The Great Lake Review
SUNY Oswego’s Literary Magazine
Fall 2015

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

Please submit your fiction, nonfiction, drama, poetry, and visual art as an attachment to:

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Located at 19 W. Bridge Street in downtown Oswego, the River’s End Bookstore is GLR’s off-campus home. Every year the River’s End holds the release events for our fall and spring issues.

All of us at GLR would like to extend a special thank you to everyone at our favorite independent bookstore, especially Bill and Mindy.

THANK YOU RIVER’S END!
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Singularity
Andrew Golembiewski
Afterlife of Leaves
Anna Swisher

When we die, our lives continue on in the shape of a fallen leaf.

When our organs fail and blood stops streaming through the small tubes underneath our skin and electrical impulses no longer make sparks within our brain, and our sight is surrounded by a dark vignette like the filter on a captured memory

Our last breath is pulled not only from our lungs but from every cell that ever belonged to our human form.

When we exhale for the last time, a silk ribbon that tastes like clouds from the light-blue morning sky departs from the space between our lips and dances around our frame, collecting any final energy that had been unfortunately forgotten.

When our skeleton turns frail and our eyelids become permanently closed, the ribbon that contains every former thought folds in on itself, solidifying into the jagged shape of a leaf freshly fallen from its home on a sturdy branch.

Crisp and wrinkled, we lie on grass dotted with droplets of dew. As time goes by the wind rearranges our position, carrying us to new patches of earth. And in our travels we are stepped on by boots large and small, their grooves ripping our already delicate form.

Some days we are mistaken for little sparrows, hopping along in search of seeds. But we are able to recognize the true leaves from those who merely pretend to be plants.
In the Garden of Gethsemane
Susan Velazquez

The click, click, clacking of the ballpoint pen doesn’t really help my thought process any better but I continue to push on and off the spring as if with one more click, I’m finally going to get the words I need on the blank page before me.

I can’t do this. Well, I can do this, I mean I have to do this. I just can’t think of what to write.

What do you write down before you’re about to die?

I put the paper away and decide to concentrate on knotting the noose. I can think as I work; I’m a multitasker anyway. I used to write my sermons as David blared his cartoons on the TV and Annabelle and Naomi fought over whether or not Naomi’s skirt was inappropriate. Sometimes having them in the background and overhearing their conversations gave me ideas. I sort of wish they were here right now but the kids are at school and Annabelle went to the church to take care of things for me.

I don’t deserve a woman like her. She’s putting on a brave face and facing all those people for me. I bet they’re all hovering over as she tries to set the books right again, set my mistakes right again. “How are you doing?” I bet they’re saying, with their eyebrows raised in condescending concern and their eyes searching her blushing face, looking for a bit of gossip to pass on.

I can see them in my mind’s eye so perfectly. I think the reason I can picture them so clearly is because, well, I used to be them. Whenever I heard Bob Morgan fell off the wagon again or the Larsen kid got suspended again, I’d put on that face. “How are you doing?” I’d ask. “Would you like me to pray for you?”

They always said yes because when a pastor offers to pray for you, it’s hard to say no. But I could feel them squirm uncomfortably as I loudly asked God to forgive them of their sins and set them on the right path again.

We’re supposed to ask God for forgiveness when we sin but no one likes to do it. It’s easier to live with the guilt and shame alone than to let other people know about the bad things we’ve done.

“You did a bad thing,” Delia told me. “I’m giving you the chance to make things right.”

Except she didn’t give me a chance. She just dangled it in front of me and then took it away, that stupid goddamn bitch.
No, no that’s wrong. It’s wrong to take the Lord’s name in vain. And I guess it’s wrong to call Delia by that name, even if she deserves it. And she does deserve it, by the way. But I should try to make things right and say sorry to her family in my letter. Maybe that’s how I’ll start.

I am sorry. I know that’s very least I can do. But I am sorry. I don’t know what else to say.

I wonder how anyone does this.

I think about David, not my son David, but the David from Samuel. He was once God’s favorite and then he strayed—badly. And more than once too, if you don’t remember. And each time he came back to the Lord and the Lord forgave him. He didn’t get off scot free, mind you. God made David’s son die as punishment for scorning him so badly.

I scorned God, but I killed my son myself. Is that my punishment? Or is that still yet to come?

It’s yet to come. I can feel it. The police have already been around asking questions, telling me that I was the last person to see Delia alive. I told them that I haven’t heard from her since she told me that she decided to keep the baby, that maybe she went to her mother’s. The officer wrote this all down but I could tell that he didn’t believe me. Still, he told me to have a nice day—and oh, don’t leave town any time soon.

“We’ll get through this,” Annabelle told me, several hours after I confessed to what I did. Well, the first part of what I did. This was before we knew how much worse things could get. She had ignored me all night, refusing to meet my gaze throughout dinner. The kids knew something was wrong without even asking and quietly excused themselves to their rooms as soon as possible. Eventually, Annabelle made an excuse to go to bed early too. It wasn’t until I snuck into the bedroom to steal a pillow and blanket for the couch that she finally acknowledged me. I wasn’t sure I heard her at first until she repeated herself.

“We’ll get through this. I know we will,” she said but she was laying on her side with her back to me. I stood there awkwardly, not knowing if I was supposed to slide between the sheets next to her or just keep standing. I compromised and sat on the corner of the mattress. Annabelle sat up and scooted next to me. When she turned to face me, I could see the tears forming in her eyes.

“I don’t know how I’m going to forgive you right now,” she whispered.

I swallowed. I didn’t know how I was going to forgive myself, let alone have anybody else do it for me.

“Maybe we should pray,” I suggested half-heartedly. I wanted to kick myself as soon as I said it aloud but Annabelle sat up and nodded.
She bowed her head and began to speak.

“Lord help me,” she sobbed. “Lord help me forgive John and what he did. I know he loves me but when he told me that he went off with that other woman and got her pregnant, I just—”

I couldn’t hear anymore—I didn’t want to hear anymore. I quietly stepped out of the room as she continued praying and slept on the couch.

I finish the noose and I wrap it around the beam around the garage. I tug hard, making sure it’ll be able to support my weight. I look back at my suicide note and try to see if there’s anything else to add. I debate confessing—on the one hand, it would give Delia’s family some peace and they would stop trying to find their daughter. But on the other hand, I don’t want my kids going through their whole lives knowing their father is a killer.

Satisfied with the noose, I look over my note for any spelling errors. This is going to be published in the local paper, I know it is. I can’t afford to embarrass my family even further. They don’t deserve that; they didn’t deserve any of this.

I apologized in my note, that’s good. I vaguely mention Delia and how sorry I am that she lost her baby. Wait, should I say that? I don’t know how many people know she’s missing, let alone pregnant. I’ll just say that I’m sorry for what I did to her—no, to Annabelle. I’ll say I’m sorry for straying from my marriage and I’m sorry for using the church’s money to cover up my mistakes. Maybe I won’t mention Delia at all. If I do, the cops will take it as an admission of guilt.

I already confessed what I did to God; I don’t need to do it to anyone else, do I?

I burn the note and start over, leaving Delia out. I don’t even feel bad. If she just went and took care of it like she promised, none of this would have happened. What was the point in me giving her the money then? I should have known that she was lying through her teeth.

“I changed my mind,” she told me. “I want to keep the baby. I want to start a new life and be a better person, honest. It’s like you always say in your sermons: it’s never too late to ask God for a chance to start over. You did that once, why can’t I do the same?”

No one really changes, no one does.

I was a bad kid who was quickly becoming a bad man until Pastor Lee saved me. He told me that I could start anew but he was wrong. I didn’t stop drinking; I just hid it better. I didn’t stop stealing; I just did it in smaller amounts. And I didn’t stop lying; I just got better at it. I didn’t stop being a bad person, I just felt guiltier.

I helped Delia, in a way. She would have gone through her whole life trying to be a perfect person, constantly playing catch up and trying
to make up for the mistakes in her past until she broke down because no matter how much other people forgive you, you can't forgive yourself.

