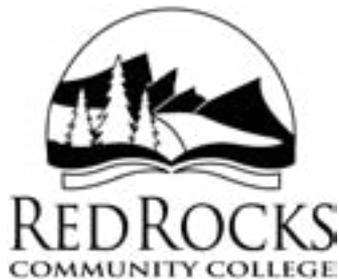


Obscura

Issue Nine



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..... Lauren A. Smith
..... Blake Cory
..... Justin Carbone

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..... Kevin Peterson
..... Claire Young

Obscura began its journey into the literary world in 2004 thanks to English faculty Amy Braziller and Paul Gallagher. In the beginning, it was a small student club that made its decisions from a coffee shop. *Obscura* grew from a student club to an actual class in 2008. Now the class is responsible for publishing the entire journal.

Obscura is one of the few student-run art and literary magazines in the country published by a community college. Not only is it published by students, its contents are the creation of the student body. Pieces can be submitted to ***RRCCObscura@gmail.com*** at any time for consideration in the annual Spring issue. The magazine staff accepts fiction and creative nonfiction up to 5000 words, poetry up to two pages in length, and art in all media (pdf format). Students can submit up to three pieces per issue.

For more information, please go to <http://www.rrcc.edu/obscura>

Thank you for reading, and enjoy!



A collection of handwritten signatures in black ink, arranged in a circular pattern. The signatures are: Kevin Peterson, Claire Young, Blake Cory, Justin Carbone, Lauren A. Smith, and Mike Mendez. The signatures are written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Contributors Notes

Sandra Abel is currently in her eighth fun-filled semester at Red Rocks. The classic lifetime student, she also has formal training as a chef and massage therapist and is finally pursuing her childhood dream of being an eccentric artistic type. Recently graduated with both digital photography and graphic design degrees, she is a little sad to leave, but also incredibly excited to complete her BFA in interior design at Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design. **[Room to Grow]**

Thom Adorney is a former teacher now studying photography at RRCC. He describes his process as “observing the unobserved,” aspiring to capture beauty that might be otherwise overlooked. **[Airport Origami]**

Marzouq Algenai was born in Kuwait in 1954. He retired in 2008 after 35 years as an Air Force pilot. In 2010 he enrolled at Red Rocks Community College, pursuing his Associate of Arts. He mainly paints and draws landscape. Marzouq enjoys hiking, playing golf, and reading. **[Bear Creek Trail]**

Spencer Bates is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College. **[Bubble Man]**

Mary Schaefer Brink has almost completed her Associates in Elementary Education at RRCC. Her goal is to teach art classes part-time while remaining a free-lance artist. She would also love to run a gallery and a bunch of other stuff! Mary has always used art as a way to focus her energy and communicate from the inside out. She has been exposed to and educated by a mixture of Denver based art studios, graffiti artists, and by children who have taught her the freedom within the imagination. **[A Child’s Imagination, Afro Man, Hunter’s Garden]**

Dan Ciobanu aspires to be a literary mixologist. He experiments with Deviant Vodka and Dry Wit Vermouth. Dan adds edgy ice cubes of inspiration and blends them with subtle style. He strains out insipid utterances and pours his flowing story into a cool martini glass. Dan drops in an oddball olive and adds a tangy, twisted ending, therein completing his deranged tale cocktail: the Derangester Martini. “Sip and enjoy ... one word at a time.” **[Letter Down]**

Daryl Colburn is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College. **[Ambrosial Purgatory]**

Blake Cory will soon be graduating with his Associate of Arts with an emphasis on creative writing. He currently works for the e-sports team Evil Geniuses as a web content producer/writer for their Fighting Game division. **[Death of a Beautiful Woman, Rock Bottom]**

Chris Gillock is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College. **[The Final Heartbeat]**

Scott Ludgin is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College. **[Boulder Falls]**

Jesse Miller is currently a student at Red Rocks Community College. **[A Fowl Aubade]**

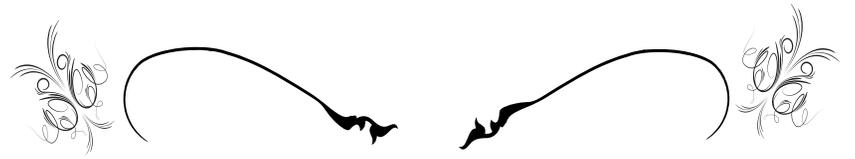
Tori Osendorf is a Video Production and Creative Writing student, pursuing Associates degrees in both fields. She spends her time fostering her insatiable hunger for stories, told in all mediums (books, news reports, magazines, video games, movies and movie scripts, music and oral communication, etc.). She aspires to travel and work abroad using videography, and hopes to one day make a movie and publish a book. **[What I Did, The War Jacket]**

