw a way out and he made it happen. I think as a young girl, with the Disney cartoon as my favorite movie, I often imagined I could be Wendy and fly away with Peter; living with the Lost Boys, embracing childhood forever. Instead, at a young age, I learned that everyone must grow up, and not everyone gets to decide when or how fast it happens.

I was only seven when my mom was diagnosed with insulin-dependent diabetes.

Photographs are the best way for me to recall my mom prior to her diagnosis and in the early stages of her disease. I have memories before the camping trip, of course, but the only way I can picture my mom in these memories is the way she looked in these photos that fill albums of my younger years.

A photo at my brother’s confirmation shows all four of us: my fourteen year old brother in a light blue button up shirt and a Looney Tunes tie; my father in a coat and tie; and the child’s version of myself in a flowered dress, with a huge smile, my little eyes squinting up and the gap between my front two teeth prominent. The strange part of the photo is my mom, who almost looks like someone who was photoshopped into the picture. She is wearing a dusty pink dress that has tiny white accents on it. Her hair is straight and thin, much like mine is now. Later in her life, she would resort to getting perms to give it a little more body to balance out the extra weight in her face. She smiles, but not as wide as me, just a polite, close-mouthed smile. Her face is not strained, but it is long and thin, and her neck looks as if it belongs to someone with my smile on their face. The tendons in her neck are visible. The skin around her collarbones hugs closely to the bone. Her whole body is noticeably, almost disturbingly thin.

This photo was found when I graduated from high school and we were putting together the photo collage for my party. My brother joked that my mom looked like Skeletor and of course all of us laughed, but after my smile faded, I still chose to leave the photo in the album.
Jen Blye

rather than displaying it on the kelly green poster board with some of the other photos we had found. I could never put this photo out for everyone to see—my mom looked sick in it. Granted, by that point she was sick, but in the photo she really looked it.

When I was young my dad worked for a company that sold roller chain. He was a regional manager for the northeast portion of the country, so he found himself on the road a lot. It was never anything that affected the dynamic of our family too much—it was simply how things were. My parents never fought about it, and even now after thirty years of marriage, my parents are still happy and it is not a sore spot in their relationship. Due to my father’s travel schedule, my mother had a lot of responsibility in raising my brother and me. After my mom was diagnosed, my dad took a short hiatus from travel, but he couldn’t stay off for too long—after all, it was his job. My brother and I were well-versed in what diabetes entailed, and more importantly, what it entailed for us as a family. My mom had to adjust to a new lifestyle, one with dietary restrictions, needles, and regular doctor’s visits. This was a lifestyle that we all had to adjust to, and a large portion of responsibility fell on the shoulders of my brother and me. By this time though my brother was well into his teenage years and a lot of the time when my dad was gone, my brother wasn’t around either. Whether he was getting in trouble for jumping off ski lifts on Friday nights or bruising up his arms at football practice in the afternoons, my mom and I spent a lot of time alone, and as a seven-year-old, I found it to be my place to take on some responsibility for my mother. For this reason, I’ve always sort of felt that I was forced to grow up quickly.

There are snapshots of moments in my head that represent my struggle with my mother’s disease. There are memories and comparisons of how things changed over the years as I grew.

Dad is out of town. I can’t remember where brother is at the time. Mom and I are together, at the mall. I am still young—probably only eight. After the mall, we go to Wegman’s, and after Wegman’s, it’s Wal Mart. I’m hungry, so I pull out the bag of animal crackers just purchased at the grocery store and munch on a few on the car ride to Wal Mart. When we arrive in the parking lot, I start to get out and notice mom sitting in the car still, her head on the steering wheel. I try to get her to get out of the car, but she’s acting funny. At the age of eight, I’m still adjusting to life with a diabetic mother and I don’t recognize what is happening. I think she’s just joking around with me, so I joke right back. This goes on for a good ten minutes before she reaches in her purse and takes out her insulin pen, giving herself a shot. It is only now that I realize this isn’t play time—this is “Mom forgot to give herself her shot after eating which was three hours ago and now we could be in big trouble” time. After many failed attempts, I finally get her to eat a few animal crackers, and we resume our Wal Mart trip. The next day when Dad returns from traveling, I speak to him in hushed tones in his upstairs office about the previous night.

When I am young, conversations about Mom’s episodes are always had in hushed tones in dad’s office.
Dad is in Rochester for work. Brother lives away at school. Mom and I are alone at home. I am probably fourteen. This memory plays out in a variety of snapshots. I can’t remember the exact circumstances, or the exact moments. We are in the living room. It is after school. Mom’s sugar is low and she’s acting funny, of course. I try to get her to eat a few Hershey Kisses. Dad always makes her drink orange juice, but she hates orange juice, and she loves chocolate. When things are in my hands, I always give chocolate a try. When she gets really low, she gets extremely stubborn and refuses to accept any help. It’s times like these that it gets especially tough being my mother’s caretaker. I try harder and harder to coax her into eating just two of the Kisses. She refuses to have any part in it. “I’m fine, just leave me alone,” she says, and then buries her face in her hands, blowing raspberries. I’m trying to keep my patience, but at the age of fourteen I’m still learning and finally I give up, throwing the Kisses at her. “Fine, have it your way!” I snap back to life and pick up the phone, dialing, shaking with fear and crying. My mouth says all the right words without my brain even thinking about it. My eyes stay glued on my parents. My dad is holding my mom’s head with one hand, making sure she doesn’t hit on the back of the chair, and her legs with the other, making sure she doesn’t fall off of the deck chair. Mom is making weird noises, bubbles of saliva forming between her lips like a rabid dog foaming at the mouth. Blood starts coming out of one side of her mouth and my dad yells at me to tell the 911 operator this. “The ambulance is on the way.” I hang up and automatically dial the phone number of my parents’ best friends, Mary and Bill. Mary is a nurse. Once again, my mouth says all the words that my mind can’t even formulate. What feels like an hour later, but in reality is probably only five minutes, my mom’s seizure is over and our yard and driveway are filled with vehicles. The ambulance fly vehicle is first, with my friends’ father running through our house to the back to tend to my mom.