I grab the step ladder from the kitchen, where I was fixing the light bulb earlier. I was trying to do some nice things before I left—fix the lightbulbs, put the dishes away, vacuum the rooms, put a casserole in the oven. I walk around my house for the last time and I’m angry that I feel so sad.

I shouldn’t get to be sad.

I set the ladder up in garage, underneath the noose. I just have to take a couple steps up and then one step off. I know what I have to do but I still stand there stupidly for several minutes. Then I realize it’s because I have the urge to pray. For some reason—no, I know the reason— I burst out laughing.

Suddenly, I’m reminded of the sermon I gave last Easter, which focused on Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

“Jesus knew that he was sent down to Earth to die for humanity’s sins. It was something he probably knew the moment he was birthed from Mary’s womb, mind you. But I don’t think he quite grasped the gravity of sacrifice until he was there, alone and kneeling in the garden. He lived among us for approximately thirty years—he had a mother, a father, a brother, friends. He loved people and he was going to leave them. Physically, I mean,” I hastily amended. “The Lord Jesus Christ is always with us.”

“Amen,” responded the congregation but it was more of a knee-jerk response than a genuine reaction. I remembered looking out into the crowd and seeing how everyone’s eyes were glazed over. No doubt they were already thinking of kicking off their uncomfortable patent leather shoes, eating the honey glazed hams currently roasting quietly in the oven, and watching the little Sunday school children shriek excitedly as they participated in Easter egg hunts.

“Everyone was just groggy from the heat,” Annabelle told me that night as we were preparing for bed. Without me even saying so, she knew what was troubling me. I had been preaching for almost a decade at the church and still no one seemed to be listening, no matter what I talked about.

“You gave a lovely sermon,” she assured me. “I never thought of Jesus that way,” she added, attempting to make me feel better.

No one thinks of Jesus that way. I sometimes forgot to think about Jesus that way too.

It wasn’t until I was reading my bible, trying to ignore the fifty year old Scotch sitting in our cabinet that Bob Morgan asked me to keep for him, that I finally remembered that verse about how Jesus tried to ask
God to remove the cup of wrath he was about to drink. It gave me the inspiration for his sermon; I wanted to tell everyone that they were all weak. Even I, a pastor, was weak. I was weak all the time and I was about to break but it was alright because through the grace of God, they could all be saved again—we could all be saved again.

But people were falling asleep and no one heard me. And after a while, I stopped hearing myself too.

I keep thinking about that failed Easter sermon as I climb the ladder and wrap the nose around my neck. I stand for a moment, pausing. Jesus knew what it was like to be weak, I remember. He understood what it was like.

I can be forgiven.

So I step off the ladder, unafraid.
Withered Yellow
Andrew Golembiewski
It was at Jacob’s funeral; motorcycle accident at age 27—closed casket—a harsh way to go if you ask me. We hadn’t seen each other or spoken in many years. I had since finished high school, served three years in West Germany in the Army, moved from job to job, drank heavily, and generally lived life as I pleased. My first and only Grateful Dead show was at Soldier Field in Chicago on the day before the funeral: Friday, June 26th, 1992. It was International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking. No shit. And I thought anything was possible.

Hardly anyone was in the stadium to see the Steve Miller Band open the night. We were partying in the parking lots. Dropping acid by 3pm, my girlfriend Noreen and I were wide open. Aromas from all the different foods, body odor and Patchouli made us feel like we were in a different country. Acid made us feel like we were on another planet. Hippies bartered handmade crafts for food, drugs, concert tickets, bus tickets or rides to the next ‘show’. Turns out, hippies took money too. I bought a hand carved bowl from a dude for $8.00. Carved from a four-inch section of a broom handle, it looked like an ancient wizard with a long, wise face straight out of The Hobbit. I just had to buy it (Gandalf winked at me).

Once in the stadium, fireworks really set off my acid trip. I vividly recall giant round lighted screens that swirled and mixed a kaleidoscope of colors with the music. Between sets they did this face morph with each band member’s face melting into another; a truly magical sight. I especially remember the opening song, Hell in a Basket, drinking many beers and toking on joints that were constantly passed along our 18th row. The peak of the afternoon was epic sex with Noreen in a porta potty surrounded by 50,000 beautiful, cheering people.

Evening brought a brilliant, deep red sunset over Chicago and Jacob suddenly began to linger on my mind. He would never see a show or a sunset again. In grade school I had a bully nemesis, Darren, who took to riding my ass for a few years. I already endured the unofficial nicknames of Nazi and Kraut, due to my German immigrant parents. By eighth grade, Darren figured he’d drive the point home and finally cornered me in the men’s locker room. We were just coming to blows when Jacob came out of nowhere and broke it up.

They kind of frowned upon fighting at our little Lutheran School. The incident was kept quiet and Darren’s black eye was forgiven as
horsing around during a Four-Square game at recess. In spite of such a silly and revealing lie by the teachers, Jacob remained the only classmate in all my grade school years to back me up. Jacob and Darren weren’t friends anymore.

Back at the show, Rock-Med suddenly raced down the center aisle with some dude on a stretcher and the security guy yelled, “That’s why you gotta stay out of my fucking aisle!” All the commotion brought me to a final realization: Jacob was gone and I could very well be next. In my state of heightened emotions, I suddenly became deeply committed to attending his funeral the following day. Noreen noticed the tears and knew it wasn’t the acid.

“You’re gonna ruin my trip, bud,” she hissed.

“Got some shit on my mind, darlin’.”

“Don’t call me darlin’,” she said. “You know I hate that. Grampa used to call me that. Going to a show the night before a grade school funeral anyway. Psh! What do you care? You don’t even know the guy anymore.”

“Let it go,” I told her.

And so she did let it go. After a once in a lifetime, spectacular concert experience, we crashed at her friend’s place in Wrigleyville and early the next morning, Saturday, June 27th, 1992, I got her bitchy, hung over ass up and drove ninety miles back to Rockford. I would never see her again.

I had nothing to wear for a funeral; no formal clothing of any kind. Settling on a pair of reasonably clean jeans and a pair of old Army combat boots, I added my only clean shirt: a tie-dyed “Peace, Love & Vegetable Rights” t-shirt from the show the day before. I was brutally hung over and clearly shouldn’t have driven across town to the funeral, let alone from downtown Chicago earlier that morning.

Arriving late, I approached the same old cronies. I had no friends from grade school—then or now. They looked me over in astonishment as I coolly walked the line and shook their hands, somehow remembering their names. Their fierce contempt at my really long hair and inappropriate clothing was palpable. Apparently they had all remained very Christian, suit wearing, well-adjusted, productive members of society. Well, good for them. I was there for Jacob and required nothing from any of them.

The ceremony began abruptly when I heard a grunt or what may have been a snicker. I hadn’t eaten anything yet that day. Perhaps, in my state of acute starvation, a small amount of body fat laced with LSD from the day before was released back into my bloodstream. The sun suddenly tuned to a warmer, buzzing color. Shadows seemed deep and menacing.
The pastor’s voice sounded like smooth butter. I glanced beyond the immense, bottomless chasm dug for Jacob’s coffin and noticed a glowing, red marble grave stone.

It moved; no… actually, it snickered.

“Ashes to ashes.”

“Mwah, hah, hah.” The laugh began as a low muffled guttural chuckle.

“Dust to dust.”

“Bwahhhhhhh ha he hee haaaaaa,” the laughter crescendoed to bitter heights as the terrifying stone breathed like a human chest, laughing at some final cosmic joke.

“The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away,” the Pastor continued as the stone howled.

Horror mounted in my spleen and worked its way up my dry, acidic throat. I was shaky and about to pass out. Someone must have been picking up on all this because a hand came down on my shoulder and gently led me to a chair. Then, the ceremony was over as abruptly as it began. No Pastor in sight. No forgiveness. Thinking I was distraught, people must have left during the petrifying laughter coming from a grave stone mocking my mortality.

No more of this, I thought. It was summer 1992 and I couldn’t tell you a single thing that happened since I got out of the Army in spring 1988. Scarcely remembering the dazzling concert the day before, I suddenly missed Jacob, or at least the thought of him. He had been that one person on earth who backed me up when I needed it most. LSD taught me one crucial lesson: reality should be fun, but reality should also be fulfilling and fantastic; not harsh or painfully intense. Coming back to the present, sitting in a cemetery, I realized Darren was next to me.