Katrina Pawlowski has spent her time at Red Rocks Community College in various writing programs under great instructors, working alongside other writers to strengthen her craft. She is pleased to be published alongside other talented students in this 2012 edition of *Obscura*. Kat hopes to continue entertaining others through upcoming works in a variety of other written mediums in the future. **[Experiment]**

Kevin Peterson is currently on the road to an Associate of Arts with a Creative Writing emphasis. In his free time he enjoys writing poems about girls, drawing pictures of cute things (like cats or penguins), and taking pictures of cake. He is very good at distracting others and very bad at finishing sentences. He somehow manages to have friends. **[Boxcar, (Hi), I wanted to go for a hike...]**

The ever-eccentric **L.A. Smith** is a word-nerd with a fiction addiction, consummate cloud collector, and a fledgling writer-poet who is utterly thrilled to be published for the first time. An eclectic student of divided interests, she has pursued business, psychology and English in search of the perfect degree but is, as of yet, happily undecided. Influenced by Nabokov, Gaiman, and Flaubert, she views figurative language as the most powerful tool in a writer’s repertoire. **[Descartes, Winter’s Welcome, Humanity]**

Claire Young is currently finishing her last semester towards an Associate Degree in General Studies at RRCC. She hopes to continue her education at Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara, California by earning a Bachelor’s Degree with a major in Photojournalism. Claire enjoys traveling, hiking, and taking photographs everywhere she goes. **[Glencar, “Bird Font”]**



*P*oetry 



(Hi)
Kevin Peterson

Your heart is racing.
Out of control.
Or, wait?
Is that mine?

A kiss
so forceful my head hits the door –
Ow!
Keys in the lock.
Almost.
Hands shaking.

Hormones raging.
Clothing furiously removed.
Skirt slides to the floor.
Did you just break my pants?

Struggling to keep up.
Delays.
Opens from the front? Since when?
Oh! I see.
That is helpful.

Hands
guiding
down
to
soft,
matching?
Lace?
Pink?
Black?
Nothing?
Oh!
Nothing!
(When did you take them off?)

Warm.
Every part of you is warm.
Your skin is on fire
and
it's not just me this time.

Here. No? Where?
Are you sure?
Here? Now?
Almost.
Hands shaking.
There!

Oh.
(Pain! Are you ok?)
Really it's supposed to...?
Sensations.
Breathing.
Beautiful.

Your eyes...

so focused...

(Hi.)
“Shhh...”

Descartes

Lauren A. Smith

[Absent sleep's tears stain the page whose words tell the truth of the proof of my existence, though not of any other's...]

To think is the key, and likewise to be.

Of many false prophets I have read,

Some living, the majority dead.

Yet it is for the spanse of this mind alone,

That my passions and interests have grown.

I think, therefore I am.

He thought, therefore he was.

But proof of the latter to have? One never does.

Whether he was he or simply another me,

His words brought one certain truth to philosophy:

“I am, I exist.” I am, I think,

But what I am, is the missing link.

Rock-Bottom

Blake Cory

“I’m leaving for good,” because I took twelve steps back again, and now my only fix is in this can

of beer. This wasn’t supposed to happen, and yet there you go right through the door, leaving me with my shooter

of whiskey. It burns the throat and blurs the mind, these memories of you. My overflowing glass

of regrets spills from bleary eyes onto our – my kitchen table. I grab a tissue to clean it up, and while I’m up, a shot

of tequila to fill it up. My 80-proof friend José and I gaze at your favorite picture of you and I. Further down this empty bottle

I dive, and I find myself swimming in it, drowning myself in an ocean of drink. Drunk, I waltz, soldier

in hand, down the hall. My fingers trail the walls, hurling hanging memories, tumbling, shattering. Bottle nearly empty, my world is abuzz, afloat. I suckle at artificial ambrosia’s final drops, and I nurse this bottle

as much as it nurses me. Another night alone, wasted, looking at the end of my world through the bottom of a bottle.

A Fowl Abaude

Jesse Miller

Sharp knives and pointy forks,
 these by the hundreds I would face for you,
 simply to feel the caress of your beak upon scruffy neck
 for a single, glorious, second more.