The ambulance is there, taking up most our driveway. Mary shows up and drives right down the hill and
Jen Blye

through the yard and parks in front of our house. A state trooper shows up, but he’s a friend of my brothers’, only a few years older, and he stands to the side, trying to stay out of the way of the medics. I go upstairs and change into jeans and a t-shirt and then hide away in the dining room, too scared to watch this scene. I spend the rest of the day in the emergency room with countless relatives, and the frightened, dazed look from that morning never leaves my face.

It is that night as I lay in bed that I realize I’ve just been through a time warp. At the age of sixteen, watching my mother have a diabetes-induced seizure pulls me ahead two years and into adulthood.

When I am sixteen, all previous conversations about episodes are forgotten, and this is the only conversation, the only episode, that I can remember perfectly. This is the episode that all subsequent episodes are gauged against.

In the past four years, there have been more episodes, more low points, more ambulance calls. My mother’s disease has taken a turn for the worst in the past five years and it is a family effort to keep her healthy. The effects are seen in current family photos. My father no longer with a moustache, now has gray hair forming on the sides of his head, starting at his temples and expanding. The wrinkles in his forehead are more noticeable. My mother, no longer the thin frame of bones when she was fifteen years prior, also has more gray hair and her weight has changed over the past five years. My brother, past the mid-point of his twenties is rarely in these photos, but when he is he looks remarkably older than he actually is.

Peter Pan Complex

with a receding hair line and a few stress lines forming between his eyes and above his brow. Often wearing a shirt and tie for work. And then there’s me. I no longer have a huge grin on my face, but rather a small, polite one for the sake of the photo. Three years of braces have fixed the gap in my teeth. I am a full-grown adult version of me, but there are still remnants of a scared little girl, just trying to get her mother to eat an animal cracker.
First Customer of the Day
Emily Turner

The gray cart rattles to the counter, followed by the grunts and yells of two young boys home from school on summer vacation.

I want nothing more than to shove my fingers in my ears to block out the noise.

Instead I greet the haggard looking mother and smile at the tiny snoozing baby in the white plastic baby carrier in the cart.

The items she piles onto the counter are mostly baby clothing, diapers, blankets, and baby bottles.

The boys are using the blue and red plastic light sabers in an epic battle, smacking innocent Hershey bars and packs of Extra along the way. I ask them nicely for the toys so I can ring them up.

Running to the mother, one yells, “The evil lady wants our sabers!” while the other begins to wail.

I tell them that I will give the toys right back, and they let me scan them.

I hand them back and begin to pass the pastel pink and purple fabrics over the scanner as the boys beg their mother for candy or soda.

They are just “going to die” if she says no, my ears will bleed if she says no, the store might blow up if she says no.

Luckily she says yes, and everything is calm and quiet, as the mother hands me the goodies.
The boys stare greedily at the treats as I pass them over the scanner.

I get to the bottom of the baby treasures
to spot a rectangular pink box
containing an unexpected item.

I glance at the woman
noticing her droopy eyes, the deep crevices near her mouth
and the strands of gray throughout her dark brown braid.

I look at the sleeping baby,
the two crazy boys,
and feel pity as I drop the test into the bag.
“Thank you for shopping, have a nice day,” I say.

The Goodbye Bell
Melanie Proper

His teeth were out. He lay there so stiff and straight, with his arms pressed firmly against his sides. He looked just like a mummy, shrouded in layers of gauzy, white hospital blankets from his chin to his feet. His feet, however, were almost unrecognizable, because they had put those thick, heated tube socks on him that made his feet look like stumps. If he were conscious enough to know, he would have been so embarrassed. Tom was the kind of man who wouldn’t even run out for a pack of cigarettes if there was too much stubble on his face. Luckily, I suppose, they had him on enough drugs so that all he cared about was that when the drugs started to wear off, he got more. As I sat there watching him, I was unaware that this would become routine or that I would eventually become numb to the whole process.

I found myself desperate for those moments when I could just sit there quietly with my husband. This was after everyone else, his sisters and his son, had served their time and gone home. I had grown tired of them acting like they knew exactly what I needed to be doing at every moment and pretending like they were concerned.

“Here. Have a ham sandwich.”

“You need to eat. You haven’t eaten a thing all day.”

“What’s wrong with you?”

I learned early on that it was best just to keep quiet, take the ham sandwich and carry it around all day, while the lettuce turned brown, the mayonnaise began to solidify and Lord knows what bacteria began to grow on the ham.
Melanie Proper

Every time I had to sign a paper or go to the bathroom, I had to fumble with that ham sandwich when I really just wanted to throw it at someone’s head.

The thing that probably bothered them the most was having to take so many hours out of their day, even though all they had to do was show up and bicker over the gossip in the waiting room magazines. They got to leave. They weren’t with Tom and me the night before, when I stayed up with him the entire night — he went back and forth from the bedroom to the bathroom, as a result of those delicious drink mixes they made him consume the night before surgery. Well, if you like putting the equivalent of a box of chalk and a bottle of water in the blender and chugging it down, it was delicious. And I’ll just ignore the fact that they gave him his choice of cherry or orange flavor, since there was nothing flavorful about either option.

"Is tomorrow the end?" he asked me. "After I have this surgery, will it all be over? Just promise me that and I can make it through this."

How could he ask me something like that? What was I supposed to say? I wanted it to be the end too. I wanted it to be like those horribly written movies where the main character woke up in the end and all of the hell they just went through was a dream, but that wasn’t going to happen. That’s why everyone hates that type of ending, because it’s not real. No one could be that lucky.

It was the beginning of the end, though not the end he asked for. It was the beginning of the end of his pride, the end of his dignity and the end of his happy, sparkling blue eyes. If I’d known, or if I could have made love all day, every day that he was able. I would have asked him where he bought those damn light bulbs for the dining room and what size to get. I would have hired more competent doctors, ones who maybe would not have treated him like a lost cause. I would have done many things, if I hadn’t been so naïve.