“Hey Tom.”

“How’s life, Darren?” I responded, leaning forward to hold my head in my hands.

“Could be better I guess. Couldn’t help noticing your shirt. Ya know, Jacob and I were going to road trip to that very show in Chicago yesterday. We ran into each other a couple months back and started riding together. He wanted to see The Grateful Dead; some kind of bucket list thing, like hiking coast to coast or some shit.”

“Way Cool. It was a great show,” I said, nodding gently with a spitting headache.

“You basically get up every morning and do whatever you want, don’t you?” he asked.

“Yeah. And your point?” I replied.

“My point is: it’s pretty damn clear we all have only one life, and
precious little time.”
“I never think about time,” I said, standing to leave.
“At least it looks like you’re living the life you want.”
“Reckon us Germans are good at that,” I said, turning to leave.
“I just thought,” he said, his voice trailing off, “…I only wanted to wish you well.” I turned back, shook his hand and silently walked to my car with Darren looking after me.
“Good to see you, Tom,” he shouted as I turned the key.
We parted strangely. No happy reunions. No resolutions. Darren was fishing for something with his sudden concern. Maybe he sought redemption for his poisonous, grade school, name calling bullshit: he was a black classmate that often called me a Nazi Jew killer. Shit, in 1979, at age thirteen, he knew as little about Germans as I knew about Africans. But words really do mean things, don’t they? Or perhaps he thought I lived in some kind of bachelor’s dream and wanted to live there again too (without the responsibility for his wife and children and mortgage that is). He was lying to himself then. True, everyone lives only one life, but precious few live the life they want to. And no one lives without regrets.
Thus began a new chapter: I was done with LSD, having learned all I would learn from it. Reality is not merely stagnant, repetitive and lingering, it instinctively seeks new directions. Realizing that I now needed to live in a sober world, or soon die as well, my new course led forward into the mountains. Not long after Jacob’s funeral I gained a sudden idea, an obsession really, to do something very real like walk two thousand miles from Georgia to Maine on the Appalachian Trail (AT). Within two years I would refocus my life, plan out the journey and save enough money to do the trip.
On October 3rd, 1995, I completed the AT on Mount Katahdin in central Maine; 2,168 miles over six months, ‘thru hiked’, straight through in one shot. I was also a purist, which meant I walked every single foot of that trail—no hitches or shortcuts. As I hiked, I sometimes wondered if Jacob had ever heard of the AT; if, perhaps, it was on his bucket list. It fulfilled me to imagine that he had in fact heard of the AT and wanted to take it on, but had never found the time to hike it. I felt that maybe I had lived that wonderful journey for him; that this time I had his back when no one else in the world did.
Citizens call for boots on the ground.
Those dust covered boots are a Syrian Desert.
They are boots of courage.
Boots that run with the power of a thousand fallen soldiers.

Foreign soil clings to the treads.
The leather shaft supports the soldiers’ steady stride.
Its laces are a hissing snake.
“Don’t tread on me.”

Those boots stand before the enemy. Ever sturdy, ever ready.
Standing in those boots is America’s protector.
Armed with an M4 and faith, he is content with his fate.
A healing man mends the wounds caused by enemy’s hands.

He is an eagle. His talons rip evil from the land.
His wings, forged by the sacrifice of his brothers’ blood.
They will always call for boots on the ground.

He leaves his trouble where he leaves his boots.
Gently, he wipes tears from a little girl’s eyes.
Yes, he is a protector.
There is a man in those boots on the ground.

Pearl 2015
Wildflower  
Sequoya Fitzpatrick

Bruises.  
Like daisies were pushing up.  
My body is a garden that  
Will always lean towards the sun.  
So the Forget-Me-Nots in my chest cavity  
And the Baby Breath in my lungs,  
Will never see silence.  
Like the Roses on my tongue.
Wishes
Andrew Golembiewski
INT.

OLD LIFT - NIGHT

Two FEMALES in black and yellow body armor are going up a creaky lift. They are wearing respirators and holding assault rifles. Their name patches read DUTCH and RINGER.

The dim light overhead flickers.

Ringer is whistling the GhostBusters theme.

DUTCH
(interrupts)

So you catch that movie last night?

Ringer turns to face Dutch. The lift moves slowly and creaks loudly. The light continues to flicker.

RINGER
The sappy rom-com or the one with the vampires?

DUTCH
The vampires doofus. Even I know you don’t go for that romance bullshit.

RINGER
What can I say? It bores the hell
The lift catches and stops with a jolt. The light goes out and the lift is in complete darkness.

Ringer and Dutch turn on their flashlight attachments and begin to look around. The floor indicator is stuck just before the fourth floor.

**RINGER**
All this trouble for four goddamn floors?

Ringer turns to Dutch.

**RINGER (CONT.)**
We just had to take the elevator, didn’t we?

**DUTCH**
(shrugging) What? I thought it would be more fun than the stairs.

Ringer kicks the wall of the lift.

**RINGER**
Just look at all the fun I’m having.

**DUTCH**
I’m sorry, but that attitude of yours isn’t going to get us out of here.

Ringer shines her light on the ceiling and spots a maintenance hatch. Ringer opens the hatch and climbs through. We see her light move around the shaft.

**RINGER (O.S.)**
CLEAR!
Ringer reaches her arm down to help Dutch up.

INT.

OLD LIFT SHAFT - NIGHT

Ringer pulls Dutch up and they use a knife to pry open the door to the fourth floor. The two exit cautiously.

INT.

ABANDONED BUILDING - NIGHT

The floor is dark. The two exit the shaft in formation and sweep the floor with their flashlights. They find a mangled body with flesh missing.

DUTCH
JESUS CHRIST! What in the hell do you think could have done this?

Ringer squats down to examine the body.

DUTCH (CONT.)
Do you think we’re dealing with a Nagaraja?

RINGER
No. It doesn’t look like it was a vampire...

DUTCH
Maybe it was a werewolf?

RINGER
I don’t see any hairs or claw marks. (beat) The bites almost look... human.

DUTCH
I don’t think a human could cause this kind of damage.
A drop of blood hits Dutch’s visor.

DUTCH (CONT.)
What the...

Dutch is interrupted by something falling on her while roaring. It is a GAUNT LOOKING MAN with whited out eyes and flesh hanging from his barred teeth. Dutch lets out a blood curdling scream. Ringer shoots the Man multiple times before he stops moving. She helps Dutch back to her feet.

DUTCH
Thank you.

RINGER
No problem. I got your back.

The two turn to examine the new corpse.

RINGER (CONT.)
What the hell is it?

DUTCH
I dunno, it kinda looks like a zombie.

RINGER
This far North? That’s new.

Ringer lets out a yelp of pain and falls to the ground as the corpse from earlier bites her ankle. Dutch shoots it in the head several times.

DUTCH
Oh my god. Are you okay?

RINGER
I don’t know...

Ringer pulls off her boot and winces at her bleeding injury.
RINGE(R (CONT.)
SHIT!

DUTCH
Goddamnit!

RINGE(R
You know what you have to do.

DUTCH
I can’t.

RINGE(R
YOU HAVE TO!

Ringer’s breathing quickens in pace.

RINGE(R (CONT.)
JUST DO IT!

Tears well up in Dutch’s eyes as she pulls out her side arm and points it at Ringer’s head.

RINGE(R (CONT.)
Just promise me something...

DUTCH
(holding back sobs) Anything.

RINGE(R
Don’t watch that vampire movie. (beat) It sucked.

Ringer coughs up blood and starts to growl. Dutch turns her face away as she shoots Ringer in the head.

CUT TO BLACK.
There is a wax museum off in Los Angeles
Maggie Gaiero

Lodged between the place a lady got her hair dyed pink last month and the mortuary that cremated her cat two years ago. Lodged next to the veteran who now hides under fire escapes in the alley when it rains, imagining ash falling and bodies melting into the dirt, bodies missing legs, parts of heads blown across the sand— murmuring the names of these fallen friends to try to keep a wisp of sanity in his brain but it’s like trying to catch that one grain of sand spilling through your fingers at the beach.