By the remembrance of your feathers against mine
 will I be sustained at sight of the headsman's ax.
 Sounds of your joyfully melodious squawking
 shall linger as his blade slides through my flesh.

With the cessation of my flailing, they will ravage my body,
 yet your elegant tail-feathers shall consume my thoughts.
 When searing heat slow-roasts my hairless physique,
 the thought of your floppy red wattle will comfort me.

Cool three-pronged sterling skewers lightly browned flesh,
 serrated edges slice into my basted essence,
 digestive juices corrode mangled corpuscles,
 last memories come, you invade final thoughts,
 as my soul fades away.

What I Did

Tori Osendorf

What I did
 What I did was trip him
 He tripped and fell backwards, into a ravine
 His back snapped and angled, but he was still alive
 He was still alive, so I had to finish him
 I had to finish him, so no one would know what I did
 What I did

What I did was throw two knives
 Two hunting knives down at him
 He writhed around, so one missed but the other hit
 The other hit, but he was still alive
 He was still alive, but no one could know what I did
 What I did

What I did was dump water on his face
 The water smacked him as I tried to drown him
 He gurgle-screamed and flailed, and he couldn't move
 No, he couldn't move, but he was still breathing
 The breathing had to end so no one would know what I did
 What I did

What I did was push a boulder
 The boulder tottered above where he lay shrieking
 Shriell, limb-tearing shrieks, he begged me not to
 Begged me not to, but I had to
 Yes, I had to, and I got away with what I did
 What I did

Death of a Beautiful Woman

Blake Cory

“Nevermore!” cries the cruel, malevolent, black-winged beast.
The haunting howl shadows my sorrow for poor, lost, lovely Lenore,
Unceremoniously stripped from my enraptured embrace, and I,
Left with naught but the pursuit of ancient lores, have receded into
madness.

The howl – that haunting howl! – agitates my guilt for my wife’s
butchery.

Pluto’s fault, truly. She – a witch in feline’s form – has tricked me,
Left me with naught but the pursuit of averting lockup! Ligeia’s
brained body now

Hidden in the walls, and surely Detective Dupin will be none the
wiser.

Her eye’s fault, truly! The vulture’s eye perched in woman’s skull
did vex me.

The damnable eye did agitate my acute senses, forcing my steadfast
hand.

Hidden beneath the floorboards, surely Detective Dupin will be none
the wiser to

The beating of my beloved Morella’s heart, ever-present, ever-
pounding.

The damning evidence does palpitate my blood! Forcing my quiver-
ing hand

to my brow, I dab at beadlets of perspiration. Detective Dupin must
hear

The beating of my own heart, ever-present, ever-pounding, betraying
My wicked transgression, and the look in his eyes says he knows. I
sink

To my knees, and stab a sweat-drenched finger towards Detective
Dupin’s chair,

Under which lies her still-beating heart. He tears the floorboards
back to discover

My wicked transgression. The look in his eyes says he knew. I sink
Into the back of a vehicle and the recesses of my mind, bound for
Maison de Santé.

Under the witch’s lies, her still beating heart rips at the fabric of my
mind. I discover

A memory of my sweet Ligeia. She, studious of Dark Arts, imparted
information unto me...

Further into the darkness of my memories, bound for a raison d’être!
And I see her spectre before me now, wailing that death is an illu-
sion of the weak-willed.

The memory of my sweet Morella, one and only wife, imparts this
infinite wisdom.

It takes me wholly, jarring my sense of life and death – naught but
an illusion!

And I see her spectre before me now, declaring that she will rise
again.



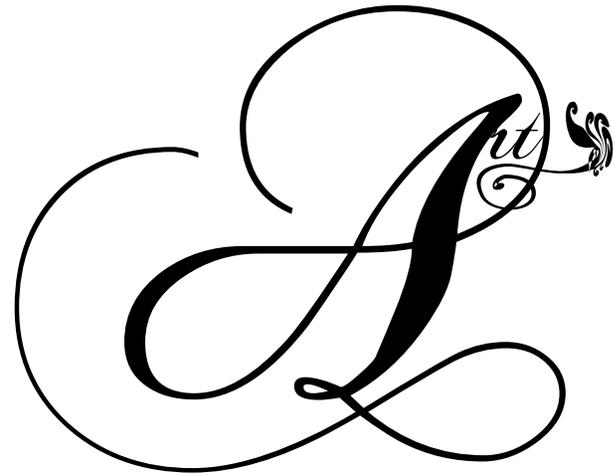
Black figures amass outside the vehicle, and I ask of them “What use, these cuffs?”