One time, after we came home from the second surgery, the doctor stood right there in his pristine, white coat with his Bulova watch glistening in the light and told us how this type of surgery caused more stress to the body physically and emotionally than open heart surgery. Then, after a few days, he sent us home in order to free up the bed for a new patient. He handed us the bag of prescription pain medication that kept my husband not only sane, but alive. I know I should have checked the bag, but I was just in such a hurry to get him home and make him as comfortable as I possibly could, which is what I did. But when he started feeling the pains and the aches again and I went to that white pharmacy bag to get the morphine, I was surprised with a bottle of amoxicillin. Amoxicillin! Instead of morphine! Immediately I dialed the girl at the hospital pharmacy and explained the situation they had caused us to be in. Dumbfounded, she put me on hold and after what seemed like hours, a different voice answered.

"Hospital pharmacy. How can I help you?"

Very slowly and simply, I explained the problem again, while trying desperately to keep my voice from shaking or from reaching through the phone and pulling her hair out. Still, she insisted on asking me for every bit
of information their computer system had probably ever held about Tom.

Name?
Last name first,
Middle initial?
Social security number?
Attending physician?
Prescription code.
No, the code on line six of the box.
Now what was the problem again, ma’am?
None of them seemed to understand that I had a very sick husband at home who was in a great deal of pain and I definitely could not leave him to drive another 30 minutes to and from the hospital to correct their mistake. They were incredibly calm; it made me sick to my stomach.

Finally, my daughter Tina and her boyfriend came walking through the door and announced that they would go get the correct medication. My husband, being stubborn like most men, did not want them having to take care of him. I really don’t know what other options he thought we might have had. This was it.

“What do you plan to do with amoxicillin? You need these drugs and there’s no one else here to go get them. We’re going. We don’t mind, so please just stop worrying.” My daughter was not going to play his game.

My daughter and my husband. Not my husband’s daughter. At first, they were not so sure. She was not ready for someone else to tell her what to do and he was not ready for another dramatic teenage girl. Finally, they

found their places with each other and found a love for each other. A loyalty. And like me, they were fighting to keep it.

Once in awhile, life seemed normal. It was normal for Tom to only need two ibuprofen to get through the day and for him to sleep upstairs in our bed, instead of the makeshift hospital room downstairs, adjacent to our bathroom. He even went back to work. But, reality was never too far behind us.

“What are you doing home early?” I asked him one day when he came rushing through the door, not taking the time to shut it.

Without a word, he headed straight for the bathroom. Then I saw the light brown streak down the back of his faded blue jeans. That was all the information I needed. It was like that from the first surgery, to the next, through the chemotherapy and the radiation, all the way until the end. He was never the same person again, never truly able to live a normal life.

I heard the bell ringing, again, and even though I was asleep, I never fell completely asleep anymore. My lower back locked as I sat up and my legs almost gave out on me right then and there when I stepped up off of the couch. If my own body would have just cooperated and if I were just a few years younger, it all wouldn’t have been quite as difficult. I walked down the hallway, just like every other time, my stomach clenched, my heartbeat quickened and my mind raced, wondering what would be happening when I walked into the room.
“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

His voice was hoarse, almost silent. He barely had enough strength to form the words with his lips, but I knew what he was saying. I was his wife. I knew every pain, every sore, every fear, and every nightmare. Two years of it and sometimes I felt guilty for crying over the pain I was going through when I knew what it was doing to him. I prayed to God, almost constantly, and especially when I heard the bell. I just could not stand the thought that one time, maybe soon, that bell was going to ring and it was going to be the bell that meant it was time to say goodbye. The Goodbye Bell.

Sometimes, I’d sit there, holding his hand as he drifted in and out of sleep, and stare at the bell, tears stinging my eyes. The Goodbye Bell. I hated that bell. I still hate that fucking bell.

But not this time. He reached his hand out towards his cup, almost knocking it over, because he was too weak to even move that far. He wanted more water. That was all. I breathed a sigh of relief and rubbed my palm against his forehead, reminding him of my touch and checking his temperature.

At the kitchen sink, waiting for the water to run cold, my legs gave out again. This time, it was not because of my tired, overworked bones and muscles, but because of the thought of losing the man I had already partially lost, but instead, losing him forever.

Lost. The sixty-five year old man with hair white like goose down. The sixty-five year old man who still played basketball with teenagers at the park. The sixty-five year old man who was just reclaiming his talent with a paintbrush. The sixty-five year old man who was still making music and trying to sell his song lyrics. I lost him.

Lost. He lost one foot of his large intestine. He lost the stomach that had hung over the top of his big, silver belt buckle with the copper horse, running wild. He lost the ability to get out of bed or even sit up. He lost any good night’s sleep. He lost the normal, comforting feeling of his own body. He lost everything.

Lost. He lost to the cancer.
The cancer.
Cancer.

***

It felt like I had gone to sleep for months and survived only by doing what took the least amount of thought or physical effort. But just as quickly as I slipped into the hibernation, I was awake. I wasn’t dead yet and as long as my body insisted on functioning, I needed to escape the constant, dull pain. I needed to allow myself to live my life again.

It was strange and uncomfortable. It felt like an inquisition. But my children needed to understand. They needed to understand that I had met someone and that I wasn’t going to defend my right to live.

“What’s his name?” they asked.
“Patrick, but he goes by Pat.”
“Pat? What kind of name is that? I mean, there’s a pat on the back or a pat of butter, but who wants to be
Melanie Proper

called that? On purpose?"
I could see they weren't going to make it easy.

Just after Thanksgiving, Pat and I made a trip to the mall to begin our Christmas shopping. It had snowed the night before, about a foot, and the air was still crisp and freezing. I breathed it in deep. I was thrilled by the first snow and just enjoyed walking through the parking lot with Pat, arms linked, and listening to the muffled crunch of snow under my boots. We approached the main entrance and I heard a bell ringing. My instincts immediately took me back to a place I had not been in quite awhile. My mind instantly tried to guess what Tom needed.