The wax museum.
Down the street from the Murphey’s house who lost their only son, four years old, with grass stained knees, mop of hair combed back, and a polo for church, running out into the road after the house cat, after the mouse, after life. Now the father drinks whiskey because it vibrates inside his skull, attempting to strangle the cries of his wife yelling stop, the squealing tires, crystal cracking, the cries of his son who wasn't blessed with the immediate kiss of death, of himself.

The wax museum.
I myself have been, not to it, there on that street, not the place with Hollywood's finest memorialized. It was a place with white walls, no pictures, no smiles. No flashing cameras, but flashing machines, beeping sounds. Robot breaths forced in and out of bodies that no longer had real breaths to breathe. No longer opened their eyes, did not move by themselves, whose very consciousness is debated and wrung out and twisted like a tug of war rope between some spiritual being and science and all that was real, was

the wax museum—
my grandma had been on display for a month, cancer had brought her in, shut off the light behind her eyes and drawn the curtains shut her nails ever more yellow while her skin flushed blue, flushed grey and a line could read her heart beat but it could not read me my favorite fairy tale book, could not say my name like a song, and I did not know
they were about to put her away in some back closet and I was too frightened to look for one more second at her face, to tell her I loved her, to touch her that I too would become wax.
Fifteen Minutes to Midnight

The town seemed so peaceful in summer, so light and carefree. The shops were all open. The people bustled in and out with their groceries and their goods as I walked down Highburgh Road. No one was worrying then. The electronics store I passed had a flat panel display in the window turned to news no one cared to watch. No one that is, except me. I watched a few minutes, the headline graphic catching my eye. “Disturbance in Europe,” it cried. However, without the sound of the reporter and nothing but a map of the Baltic, barely anyone paid any attention to it. The problem seemed so far away then.

How naive we all were.

~*~*~*~

Ten Minutes to Midnight

The heat of summer may have cooled with the passing to fall but the reporters cry out, “Tempers are rising.” The news talked of separatists and terrorists, governments around the world tightening the noose around freedoms once taken for granted. Even here. When my family tried to vacation to Spain that October, we weren’t allowed to leave. “Anyone going to the continent forfeits any protection from the Crown,” the customs officer told us at the airport. “We can’t keep track of everyone and if something were to happen it’d be impossible to get help to the affected areas.”

With that, we cancelled our trip. So much for tanning in the Mediterranean.

~*~*~*~

Eight Minutes to Midnight

A cloud of hot breath floated through the wintry air as I watched the bizarre construction project in the vacant lot next to my house. “A precaution,” our councilor said when my father asked. A ridiculous mess, I thought. The ground had a big hole for the entrance in the center of the plot. Workers brought in concrete and rebar to reinforce the underground walls. Boxes of supplies and provisions lined the street, waiting for the shelter to prove usable before taking the trip underground.
I passed two other such projects on my way towards classes at the University of Glasgow. The one closest to campus was the furthest along, pairs of workers shuttling in cot after cot as the final preparations were getting underway.

The frantic whispers of troop movements in Ukraine, Poland and Russia coupled with readiness exercises in the States and in Scotland filled the air just as much as the winter cold. Nerves were on a razor’s edge. Some international students huddled around television and computer screens, praying for news from their homes. History professors warned of global ruin and religion professors were calling for the End of Days. No one listened.

~*~*~*~

Five Minutes to Midnight

“State against State!! America Plunged into War against Itself!!”

The headline bolded in The Daily Record signified the latest in a series of stories detailing the growing tensions: “Russian Flag over Kiev!” “Anarchy in Middle East!” “Seoul in Ruins!” These headlines and others like them are why my father sat in the kitchen that March, cleaning his hunting rifle. When I asked what game he planned on hunting, he told me that if those, “unruly southerners,” from London wanted a piece of his land they’d have to tear it from under his cold dead body. It was a popular paranoid delusion of course; those, “unruly southerners,” my father mentioned were also our countrymen. Somehow, our neighbors convinced themselves that England was going to take advantage of the crisis. For a time, they convinced my father as well.

Everyone was on edge. Even a few of my friends were looking towards Canada or Australia; they were so far unaffected by the madness in the rest of civilization. Canada had already closed the border with the States, fearing the ethnic tensions and economic distress of her southern neighbor would lead to the headline plastered on the copy of The Record on our kitchen table. There was talk of them closing their airspace soon my friends told me. There were dark, ominous clouds as I watched their plane take off from Glasgow.

Those clouds opened up and poured when the news said American separatists shot their plane down because it got too close to American airspace.

~*~*~*~

Three Minutes to Midnight
The distant repetitive fire of anti-air guns—ta, ta, ta, ta—sounded just as haunting as when I first heard them after Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom jumped to help the American unionists. Over the course of the past month or so though—ta, ta, ta, ta—I seemed to notice it less and less.

Normal, as it once was, was no longer. Militia drills replaced university classes. Many of my remaining friends were drafted into roles that suited them, nurses and intelligence officers. I was drafted into strategy and infantry command. The Home Militia of Scotland knew of no gender boundaries; with the separatists in control of most of the American Navy and invasion a distinct possibility, all that mattered was what you could do and how well you did it.

My father gave me a misty-eyed, resigned stare when I told him my posting. That look told me all I needed to know. He had his duty as well, protecting my sister, still too young to understand.

He never expected his eldest daughter to become a soldier.

~*~*~*~

One Minute to Midnight

With every new tragedy the tensions rise.

The latest news from overseas was dire: British ships accompanied by the last reaming American loyalist ships were heading for a showdown with Russian forces at the Strait of Hormuz, the West’s vital fuel spigot.

When my father heard the news, he tried to take my sister to safety away from the city. He drove all over, trying every major road. Army and Marines supplemented by Militia forces had completely secured Glasgow, no one in or out.

So my father and sister bunkered down, gathered supplies and coordinated with our neighbors to prepare the local shelter. I visited them when I could, but I had only a few precious hours off duty before we were separated again. We tried to persevere, to endure and get through this strange ordeal.

We all thought common sense would prevail.

~*~*~*~

Thirty Seconds to Midnight

We were wrong.

No one knows who fired the first warhead. No one could even confirm that the Americans sent were even loyalists.
The spread of crisscrossing missile contours confirmed the worst fears from the Strait. Launching missiles and falling warheads traded across the sky. Contours from Britain joined them.

The haunting sounds of sirens and the scurrying of people hurrying to the shelters built only eight months past accompanied those contours, retaliation almost a certainty. The Home Office, under authority of Her Majesty, ordered the Home Militia to a separate shelter south of the city. My father and sister crammed into our neighborhood shelter with three other families.

Just as I was hurrying into the tunnel of the shelter, I witnessed a giant fireball high in the southern sky. It blocked out the contours as it burst over the horizon. My commander ordered the doors sealed and I rushed inside.

~*~*~*~

Ten Seconds to Midnight

As I sat on my dingy cot, surrounded by colleagues and my team, my thoughts drifted to my father and sister. The commander told me that those shelters were designed for fallout, not for a direct strike. With radar equipment limited, there was no way of determining if the city was a target. For the first time since the death of my mother, I prayed to the Lord for the safety of my family. I prayed for the safety of us all.

The loss of the lights followed by the earth seizing around us answered my prayer, as I fell off my cot and knew no more.

~*~*~*~

Midnight

~*~*~*~

Dawn

Eighteen months passed. I was in a coma for six of them. The doctors told me that a light fixture crashed on top of me causing a massive head injury. They say I’m lucky to have survived. Others weren’t so lucky.

The estimates are vague at this point, but data suggests almost half of the world’s population, three and a half billion people, were killed in the global nuclear exchange and the fallout that came after. It still isn’t safe to be outside for more than an hour or two at a time, but enough to restore some vital services like communication and food supply.

Glasgow took a hit from a relatively small warhead late in the
exchange. There was massive damage, especially around the university area. Most of those sheltered nearby, including my family, perished in the blast.

The emptiness inside me during the last year was almost overwhelming, making me question why I survived if I was to live in this world without my loved ones. These doubts washed away however, the moment those shelter doors opened the first time about a month ago. Dressed head-to-toe in safety gear complete with sun-shield, we were the first from our shelter to venture out into the ruins. It was morning, and at first, we couldn’t tell. Then a few slivers of dawn light peeked through the radiation haze. We stood in awe; the wretched magnitude of destruction contrasted with the beauty and hope of the struggling rays of light.

I stared up at the sky and smiled, blinking a tear away from my eyes. From that moment on, I dedicated my life to living in memory of my father and sister, and all those who didn’t live to see the world heal.

It was the dawn of a new morning, a new start.
Cold March
Andrew Golembiewski
Signed Copy of Insecurity
Shannon Ariel

The door is open and
so is the shop,
a neon pink sign saying so,
but I stop
at the threshold.
A screen blocking me
out.

“Gay’s the Word”?
I am a duality. By definition:
happy, ecstatic, carefree?
Absolutely not.
Attracted to the same sex?
Last I checked, yes.

For me, the word
is more apt to be
anxiety.

The lanky man behind the counter
judges me with a smile
as he carries on with
the butch with an armful of books.
I walk, tripping over my feet and
my insecurities.

Patrons stare as if they know,
as if the American practically
oozes out of my ever pore.
Even Virginia Woolf glares
from the cover of her own
“best of” collection.

“I’m one of you!” I want to scream
but a scene is the last thing I wish to be,
the last thing I want to add to my list of
definitions.
I grab a copy of the wrong book, speed to the counter, pay with fistfuls of cash and a face as red as the first color on the flag.

Even in a community of outcasts, the very meaning of who we are: taboo, fitting in gets no easier. Belonging is another closet to be stuck in.
Addicts in the Attic
Rebecca Ziegler

There are moments in life when the conscious mind is rendered useless. For instance, when one parks the car and starts walking past the Wednesday night bars to avoid the monsters called Insecurity and Loneliness. When their feet keep walking, propelled by their disease, as their mind screams,

Stop!
Turn around!
This is not where you should be!

But then where should I be?
Where should I be?

Keep walking.

The porch is not illuminated. The streetlamps don’t reach this far because this is not where the respectable people of mountainside suburbia are going. The respectable drunks are in bars on Wednesday night, but no no, not I. I am moving my feet over the sidewalk with my disease silencing my conscious mind.

What does it matter that I probably have to fuck one of them as long as I get at least a gram of blow and a six pack? That’s not so bad is it?

They are howling up McEwen Street toward me.

Well I’m sure they’re all clean.
They’re respectable, working men.
I’ve known Tom since I was thirteen.

The wooden porch steps have holes in them and a cold and sweating beer is thrust into my hand. I don’t ask questions; I drink.

Get out of here!

Shut the fuck up; this is not the time to think.
I am led inside where they dial phones frantically as their pallid faces drip with sweat and their eyes bulge from their heads. I want to peel my skin, but I have no energy. I want to laugh, but it scares me that I can’t feel anything, so I chug their beer from behind the couch where they can’t see. They won’t notice me anyway when the search is in full swing.

No one wants to sell us blow on a Wednesday. I wonder if it’s because it’s Wednesday night and they have to drive to a real job tomorrow, or if they’re tired of watching us waste away. I know I am but it’s absurd that they would be. What do they care as long as they get their money? I don’t even care enough about myself to quit, so why would my dealer tell me?

I am handed a small blue jewelry bag with powdery white particles encased within. I flick it open and smile like a kid on Christmas as we ascend the attic stairs. It is July and this attic is one hundred degrees, but the beer is cold and I’m about to get high. We scoop the white substance out of our respective bags with a key and an evil, twisting smirk plays across my face. Tom disassembles a box cutter and passes the razor around. He cuts a straw and hands it to us. We spent all of our dollar bills on this and straws are free from Burger King. I wish I could smell money when I kneel at the small round glass table to inhale the first line, but that is not for addicts in the attic, that is for the rappers, rock stars, and rich guys.

It must be nice to have a dollar bill left after getting high.

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The attic isn’t so bad now. I can see the elegance in the filth. The dust dances in the dim light and the cocaine looks like pixie dust on the table. If I snort enough I might be able to fly.

These guys aren’t so bad now. I can see how beautiful their sweat is, trickling like uneven, rocky streams caressing their brows.

There is holy grace in the flickering streetlight on the corner of McEwen and Main.

If I stare at it long enough I’ll be absolved of my sins and gain salvation.

But do you really want to be saved, isn’t this just easier? Didn’t you want
to feel this way?

Well, yes and no.

I wanted to feel alive, but I didn’t want to live this life, this lie.

Everyone is laughing to fill the ugly silence; I can tell that they don’t mean it. This is not a place to let people know things, not even the way that my real laugh stutters on the exhale. I’ve heard Tom laugh for real, red faced and crying, one eyebrow cocked and his upper teeth protruding, but he does not laugh like that tonight. Tonight we laugh a nonchalant, “huh, ha,” so that no one can say that this isn’t fun anymore.

In between beers, when I remember that this is the twelfth one and I open it even though I don’t want it and I drink it even though I hate myself for it, I read Allen Ginsberg.

I feel things that I am afraid of as I pour the remnants of my soul into Howl.

I am howling defeat out of the attic window and I am killing myself with every inhale.

Dylan calls me toward the steps.

“Zig, let’s go downstairs.”

“I was going to stay up here.”

“Haven’t you had enough?”

“Well… yeah.” I lie.

“Then come downstairs, I wanna fuck.”

“I know what you want.”

“Don’t be a fuckin bitch about it!”

“I’m sorry.”

“Alright then, hurry up.”
His skin is rough and sticky and feeling him on top of me makes me sick, but I tolerate his jerking and thrusting and let out a pitiful whimper so that he might even think that I enjoy it.

I try to trick my body, just think of something sexy, but I can’t because all I can think about is how pathetic this all is. How we’re just parasites. No one cares about me or him, but he gets to fuck me and I get free drugs; that’s all this is.

I try to ignore their eyes when I enter the attic again. I left my bra downstairs, what does it matter anymore. They can stare if they want. They can think what they want, it won’t matter anyway.

It’s four in the morning and then five and everyone slowly pours into the street. Everyone except me.

I see Tom tiptoe into the attic.

“You okay?”

My sigh says it all, or maybe it’s the fifth of vodka that I’m clenching at eight in the morning.

My eyes well up and words don’t matter anymore, because Tom knows. Or maybe he doesn’t, but I’m tired of turning away the people who want to hold me when I’m falling apart. I murmur to myself more than to him about my dirty, bruised past. He doesn’t understand. That doesn’t matter. He cuts me three lines and I’m more aware of my heartbeat than I am of my thoughts. There is a creak on the steps and Dylan says he needs me.

There is no longing or urgency in his voice.

He doesn’t need me. He just wants pussy. Something tugs me toward the steps from behind my navel anyway.

He doesn’t look at me so he can’t see my puffy eyes and when I lay next to him on his bed he ignores them. He sits me in his lap and puts a water bottle to my lips. Vodka. It looks like he’s feeding a crying baby, a seventeen-year-old baby who cries for vodka. He peels off my shirt and fumbles with my bra clasp. I won’t help him. He pulls my shorts down and slips off my underwear as he kisses my neck.
You need to act like you like this.

His sweat drips onto my forehead and I can’t look at him. I forget to moan when I’m supposed to and this frustrates him, so he makes sure that I make some sound even if it’s because of pain. I try to ignore it. He rolls over and I stare at the lone ray of light admitted through the black sheet used as a curtain. He gets up and tosses less blow than usual on the table.

You should have moaned when you were supposed to.

I start cutting lines before I even put on my underwear. I look at the razor and wonder if I’ll have the time to drag it up my arm in someone’s bathtub tonight or if I’ll be too busy wallowing in my shame and synthetic ecstasy. It’s hard to commit suicide when I’m so busy destroying my life. I wipe my bleeding nose on my arm and leave without saying goodbye.

I won’t ever do this again.

“Tom, should I come over tomorrow night?”

“mm I mean if you wanna sure.”

He shrugs and shuts the door behind me.