I stopped and my tracks through the snow didn't go any farther. Quickly, I realized where I was and that the ringing bell was the Salvation Army calling for help, not Tom. But it was too late. I was too shocked and too confused to shop happily, as if nothing was wrong. I promised Pat we would return on another day, when I could be prepared for the sound of the ringing bell that I never thought I would hear, ever again.
Semester’s End: Spring ‘07 - Naked From the Ankle Down
Beth Stevens

I saw the silent suspicious stares
of staff and students
but I still took my shoes off
and wandered campus on Tuesday.
Not an act of brilliance,
but damn it felt good!
Lazy feet locked away all winter,
padded by mismatched socks,
protected by sneakers.
Not Tuesday though. Tuesday,
I could feel the difference between
man made and Mother Earth.
The hot patches of sun soaked cement.
The cool, shade covered stones.
The grass, still damp from its morning shower.
If I had an empty backyard ­
I would never wear shoes.
I would scuff my soles.
I would search for four leaf clovers.
I would try to pick blades of grass
with my toes, relishing the green
stains the turf would leave behind.
I would lie in the lawn,
soaking up UV rays almost
as sweet as a grape lollipop,
but not quite.
The Midwestern sun, Earth’s
prescription drug (with a doctor’s scrawled
signature at the bottom in ball point pen)
lifts my spirits quicker than
the wittiest of political satires.

If I were to move, to get away from the solar bliss,
I would stagger around
Light headed, seeing everything too bright.
A hazy midnight toker moment.
But if I had an empty backyard –
where I could go without shoes,
where I could pick blades of grass with my toes.
I would lounge like a lion
sleeping in the grassland, enjoying
the sight of waves in the grass as they’re
brought up by the breeze.
I wouldn’t worry about global warming.
I wouldn’t worry as to when Alaska might
Join the ice caps and go tropical.
I would just lie in the lawn, pretending
to be solar powered, ignoring
the garden gnome in the flower bed and searching
the sky for shapes.
I would identify every cloud as a walrus,
roundish and lumpy. Or I would try to be clever,
and identify everything as the space
beneath an airplane. Or better yet
the air beneath a spaceship.
I would stay in my empty backyard
(barefoot, sun burnt, covered in grass stains)
until dusk settles and Polaris,
the celestial lighthouse,
lets me know its time to go inside.
The grass will be there tomorrow.
That is, if I had a backyard.
For now, I will just have to settle for
Beth Stevens

the limited moments of freedom from socks and sneakers.
I will smile at the stares from passing peers who skirt around me as we share the sidewalk (their feet suffocating in their Airwalks).

The Gift
Kimberly Saunders

There are a million things I should be doing right now. Lines to memorize, a paper I should have written days ago, and a long awaited billowing comforter calling me into its endless ease. But there is nowhere else I would rather be than right here at six am in the basement of a sleeping building listening to you rattle on about your failing relationship that I don’t have the strength to solve anymore. I let you complain because it’s gotten to the point that I am terrified of what will happen once she is no longer a topic of discussion. What will we talk about when I’m not trying to convince you to be single? I like to hope we could retire to the reminiscent way we were almost one year ago when afternoons were spent procrastinating responsibility and filled with frivolous conversation. We forgot about the world when we were locked inside that tiny rehearsal room, used for everything but its purpose.

But we are different people now, though I am too afraid to mention it. At least before we didn’t run circles around the truth because the truth wasn’t dangerous back then.

I did this to us.

I tried to make you jealous by holding his hand, ignoring your stare, bragging about his kisses to anyone who’d listen. But all you’ve ever wanted was for me to be happy. So now you congratulate me on this new found flirtation as I fail to find the flicker behind your eyes. You’re supposed to be green with envy while I bask in this victory. Instead you tell me, “He’s a nice guy, I could see you two together.”

You don’t want me to want him to be you, don’t
want me to wish his kisses were yours. Well, I don’t. I’m not that pathetic. But I won’t deny I’d be happier if it were your arms holding me in the darkness. My heart would beat a little faster. That, I assure you, will never change.

Wrong.
I don’t care about him. Not the way I want to. Not the way I care about you and you know this.
“Kim, I don’t want you to be with him if...I mean, it’s not fair.”
“I know.” I cut you off because I do know.
You don’t want me to want him to be you, don’t want me to wish his kisses were yours. Well, I don’t. I’m not that pathetic. But I won’t deny I’d be happier if it were your arms holding me in the darkness. My heart would beat a little faster. That, I assure you, will never change.

The blue light casts streaking shadows backstage while muffled voices ring out ten feet away. We keep our conversation hushed and intimate, only inches between our bodies radiating heat born from anxious nerves. Darkness always makes me braver. You can’t see the rose rising to my cheeks as lustful thoughts flash through my mind. I smile to myself at the thought of confession. Then thought turns to idea, which transforms itself into action. Slowly I lean towards you and your face widens with anticipation.

“There are times when it takes everything I have not to kiss you.”
Your eyes are a blend of confusion and intrigue as I turn and walk away.
I no longer understand the purpose of hesitation.
Kimberly Saunders

Can’t take it back.

“Sometimes I wonder if I’m happy you didn’t kiss me or not.” Your voice remains nonchalant and relaxed.

Your body lay sprawled across the uncomfortable dormitory lounge furniture with its stiff structure and misleading appearance. I sit on the opposite side pushed against the armrest. I can’t let you know how much I need to be near you.

“I’m glad I didn’t.” I’ve never been so sure.

“Oh.”

I can only imagine the consequences from an action so small exploding into something so incredibly huge.

I will always wonder what it would be like to kiss you.

She sits behind her tattered notebook, this mini-version of myself. Her fourteen year-old inquisitive stare makes me proud to call her sister. An English assignment has put us here in her bedroom with a list of questions and my readiness to assist.

“What is the craziest thing you’ve ever done?”

I chuckle to myself and dive into my own personal memory bank, back stroking between summers and school years to find an answer. Suddenly it comes to me along with a look of distant bitterness.

“Craziest thing I’ve ever done? Told someone how I felt.”

She smiles at me with satisfaction, “Good answer.”

The quiet stillness of the bookshelves weighs down upon us with the tension of everything you’re waiting to hear. My breathing grows rapid and shallow.

“Do you feel like things are different between us?” I plunge right in.

“I know they are. But I can’t figure out why.” You place yourself three feet away; I am incredibly aware of this proximity.

“I think we’re both very different people now, we’ve changed. And we’re both so busy this semester...” I try to make excuses; all the while I am realizing how the only difference has been my distance.

No more avoiding what today is all about. Months of confusion have built up to this moment of desperate clarification. I’ll just come out and say it.