“mm I mean if you wanna then that’s fine.”

I smell like vodka and sex on a Thursday morning in mountainside suburbia. The shopkeepers on Maine St. look at me like I’m the devil himself as I fumble with the key and hop into my cars driver’s seat drunk again. With well rehearsed recklessness I feel my way home. The blacktop is smooth and I don’t have to think to avoid the potholes. I drive with the windows down and pretend that I enjoyed myself because this was all supposed to be fun wasn’t it?

Who are you kidding? This stopped being fun long ago, but you’re shit out of luck kid, because I’m in control.
Red Wash
Kimberly Pitzrick
Boiling Potatoes  
Liberty Yalch

CAROLINE  
But I don’t want to be a chef, mom! Looked what happened to you!

GINA  
Sometimes we must make sacrifices for things in our lives that we love.

CAROLINE  
Not when I don’t want to make a sacrifice in the first place.

GINA  
Just because you are frustrated with something that you love doesn’t mean you can push it all aside.

CAROLINE  
(Mumbling to herself)  
I can do whatever I want to do.

GINA  
What was that, dear?

CAROLINE  
Nothing. Nothing at all.

GINA  
The onions must be cut into thin slices to put into the stew. I want them light enough to float on the top for decoration.

CAROLINE  
(With sudden anger)  
Why don’t you do it then?

(With sudden remorse)  
I’m sorry mom. I just got too out of hand. I shouldn’t have said anything.

GINA  
(Suddenly recalling her youth)  
Honey you know I wasn’t always like this.
CAROLINE exits the stage. GINA goes into costume change for a chef’s attire CHEF XAVIER walks in. Lights on GINA.

GINA
(Talking to the audience)
I was so young and full of life. Combing ingredients and pouring my heart into my art and creations gave me life. I was young and foolish. That was my downfall.

Entire stage lights up. GINA can be seen working in a kitchen.

CHEF XAVIER
How is my best apprentice doing this fine evening?

GINA
I am doing wonderful. I am so excited to be the top chef tonight for preparing the feast for the dean.

CHEF XAVIER
Well it has been an honor to teach you everything I know. I am sure your leadership will take command this evening.

GINA
I sure hope so. This could be my big shot into finally being recognized for my work.

CHEF XAVIER
(Leaning in very close and touching GINA’S hand.)
I can’t wait to see what surprises you have in store.

GINA
(Talking to the audience)

Lights on GINA. CHEF XAVIER exits.

I should have seen the signs. The four years I was in school, Chef Xavier always had a careful eye on me even though I was just one of his students. I would always catch him watching me. He would keep me after class and show me many things. I though he was being nice in having so much hope in me for just being a student. As the years progressed he began to stand behind me while I was working and place his hand over mine to show me how to cut properly or stir. I was uncomfortable but I thought
nothing of it. Nothing of it at all.

*Entire stage lights back up. That evening the kitchen is busy making the food.*

GINA

(Turning to a person)
Please clean up that counter I don’t want to have to worry about that!

(Turning to another person)
The meat needs tenderizing and then start mixing the desert batter.

**CHEF XAVIER enters quietly.**

**CHEF XAVIER**

(Standing behind GINA)
How is everything going?

GINA

(Startled turning around)
Oh. Hi, Chef Xavier everything is running smoothly.

**CHEF XAVIER**

I was thinking maybe after this is all done I can buy you a drink and dinner.

GINA

Oh, I am sorry. My boyfriend is taking me out tonight.

**CHEF XAVIER**

(In fury)
I have been working constantly for four years to get you here and you can’t give me not even an ounce of respect to let me take you out!

**CHEF XAVIER smashes a plate to the ground.**

GINA

Chef Xavier, it is nothing against you. You are my teacher and I feel that it would be inappropriate for you to do that. I have a boyfriend, after all and you have your wife.

**CHEF XAVIER**

(Becoming chaotic and irrational)
I could build you up to this and then I can break you down.
Throwing everything on the counter to the ground.

GINA
(Bending down to pick things up)
Chef Xavier, what are you doing?!

Not hearing GINA or seeing her below, knocks over a giant metal pot of bowling potatoes off the stove along with the utensils beside it.

GINA
(Screams)

Lights dim. GINA and CHEF XAVIER Exit the stage. GINA changes back into earlier clothing and reenters the stage. All lights on GINA. CAROLINE enters in the background.

GINA
(Talking to the audience)
I shouldn’t have bent down. I should have gone and got help. I should have never looked up to try and stop him. I was rushed to the hospital soon afterwards. I never got the recognition I deserved and Chef Xavier was never seen again. At least I have never seen him.

CAROLINE
Mom? Are you there? Hello?

Entire stage lights up to find CAROLINE in the same place in the beginning of the play.

GINA
Yes, honey, I am sorry. I was just thinking.

CAROLINE
I think you need some rest, mom. I will cut the onions perfectly and describe every single detail of how they look to you as soon as you wake up. Let me grab your cane and I will help you to the bedroom.

Both characters exit the stage. Lights turn off. END
A few days before moving to Florida with his girlfriend and new daughter, one of my managers showed me a fryer basket-patterned burn on his arm. It was bright red, blistered, and swollen. Its straight horizontal lines weren’t going to fade.

“Just a little something to remember this place by,” he said, “just the going away present I wanted. Hey, Meg. Come here and let me give you one, too. So we can match.”

I backed away, faking fear as he pretended to reach for a hot fryer basket. “I’d rather not remember this place,” I told him, thinking that I would want to shed all memory of this job as soon as I could. Working for a fast food corporation with a bad reputation is hard enough. Let alone, working for a location in a busy shopping center in an area with chronic overcast weather, a high rate of depression, and a population abandoned by abusive businesses that poisoned the land and shipped jobs overseas. For these reasons, the people in the area are especially miserable and see my red and black uniform as an invitation to treat me as badly as they feel. On top of tackling the surprisingly challenging tasks I had to complete, dealing with the poor management, and working long hours (the longest shift I had was fifteen hours) in hot, greasy conditions, I continually had my days ruined by grown adults’ tantrums over simple mistakes or delays that were usually out of my control.

“I’m sorry, sir, I can take this back and fix it for you right away.”

“Don’t fucking call me ‘sir.’ I just want my damn money back. Can’t you do anything right?” Just smile. The man continued his outburst as I stood there, trying to ignore his harsh words and smiling. I walked away when he was done. It was the end of a ten hour shift in the burning heat of July. I had been standing over hot grills all day with no air conditioning or fans. Our crew was struggling to keep up with the long lines and complicated orders, probably because we were all quickly becoming dehydrated. Many other customers had been rude that day, but this man was particularly rotten, sitting in his clunky car next to his pregnant girlfriend, a lit cigarette bouncing between his lips as he yelled at me. He made me cry in the back of the restaurant for five minutes. All of this because someone- not even me- handed him a fish sandwich with tartar sauce on it.

There’s a manager at our store who seems way too happy for
someone who has had this job for over five years. Every day, she comes in
and greets each of the crew individually with a smile.

“Okay, y’all. We gon’ have a great day!” We would roll our eyes at
her.

“It’s never a good day at this job, Chee-Chee,” was our usual
response, even though we knew that because she was there, it would be a
better day than usual. It was hard for us to understand how she stayed so
positive, but I admired her for it. I think she knew better than the rest of
us that nothing any of the customers said was personal. And even when
it seemed every customer was ready to jump over the counter and knock
our teeth out, she would focus on the positive experiences: the customers
that let their small children order for themselves, and while they told you
what they wanted in their kids’ meal, they would bounce around in front
of your register so excitedly that you couldn’t help but grin.

“Did you see that adorable little angel?”

“Guys, look! This guy has a cute dog at the window!”

“Don’t pay him no mind, sweetie darlin’, he’s probably just so
hungry he’s grumpy.” These small things she reminded me of kept me
from walking out on my job every day.