“I wanted to say...and I’m sure you already know...everybody knows...I love you. I have for a long time. I didn’t know what would happen when this semester started. I know we both were a little hesitant about how things were going to be. But it was obvious real soon that I still felt the same as I did at the end of last spring.”

“Kim...”

Wait, there’s more.

“I’m not telling you because I expect anything from you. I don’t.” My voice quivers.

Seconds shift between us. A sudden interruption spurs behind us as a flame of red hair appears from around the corner. His eyes dash wildly between our sullen faces.

“Dude, I’ve been waiting down there for like twenty minutes.” He starts to pick up the scent of my invitation only glare.
Kimberly Saunders

"Sorry, man. Kim needed to talk to me about something."
He gets it now. I’m doing what he told me to do.
"Forget it; we’ll do it another time."
And with that he’s gone, leaving us to our own devices. You try to bring him back but I know he won’t turn around. He’s letting us have this moment. Remind me to thank him for it later.
Your eyes begin to glimmer the reflection of everything you are trying to reveal.
"You know I could date you. I’ve told you that before. Believe it or not you’re really a lot like my-ex."
I let out a small laugh that hints to my annoyance.
"We all know how well that one ended."
My arms cross in front of my chest and my voice spikes with sarcasm.
"Think about what led up to it. Sure we were always fighting but I still loved her for five years.” Now you’re getting defensive. I have to tread lightly. “It’s just the way you feel about me. I can’t share those feelings with you at this time in my life.”
That’s what I needed to hear. I can feel the weight slowly lifting from my body.
"I’m not asking you to. I just needed you to know,”
I say.
Your eyes see right through me, past the surface, into the genuine core of this confession. How can I tear myself away from those smoky irises like needles piercing my confidence that I could do this and instead inject me with averted glances? My watery stare stays glued to the peeling label of an ancient azure binding...
“We like each other. We want to be together.”
“Good.” I can’t even look at you.
“Come here.” You pull me in close.
I try not to cry as your arms enfold me. I’m not used to your touch. But there’s something different about the way you feel. Now that everything is out in the open and begun to bury itself under layers of disappointment the cloud is gone and instead rays of recovery are peaking through. Beams of light that let me know I’ll be okay, after four months of wondering if I could survive without you.
You leave me standing there with half an hour left to reshelving books before we’ll see each other again at rehearsal.
I should be angry.
I should be breaking down.
And for a few seconds I think I might collapse into pathetic right there under Joyce’s watchful eye, but then the strangest thing happens.
I smile.
I’m standing in her doorway patiently waiting for advice.
“Telling him how you feel will be good for the both of you. It’ll get it off your chest and I think telling someone you love them is the greatest gift you can give.”
I know she’s right...

Cunt of a Different Cut
Samantha Doud

She poked the earring through the hole fixed the slight smudge of her lipstick and headed downstairs.
Red lipstick?
He walked towards her, told her what a whore she was with the back smack of his hand. He went outside to wait for her while she swept her nipples up off the floor.

She smiled graciously in reply to her compliments at the party.

She felt the cool wall press against her bare ended breasts while he tore her up from behind. When he was done he threw her aside- kicked her uterus off the bed and went to sleep. No longer firm, it lay, like a rotted mushroom on the floor.

He sat staring at the bowl of cereal, she spread strawberry jam on his toast. The tinted glass smashed scattered on the floor, its contents covered her head. She walked over to the stove and fried up her ovaries with a side of bacon.
He ate them in the living room.

She woke to his breath in her face
his hand pressing her thigh away, into the bed.
With one good thrust his dick
was forced into her. She leaned her head back,
closed her eyes, and tightened her body.
She smiled at the sound of his scream,
slid off the bed and pulled his dick
out of her vagina. She threw it next to him on the bed.
She didn’t want it anyways.

Coming and Going
Michele Giorlando

**Going:**
I woke up half way through my flight and everyone else seemed to be asleep. We were somewhere above the Atlantic Ocean, miles away from any city. I could hear the music escaping from the headphones on the woman next me, but I couldn’t make out the lyrics. On the other side a man had fallen asleep with a book in his hand, *Discovering Paris*. He was a tourist, just like me. I tried to pry it from his fingers, but he shifted slightly and I pulled back, my eyes focusing on Audrey Tautou, crying on the screen in front of me. The captions told me that she was lonely and heartbroken, but I didn’t need the captions for that.

I looked around the plane, my eyes adjusting to the dim lighting. Even the stewardess’ had fallen asleep, their heads resting against the sides of the plane, exhausted from endless traveling. Their navy uniforms were crisp and professional, silver wings glistening, even in the dark. When everyone else woke up, with their hair out of place, eyes still squinting, the flight attendants would appear refreshed, collected, as if they had never fallen asleep at all.

A girl a few seats ahead of me poked her head out into the aisle. I recognized her from the airport. She had been crying as her mother stuffed her plush koala into a suitcase. She’d screamed at her mother, begging to take the koala on the plane with her. Her mother had been rational, afraid it would get lost in the constant airplane chaos. The little girl’s screams were enormous and I wanted to stuff her into the suitcase along with the koala. Maybe that’s why
she couldn’t sleep now. Maybe her mother’s protection and proximity was not enough and she needed the koala as a reminder of her home. At least she wasn’t crying.

Another mother started walking toward the back of the plane, cradling her baby in her arms. The baby was crying, only softly right now, but I was sure it wouldn’t be long before it woke up the plane. When the mother got to my row, she looked at me, rocking her baby back and forth, trying to get a look of sympathy or understanding from me. Like I, in my pinstripe suit and black brief case, would possibly understand. But I did. I smiled to the mother, unable to comfort her child, far away from home. I smiled to the little girl, unable to rest without her stuffed animal. After all, we were all just trying to get where we were going.

I thought about waking up the man next to me. I wanted to ask him if had been to Paris before, get some good ideas for restaurants and shops, though I doubted I’d have the time. It would be like the time I went to Florence: no time for the Uffizi or Academia, strictly business. But I wanted to see the Louvre and the Musee d’Orsay. I wanted to stroll down the Champs Elysee and admire the II de Paris. Maybe he had been there, maybe I’d never go. Maybe he would get excited, show me the highlighted sections of his book, tell me what I could not miss. Or he could be bothered, irritated that I woke him. He might shift to the other side, hide his tourist book and pretend that he didn’t speak English. He wouldn’t have known that I had seen him at the airport, standing in front of me at the coffee shop, reading the business section of the Times. Maybe he was going to Paris to check on his investments too.

I looked back to the woman on my right. Her breathing was quiet and steady, a look of tranquility on her face. I listened closely to her music, hearing the sweet French voice emerge from the headphones. Not like me and the man next to me, not like the girl ahead of me, or the crying baby, this woman was going home. I looked back to Audrey Tautou, still crying on the screen, and turned off the captions. I’d create the endings that I wanted to see.

Coming:
I love airports: all the comings and goings, hellos and goodbyes, arrivals and departures. Everything is always in motion, never standing still. You can catch the next flight to Barcelona and leave Madrid behind. That was how I had been living for the past six years, never staying too long in any city, never visiting the same city twice. Lost my luggage once in Geneva and again in Kiev. Missed my connection in Milan, ended up in Basel. Fell in love with Florence and Helsinki. Two years in Lisbon but only two months in Interlocken. So many cities and so much time.

I love the Catania airport, so tiny, but so diverse. The first time I flew to Sicily they lost over 7,000 pieces of luggage, but not mine. At first I was thrilled, chalked it up to travel experience and enormous luck. But when I saw the lines of people waiting at baggage claim I was instantly envious, disappointed that I was missing out on
the airport camp-ins and endless conversation.

Once, in Prague, the flight attendants refused to enter our plane. I had spoken with someone who knew one of them and apparently they would not fly with the pilot, who had cheated on his wife, one of the stewardesses. Despite all of the confusion and complaints it was beautiful. Everybody understood the trials of love.

I spoke with a man named Phillip in Nice. He didn’t speak English and I didn’t speak French. He told me about his mother, who lived alone in the Alps. I told him about my brother who was somewhere in Iraq. He loved music and I loved books. We both spoke Cantonese.

I met a girl in Manorca who wanted to go to New York. I told her about the city, about 5th Ave and Broadway. I told her about the Hudson, and how I loved the sunsets in Piermont. She asked me about Times Square. I told her about Christmas. My grandmother once took me ice skating, and I told her how I broke my leg. I told her about New Year’s and about the time I watched the crystal ball drop. My pop was working NYPD at the time and got us access to a building where we watched from.

There was a couple I met in Pristina who had been married thirty years, almost as long as my own parents. She was an artist and he marketed her paintings. She painted me in shades of blue, sapphire streaks giving me life. I kept it with me for three years, before I lost it in Novi Sad.

In Stockholm I fell in love. We made plans to go Hong Kong, I knew the city well. When I was younger I spent summers there with my mother’s parents. Chinese was the second language I learned. I wanted to go to Shanghai first, maybe stop in Beijing too. He didn’t really want to leave Sweden.

I met up with my grandfather in New Delhi. He said he didn’t recognize me, that I looked more European than I spoke with a man named Phillip in Nice. He didn’t speak Chinese. I was half Russian, had he forgotten? He told me I wasn’t Russian or Chinese; that I had turned into something else. I asked if maybe I was everything but he didn’t give me an answer. He just told me to go home.

When my parents see me I wonder if they, too, will not recognize me. I imagine them holding up a sign to welcome me at the airport, like they did the first summer I went to China. Back then the sign was huge, decorated with jewels and gems. Back then I was embarrassed. My brother laughed as my face turned bright red. I didn’t even accept my mother’s embrace. Well, we all have regrets.

I can step into any airport in the world and feel at home. Bangkok, Oslo, Munich, it doesn’t matter where. I don’t have to speak the language or know the city; I will learn it soon enough. I don’t even need a place to stay or a familiar face; I never stay for too long anyway. But stepping off the plane into Newark I’m at a loss, and even though this is where I’ve grown up, where I spent the first twenty-four years of my life, I don’t feel at home.
“Welcome back,” says the man at Customs. He looks like Peter from the “Guess Who?” game I used to play when I was younger. He is happy and smiling as he flips through my passport. “It’s been a while since you’ve been home,” he says as he stamps my papers and grants me admittance to the United States. I nod and walk on by, looking for the sign with my name on it, wondering where I am going.
I walked down the hall of my preschool with determination. It was just after recess and it was time to go back to the classroom. As I walked in a straight line, my eyes wandered to a room that was not my classroom. Through the window a woman was frantically trying to keep the tiny balls of fuzz in the cardboard box she had brought them in. They were a blur of orange and white as I walked and I soon left them far behind.

There was one kitten left. He was light orange with white ripples through his fur. My mom had just dropped me off at nursery school and was on her way home.

"I'll take him," she said to the woman getting rid of the kitten.

"Oh, I'm sorry," the woman said. "He's already taken."

My mom walked away empty handed. A few days later, the woman was back with the same kitten.

"Do you want him?" she asked. "My cat doesn't get along with him."

"Yes," my mom replied.

Butter was my first pet. Butter was short for Buttermilk, named after his creamy buttermilk colored fur. Although pets weren’t allowed in the apartment we were living in, my family promised to keep Butter a secret. I was only three but Butter and I quickly developed a strong bond.

There’s a picture of me and Butter when he was still a kitten. My already long hair is pulled back into a ponytail with wispy bangs skirting my forehead. I’m looking directly at the camera, my tiny features breaking into a smile. Next to me, Butter is curled up in a plastic bowl, his paw hanging over its yellow side.

Another picture is of us on my bed. Butter is now fully grown and is covered in a pink and white blanket stolen from my dolls. His head is resting on a matching pink pillow and his eyes are directed toward the camera. I’m sitting next to him, my Little Mermaid dress scrunched up to my knees.

"Oh my God Rob," my mom said frantically, her hands clutching the phone. "I can’t find Butter anywhere."

"Isn’t it in the fridge?" my dad replied from the other end.