There’s a lot to learn at this fast food restaurant. I learned it all
very quickly. I know how to clean, fix, and maintain all of the equipment
in the store, how to place ads, how to cook, assemble, and inspect all
food items, how to take orders and money, how to solve issues with the
computerized registers, how to set up a shift plan, how to manage a shift,
and how to deal with any customer complaint. As much of a pain all of
these tasks are, and as much as my managers overwork me because I am
one of the only people with so many abilities, mastering all there is to
know in a job is extremely rewarding. My job isn’t fun, easy, glamorous,
or well-paying, but I excelled at it.

“You’re so good,” my coworkers joke, “that you’re the only Crew
Member of the Month ever.” I was chosen in January of this year, and the
only person for whom the management remembered to make a hanging
nameplate the whole year.

The second to last day before returning to college this summer,
I burned myself with a fryer basket. I guess that’s how this company
makes sure you never forget them; it seems to happen to almost
everyone who thinks about quitting. I have a permanent physical scar
on my left forearm to remind me of the days I’d come home smelling
of grease and sweat and stale beef. A brand to mark me as one of those
underappreciated people who wake up at four in the morning to make a
miserable soccer mom her egg and ham sandwich and “fresh” coffee with
two creams and two Splendas “no more, no less” with a smile. A physical
manifestation of the hard work I put into a job that nobody else seems to take seriously. Truth be told, I don’t need the scar to remind me. I couldn’t forget this job if I wanted to.
Open Lights
Marissa Miksad
Lights up on stage. Two men/women, referred to only as L and R, stand in front of a giant control board. They keep glancing up looking towards the audience as if there is supposed to be a monitor where they are looking. They talk extremely fast to each other.

L
Heart?

R
Still beating like a champ.

L
Lungs?

R
Slower than usual, but still pushing on.

L
Liver?

R
They’re working overtime tonight. Everything should be clear by approximately 5:57 A.M.

L
Wait woah, what’s going on in the penis?

R
Standard boner, nothing to worry about.

L
And how is the brain doing?

Both stare at each other for a brief moment before laughing to themselves.

L
Okay, everything’s looking great and in standard order. Grant’s got
approximately 5 minutes before he wakes up, so we got time for one more dream. Is the next one ready to go?

*R reaches down and lifts up a thin metal sheet.*

R

Dream File: Ask Brittany to Prom and She Says Yes is locked and loaded sir.

L

That one again? Really R? I don’t even get why you made it, Brittany rejected him in front of everyone.

R

Hey, tonight was my night to pick. And some of us like to rewrite some events for fun, dreams don’t need to be about sex and violence.

L

Yes, but it’d be nice to see something new every once in a while. I think you just hate making new ones because you’re lazy. Ready to launch?

R

Ready.

L

3…2…1!

*L reaches down onto the machine and pulls out a thin sheet of metal. R grabs the dream file he was holding and places it down. Both L and R then press the red buttons on the machine and hold it for a few seconds before letting go.*

R

Ugh, I wish the day crew would bring us something new to use. And where are they anyway, they should be here by now.

L

Don’t worry, those guys always run a little late. And what do ya mean “something new to use”?

R

What I mean is they don’t tell this guy to do anything. All they make
Grant ever do is lie on his back while watching reruns of Seinfeld. He orders all of his meals to be delivered to his door so he never has to leave the apartment, then he drinks himself to sleep. That’s boring. If I wanna make fun dreams for him, I need some kinda inspiration for him.

L
Not necessarily, dreams don’t need to be rooted in reality.

R
Oh yeah, trust me I know Mr. (Mrs.) I Made Grant Ride a Unicorn to the Pentagon to Save America From the Terrorists.

L
Oh come on! Just as I was leaving I saw him writing that down as soon as he woke up! He loved it!

R
Speaking of waking up, where’s the day crew? They’re never this late.

L
I don’t know, but they have like three minutes. They’ll get here.

R
They better. So what are you doing after the shift?

L
Well first I’m gonna rest and then I think I’m gonna write another dream where Grant goes to save a princess from a dragon. He travels all the way there, but when he gets there he already sees a knight in shining armor trying to save her, so he kills him with an ax! Oh, and then he fucks the shit out of the princess.

R
Can at least one of your dreams be like…normal?

L
Sure if I wanted it to be lame!

R
Sure, cuz writing dreams that he could actually do and use as inspiration is lame.
L
To each their own I guess. So what are you doing after work, just gonna sleep the day away until your next shift?

R
Naw, I was thinking about going back to the Cognitive Thinking Department. Those guys are always so busy and I love watching them work.

L
Oh hey, I’ve been meaning to ask you: what’s been the big commotion over there recently?

R
Turns out one of Grant’s friends told him there’s more than 5 senses and he is freaking the fuck out about it.

L
Gotcha. So wait, are you going over there just to hang out and watch or… are you thinking about transferring?!

R
Oh relax L, you know I would never leave you! We work so well together! It’s just sometimes listening to them yell and debate can be calming.

L
Hey R?
R turns to face L

R
Yeah?

L
If you wanna go, go. I’m not gonna stop you fr-

*L and R immediately begin to sway and shake and if there is an earthquake on stage.*

R
What the hell was that?!
L
Shit, Grant woke up a minute early! What do we do, the day crew isn’t here yet!

R
Looks like it’s up to us to take care of Grant today! You go find the day crew, I’ll stay here and make sure things don’t get worse.

L
You sure?

R
Of course I’m sure!

*L runs off stage left. R reaches over and grabs a throttle.*

Besides…today looks like a great day to go outside.

*END OF PLAY*
TWO weeks after the murder, silver handcuffs were placed around the wrists of Dr. Hoyt. They were too tight, a move that delighted Detective Maloney as he looked the doctor in the eye.

“I bet they’ll love you in prison, especially after they hear what you did to that girl. Pervert,” he said, while pushing Dr. Hoyt into the back of the police car.

ONE day after the murder, a black trash bag washed up on Cunningham Beach. A jogger on her morning run noticed the black obscenity and scoffed in disgust. It was not until she made her way back toward her car, passing the bag a second time, that she noticed a pale arm peeking through the poorly fastened strings at the top of the bag. She didn’t believe it at first, but upon a closer look, she confirmed that it was an arm. She immediately called the police.

When Detective Maloney arrived on the scene and interviewed the jogger, she was crying and her mascara was running down her face – who wore makeup during a workout?

“How am I going to get through this?” she asked.

Detective Maloney walked over to the black bag, pulling the sterile gloves over his hands and pulled the side over to observe the girl crumpled inside.

Her eyes were open, a clouded blue with petechial hemorrhaging – she was strangled to death by the bungee cords that now lay in the bottom of the bag. She was young too, maybe fifteen or sixteen at the most. Detective Maloney grew ill thinking about what kind of person she could have been.

ONE day before the murder, Dr. Hoyt cried into his satin sheets, staining them with filthy tears undeserving of the soft comfort. He could not help his urges, even though he knew he was wrong.

He was reminded of his demons when his doorbell rang earlier that
night. It was the girl’s mother, Mrs. Mason, bringing by a payment for the last four sessions. She asked to use the restroom, entering his private sanctuary and making him shiver as he thought of the girl – they had the same eyes.

As Dr. Hoyt laid in his bed, he thought about the all the sessions to come and how he was going to suffer until she was gone.

Please God, give me strength.

FIVE days before the murder, Allison walked slowly out of her session, defeated yet again. Tears ran down her cheeks, a sign that showed her mother that she was making progress – a breakthrough. Her mother looked at Dr. Hoyt with eyes full of appreciation. She was thankful he was getting her daughter to move on.

At the beginning of Allison’s session, she sat in the chair that faced the ornate mahogany desk across the Oriental rug. She stared down at her hands, folded delicately in her lap, brushing her thumb across the birthmark on her left hand. She didn’t need to look up to know that the hunt had begun – she could hear the penny loafers scoff against the hardwood floor and then the light padding on the rug until they were in front of her.

He stroked her hair and lifted her chin to look her in the eyes.

SIX days before the murder, Mrs. Mason returned from the local grocer’s and emptied her bags onto the granite countertops. A sponge, bleach, Frosted Flakes, two boxes of extra-large, black trash bags, pasta, Alfredo sauce, and four bungee cords.

In the bedroom above, Allison pulled the duvet over her tired body. After another long day at school – the whispers and stares and the snickering behind her back plagued her – she tried to fall asleep using the sound of the murmuring rain pattering against her window.

It sounded like a hoard of bees.
Forget-Me-Not
Rebekah Tanner
Don’t Let One Bad Produce Item Spoil the Bunch!
Nicholas Capella

It’s inevitable; I will always find one moldy piece of fruit or rotten vegetable when restocking a display. You know immediately when one is present. The smell hits your nose as soon as you place the box that is housing the spoiled item on your cart. You’ll pick up the box/bag and the disgusting stench clings to your nose and paralyzes your sense of smell in that particular moment. If you asked me what my top three most unpleasant rotten items are, I would say (from bad to absolute worst):

Onions - they smell like an onion but much stronger and sting your nose. You know right away when you have yourself a spoiled one. In the netted bag that the onions tend to be packaged in, the other surrounding onions are wet and have taken on the scent of the spoiled item that lay hiding within the bunch. In a sick way, it’s like a game in which you have to find the rotten one but you don’t win anything and your hands smell like onions until you go home and wash away the sadness.

Tomatoes - as if tomatoes weren’t gross enough already, (excuse my bias opinion as tomatoes are the only food that, since I was child, do not sit well with me) when they are rotten, they are even worse. A rotten tomato is relatively easy to spot since tomatoes come in a one layer box that has no top, allowing you to catch the rotten one right away. Unfortunately, about 99.9% of the time, the tomato has transcended its solid state as a lovely, aesthetically pleasing red fruit/vegetable (depending on your beliefs) and succumbs to a liquefied, melted mess. It is undoubtedly revolting; the musky stench clings to your nostril and makes your stomach flip. Just try your best, hold your breath and put up those tomatoes that have been unaffected by the spoiled item on the display.

Potatoes - now again, this list is my opinion. You don’t have to work at a grocery store to experience a rotten fruit or vegetable so I’m sure that there are a few other people who might disagree with me but a spoiled potato is equivalent to garbage. Anything that someone would place in a garbage or dumpster shares the same smell as a rotten potato. They are the most dreaded spoiled item in my book and I know the very instant when I have one in my possession. First, the smell with hit you instantaneously. Potatoes come in plastic bags and eight of these bags are placed in a large paper bag. Now when you open the paper bag, the stench quickly strangles your sinuses. Your head pulls back and you fear for yourself (in some cases, eyes of the workers have rolled back into their
head then proceeded to collapse on the floor, but I have yet to see this happen). The other plastic bags take on the smell of the one containing the rotten potato even if it is without the plagued item. Finding the rotten potato game is even less fun (if at all) than the finding the spoiled onion game. There is nothing pleasant about this situation you are in. You finally come across the bag containing the rotten potato (whether this is a good or bad thing is up for debate). This is indicated by the wetness that has enveloped itself around the bag from the rotting, melted potato. The stench is creating figurative smog around your face, making it hard to breathe. The smell has caused you to hallucinate and you are now under the impression that you are holding a bag of roadkill and not potatoes. Our department states that you open the bag and empty out the potatoes that are not rotten and do away with the spoiled one. I say, “fuck it” and throw that bag right in the dumpster.

Luckily, I do not come across these horrific manifestations that were once edible as much as I do the less grotesque but still ghastly, rotten lemons and limes. Lemons in particular. I never fail to find at least one bad item with these two fruits. Lemons are packed in a box with three layers of about 20 lemons on each. If you’re lucky, it’ll be on the top and you can’t miss it. Its unnatural white with a greenish tint is rather striking, and the overly sour smell brings tears to your eyes as it charges through your sinuses. In some unfortunate cases when the plagued fruit is positioned on the bottom layer, the lemon will have been rotted out completely and leak itself on the bottom of the box. This is disgusting and myself and other produce employees selfishly avoid touching the box and leave it for some other ill-fated soul. Being that this is such a reoccurring theme with this fruit I took note of it fairly quickly. “Why are there always bad lemons/limes in the boxes?” I curiously wondered to myself. Further investigation revealed to me that a lemon is so acidic that it will actually make itself go bad. The juices within the fruit spoil the lemon which why the rotten lemon’s presence is so apparent in the life of a produce employee.

Limes are not as horrendous of a sight, but are similar in the way in which they can become spoiled. I once had a box of limes that I was about to dump into the mixture of our citrus table in the department. Immediately, I noticed a lime that looked as if it was covered in a green powder. I picked it out of the box and on my hands, the green powder. The lime was pruned and looked as though it was completely dried and sapped of life. The lime had in fact dried itself out because similarly to the lemon, it is so acidic that it can actually dry itself out. Unlike the lemon however, a rotten lime is much easier to deal with and for that reason is more preferred.
Years Eight through Ten
Jordan Dedrick

Oompa’s sleepwalking is what sealed our fate as the weird family.

Being picked up in three different locations – the red house on the hill, so steep the bus ached and wheezed trying to reach us,

Großvater’s house with soap hanging from the trees like Christmas ornaments, but we were Jewish

Or the Funeral home with the hearse that had a flat tire, parked in front heroically –

Starting a new school was hard enough, the blow was softened by Charlie (we are going on fourteen years of friendship)

Having two sets of holidays because the parents didn’t work out or get along

No. My destiny was sealed when I became the girl with the crazy grandpa, spewing out Yiddish insults and killing Nazis in his pajamas.
Vogue Cover
Andrew Golembiewski
The Problem with Drowning
Jennifer Woodruff

The stage is simple: a cardboard sun hangs from above stage left, and separated from stage right by a string of pool buoys in center stage. HARRY and SYLVIA are on one side, and ALEX is on the other.

ALEX sits in the middle of the stage, just under a string of pool buoys. He is wearing pool goggles, a swim-cap, and a child’s pair of floaties on his arms. He speaks with a child-like voice.

ALEX
(calm)
Help.

ALEX’s brother HARRY appears with SYLVIA on stage left. They are wearing swimsuits and flirting with each other.

HARRY
I can lift about 250.

SYLVIA
Wow, you must be really strong.

From beneath the string of buoys, ALEX looks over at HARRY and SYLVIA, raises one hand over his head, and holds his nose with the other. When he speaks, neither HARRY nor SYLVIA pay any attention to him.

ALEX
That’s not true, Sylvia.

HARRY
Yep, I’ve been lifting for a few years now. What with football and hockey being so labor-intensive.

SYLVIA
You play football and hockey?
NOPE!

Yeah. I play quarterback.

You must be really talented. What position do you play in hockey?

Harry doesn’t play hockey. He can’t even swim.

Oh, hockey. Uh, I play… left center fielder?

Ha, ha. You don’t sound so sure about that.

Well, I’m sort of –

LYING!

All over the field? Like, you’re the only one who can actually play the game? You’re the only one who can save –

ME? SAVE ME?

The day.

I do what I can. I’ve been teaching my little brother how to toss the old pigskin around.

That’s sweet.

*ALEX raises his hand as far above him as it can go. He gasps for air.*
ALEX
More like I’ve been teaching him.

HARRY
He’s the younger brother, so it’s like I’m preparing him –

ALEX
FOR DEATH. YOU’RE PREPARING ME FOR DEATH.

HARRY
For life. You know?

SYLVIA
I get it. Say… didn’t you come here with him?

ALEX
YES, SYLVIA. YES, HE DID.

HARRY
Hmm… He must be at the snack bar. I gave him five bucks earlier.

SYLVIA
That was so nice of you!

ALEX
No, that was two hours ago.

SYLVIA
I want to meet him. Let’s go see if we can find him.

HARRY
Oh… okay!

SYLVIA takes HARRY’s arm, and they walk offstage as the lights go out on stage left. ALEX watches them as they go, and lowers his hands. He looks at the audience as he speaks.

ALEX
And then I was saved. No, I wasn’t at the snack bar. I was underwater for about three minutes as my brother flirted with Sylvia, and left me to be saved by some clown with an inflatable crab. Was it the ideal rescue? No, but at least –
An inflatable crab is thrown at ALEX from stage right, and hits him.

ALEX
At least, this was the only crab I had to deal with the next day.

The stage lights go out. The play ends.
We’re nice people.