Before I started elementary school, my family moved 45 minutes away to a small town. Our new home was a two story house with a lawn and lots of trees. Butter was allowed to go outside and he soon grew accustomed to catching birds and climbing trees even though his front claws had been removed. The dogwood tree in the side yard was an old tree and one of his favorites. He would sit in that tree for hours, watching people come and go from the house. Sometimes I would join him in the small boughs, picking at white flowers and running my hands along the rough bark.

"Ok kids," my dad’s voice said from behind the camcorder. "Say hi to the camera."

My sisters and I were walking to school. It was
the first day of third grade after a long summer of capture
the flag and swimming in the neighbor’s pool. My dad
was following us with the camcorder to watch us get on
the bus at the end of the street.

“Are you guys excited for school?” my dad asked
while we walked.

“No,” my sisters and I said.

We reached the bus stop where the other
neighborhood kids stood waiting patiently for Bus 74 to
arrive. My dad filmed my sisters and I relentlessly until
the bus arrived.

“Bye kids,” he said. “Have a great day at
school.”

He then turned around and started walking home
without turning the camcorder off. As he grew closer,
he filmed the giant maple tree in our front yard and the
white fence near our driveway. He then zoomed up to
my window. Sitting on the window ledge was Butter. He
was looking in the direction of the bus stop where I had
just disappeared.

“Looks like Butter was watching Kate leave
for school,” my dad said. He then turned off the
camcorder.

Butter rolled playfully in the sunlight that splashed
on the cool cement of the front steps. I ran my hands
through his soft fur, avoiding his stomach. Butter didn’t
like to be touched on his stomach. As I pet him, a friendly
chocolate lab wandered into our yard.

“Come on Butter,” I said trying to get him inside
before the dog saw Butter. I was too late. The chocolate
lab walked right up to Butter and he sprang at the dog, his
ears low, harsh hissing emanating from his mouth. Butter
chased the chocolate lab until she was off our lawn. He
then walked back to me and curled up on the steps.

My saltwater tears blended with the fresh rain.
“Butter!” I called from the backyard. My feet sank into
the soft ground and my jeans had a ring of wetness around
the bottom. Butter had been missing for a few days and I
was looking for him despite the pouring rain.

“Butter!” I repeated, each scream giving me less
hope. But as I walked closer to my neighbor’s barn behind
our house, I heard a faint meowing. My heart began to
beat faster and I quickly ran toward the sound.

Above the front doors of the barn was a small
window. Butter was sitting in the window, soaked with
rain and meowing softly. Since the front doors were
impossible to open, I ran around to the side door of the
barn.

“Butter!” I called frantically. “Butter I’m over
here! Come here boy!”

Nothing happened for a few minutes but somehow
Butter was able to climb down and reach the side door.
I picked up his wet form and kissed his forehead. I then
walked back toward the house to dry him off.

During my junior year of high school, my family
adopted its first puppy. Jackson was a blonde lab/border
collie mix that my dad couldn’t resist while visiting the
animal shelter. Jackson liked running over Butter with
his gangly legs and bark loudly. Butter would slink low
to the ground when Jackson did this, ears back and apparently annoyed. He tried to ignore Jackson's high energy by spending more time outside.

"Kate, Mom ran Butter over yesterday," my sister Hannah said.

"What?" I screamed. "Why didn’t you tell me?"

"We didn’t want to tell you while you were away. We wanted to wait until you got home."

I had just finished my freshman year of college and I was home for the summer. I had failed to notice the large clump of buttermilk colored hair in the driveway.

"Is he ok?" I asked, my throat starting to constrict.

"I dunno, he ran under the neighbor’s porch," Hannah said. She didn’t seem to care.

"Mom!" I screamed walking into the kitchen.

"What?" she asked.

"Did you run over Butter yesterday?" I asked accusingly.

"Yeah," she slowly replied.

"How?" I asked, trying to suppress my rage.

"You know how he’s going deaf. He must have been sleeping under the car when I started it and didn’t hear it turn on. When I backed up, I ran right over him."

"Is he ok?" I asked, trying to sound as nonchalant as she was.

"Yeah," my mom said. "I’m sure he’ll be fine. He ran under the neighbor’s porch."

I didn’t come home from college during my sophomore year as much as I had during my freshman year. November was the first time I was home since August and not only was I greeted by a new dog named Trixie, but I was not greeted by Butter.

"Kate, Butter hasn’t been around a lot lately," my dad said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"He disappears for a few days. I think he’s found a new home."

"What?" I asked, shocked. "Why don’t you find out who’s taking care of him and tell them that he’s ours?"

"There’s not much I can do about it," my dad said. "He’s obviously not happy here anymore."

"It’s just because I’m not here," I said angrily. "I’m the only one who still pays attention to him."

I didn’t see Butter for the entire month I was home for winter break. Sometimes I would call outside the front door even though I knew he couldn’t hear me. I’d go on walks around the neighborhood, hoping to catch a glimpse of who was taking care of him but I never did.

"I can’t take this," I said to my boyfriend Dan on the phone one night.

"Kate, it’ll be ok. I’m sure Butter’s happy with another family and they’re taking good care of him."

"But he’s mine. He’s not supposed to be with another family. I can’t bear to think of another little girl taking care of him," I cried.

"Kate, you’re being selfish," Dan said.

"I don’t care. I’d rather have him be dead. Then
I would at least know what happened to him. I’m never going to know if he’s still alive or not.”

“Kate, that’s horrible.”

I hung up the phone, unable to speak any longer.

I wasn’t home again until April for spring break. Butter seemed to be gone forever. The front steps were bare and cold, reeking of cement.

One day it was warm enough to take Jackson for a run. Since it was my first run outside in a while, I soon grew tired and decided to cut my route short. Instead of proceeding to run on Cliff Street, I turned at the top of my street and started walking. Jackson seemed tired as well and didn’t mind the slower pace. As I walked down my street, my eyes lazily scanned the small houses. I no longer knew who lived on the upper portion of my street and the neighbors I passed were all strangers. I passed a small house painted in a bright blue with a young girl outside. The house had a front porch which was littered with broken furniture. Paint chipped steps housed a sleeping cat. The cat was contentedly curled up on the top step, soaking up the sun with his buttermilk colored fur.

I stopped and stared. The little girl looked at me curiously but I said nothing to her. I stood there looking at Butter on someone else’s steps. I felt my eyes prickle as Jackson pulled on his leash and I walked home the rest of the way blurry-eyed. Once home, I ran upstairs and started crying. I called Dan and with some encouragement from him, I decided to get dressed and walk over to the house and I felt light-headed, partly from the run, partly from nerves.

“Hello,” I said as calmly as I could once I reached the house.

“Hi,” two girls said.

The girl that I had just seen stared at me from the front lawn. She looked to be around six years old with dirty blonde hair that hung to her shoulders. Her purple coat was thin and her leggings were torn. The other girl looked even younger. Her tiny form clung to the porch with both hands.

“Is this one of your cats?” I asked, my voice shaking.

“Yes,” the older girl replied.

“What’s his name?” I asked.

“Jeffy,” the older girl said.

I slowly walked toward Butter. He didn’t raise his head until my hand was on his protruding spine. His fur was matted, dirt was caked on his ears, and yellow puss drooped from his eyes. He was a skeleton with fur and he didn’t seem to remember me.

“Bataba?” the younger girl said.

“What?” I said, not understanding.

“Bataba?” she replied again.

This time I ignored her. The younger girl apparently couldn’t speak very well yet. My eyes drifted to the front porch. A bench was covered in rugs, tools, buckets, and dirt. The holes in the floorboards weren’t patched and a toilet rusted silently. Various toys the girls once played with were strewn about, broken and abandoned. My stomach sank in disgust. This was the
place Butter now called home? This landfill with a toilet for furniture?

“You know this used to be my cat,” I said, trying to mask my trembling voice.

“Oh,” the older girl said.

“His name is Butter and I’ve had him for a very long time. He’s very old.” The older girl didn’t say anything but her face looked ashamed, like she felt bad for taking care of Butter.

“Batambaba?” the younger girl asked.

“Well I just wanted to stop by,” I said, paying no attention to the younger girl. “Thanks,” I said.

I knew I couldn’t take him home. I was going back to school for a month and I knew Butter would just run away again. With one last glance at Butter, I shoved my hands in my pockets and started walking back home. My vision was clouded with tears and I could feel the eyes of the two little girls watching my every step.

if “everything happens for a reason” then my next high roundhouse kick is going to happen for a reason about .5 seconds after you inform me of this discovery.
Jess sat on the fold out couch in the living room and bit her thumbnail. She could hear the raised voices of her mom and brother through the thin wooden door that separated the family room from the living room. The television displayed an old episode of “Friends”, the volume on mute so she could hear the fight.

That morning her mom was in one of her “moods.” She had them quite often and would sometimes do crazy things. Once, on Christmas Eve, her mom told the kids that they didn’t have enough Christmas spirit. She picked up the artificial tree, bulbs, lights, and tinsel included, and threw it outside. None of the kids got Christmas presents that year, and Eddie cried for a whole day. These episodes had gotten worse with the passing years since Jess’s dad died. His passing had done something to her. Jess loved her mother, even though at times she did lash out at those around her, including Jess.

Today she’d decided to attack Andrew’s bedroom, and that she did, like a vulture ripping through clothing to get to flesh. She threw all of his belongings into the family room and brought bag after bag of trash to the entrance way. She even asked Jess to help her drag his futon outside.

“Are you kicking him out?” she had asked.

“I just don’t know. I don’t want him here anymore if all he is going to do is make my house a mess.”

She didn’t tell her mom, but when she heard this her heart began to beat faster in anticipation. Her mom had kicked him out before, but he had always come back, then she would apologize. Jess hoped that this time it would be real. She wanted him gone. She wanted his room.
Emily Turner

Ever since she graduated her life had been full of disappointments. She’d moved back in with her family, deciding that now wasn’t the right time to pursue a career in social work. She had thought about going in to the Peace Corps, but didn’t because the interview was on the date of a concert she was going to. She knew that her mother would let her stay in the house for however long she wanted. She had gritted her teeth and gotten a job at a nursing home; her mom gave her the family car to use when she wanted to.

Jess stood up, walked over to the door, and pushed it open a crack so she could hear better. Leaning against the frame, she glanced around the room that was serving as her bedroom. She hated having to sleep in the living room. When she left for college Andrew took her old room so he and Eddie no longer had to share one. Her mom had rearranged the furniture so she had space, and use of the fold out couch, but throughout the day people would come in with their grabby little hands and move her stuff around. She had no privacy here.

The door frame was pressing into her back as she leaned against it. The voices were rising louder. She knew that the fight wasn’t going to last much longer. The louder her mom got the closer it was to the end.

“Actually just get the fuck out right now! I never want to see your face again,” her mom yelled.

Andrew shouted something back at her, but Jess couldn’t hear it over the steps of her mom. Her mom was coming toward her, toward the door, but then she turned to ascend the stairs. She wanted to open the door and see if her younger brother was really leaving, but didn’t want to face him. She pushed on the door as gently as possible and glanced up the staircase to the left. Her mom was sitting on the top step, smoking a cigarette. She didn’t see Jess; her eyesight got poorer every year. Jess knew that she was waiting for him to leave so she could pick up the mess.

She took two steps and looked into the room. Andrew wasn’t in there, but his girlfriend was. She was picking up and folding the clothing that her mother had thrown about the room. Her mouth was pulled down in a frown and her shoulders were bent, like she was carrying the burdens of the entire world. Jess smiled and knew that this time he was really leaving; Becky wouldn’t let him stay here after that. She backed up slowly into the living room and closed the door behind her. She knew that with one less person in the house it would mean more of a chance for her to be the target of her mothers rage, but that would be in the future. Right now she had no other intent than to relish in the fact that she had her own room again.
A Moveable Feast (Ernestly Speaking)
Andrew Iannotta

The point is to never be noticed, right? The point is to never let them know when you show up and to certainly never let them know when you leave.

To exist as a part of their pre-formed entity without upsetting the balance. Etiquette learned and relearned.

The point is not to infiltrate, but become and once you’ve become, you are and once you are you have the right.

Right?

I’ve loved you for a long time Hem, but I gotta be quite honest, I never knew why. Not till now.

I know this is getting tedious, but I am you – always been you. You don’t have to call back, I just wanted to let you know.

Sleep well.