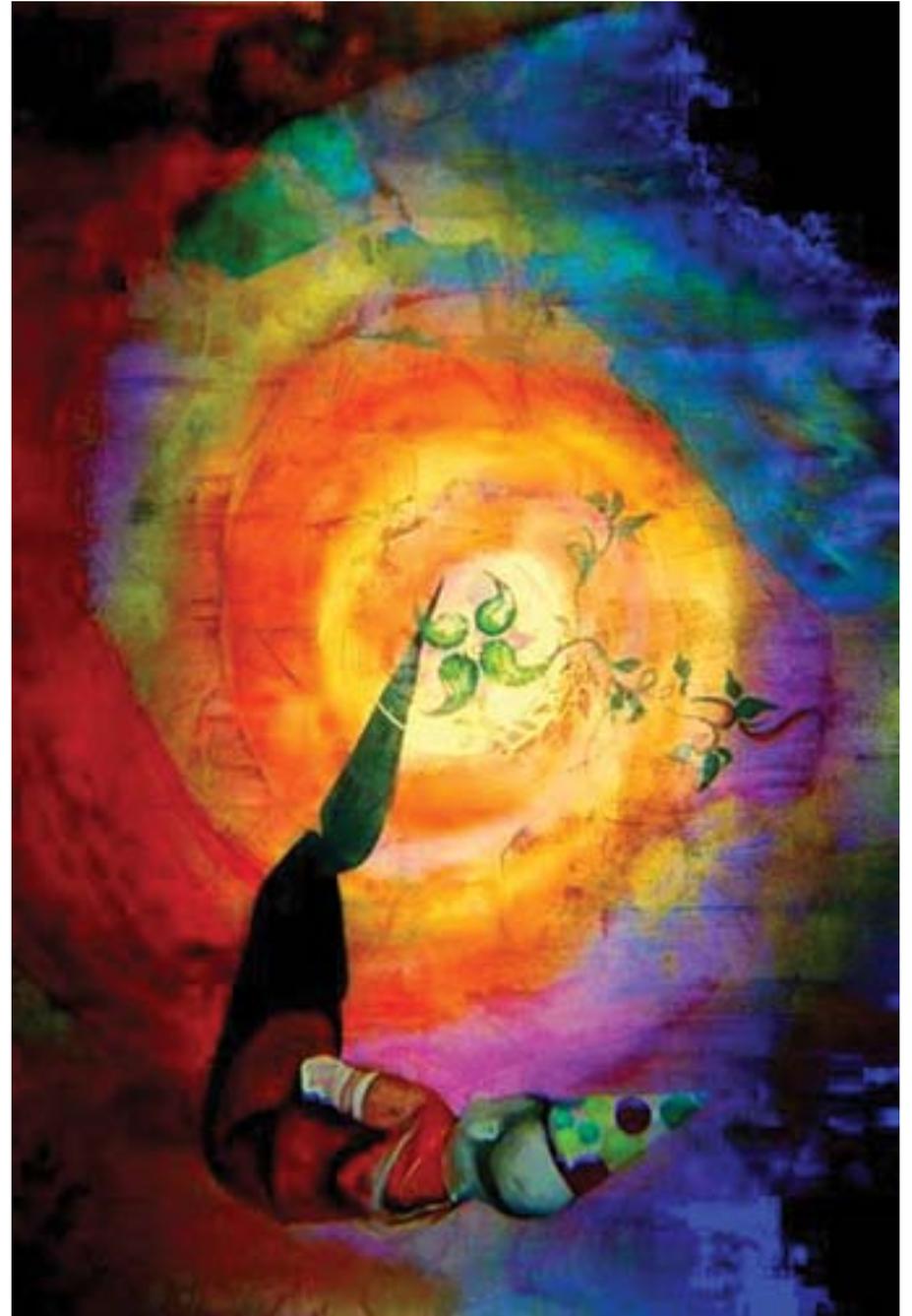
They take me roughly, jarring my senses. Maison de Santé’s walls naught but an illusion to me,

I am unceremoniously ripped from this enraptured incubus, and I laugh heartily.

A black creature perches upon my cell window, and I ask of it, “When will I see my love again?”

“Nevermore!” cries the cruel, malevolent, black-winged beast.



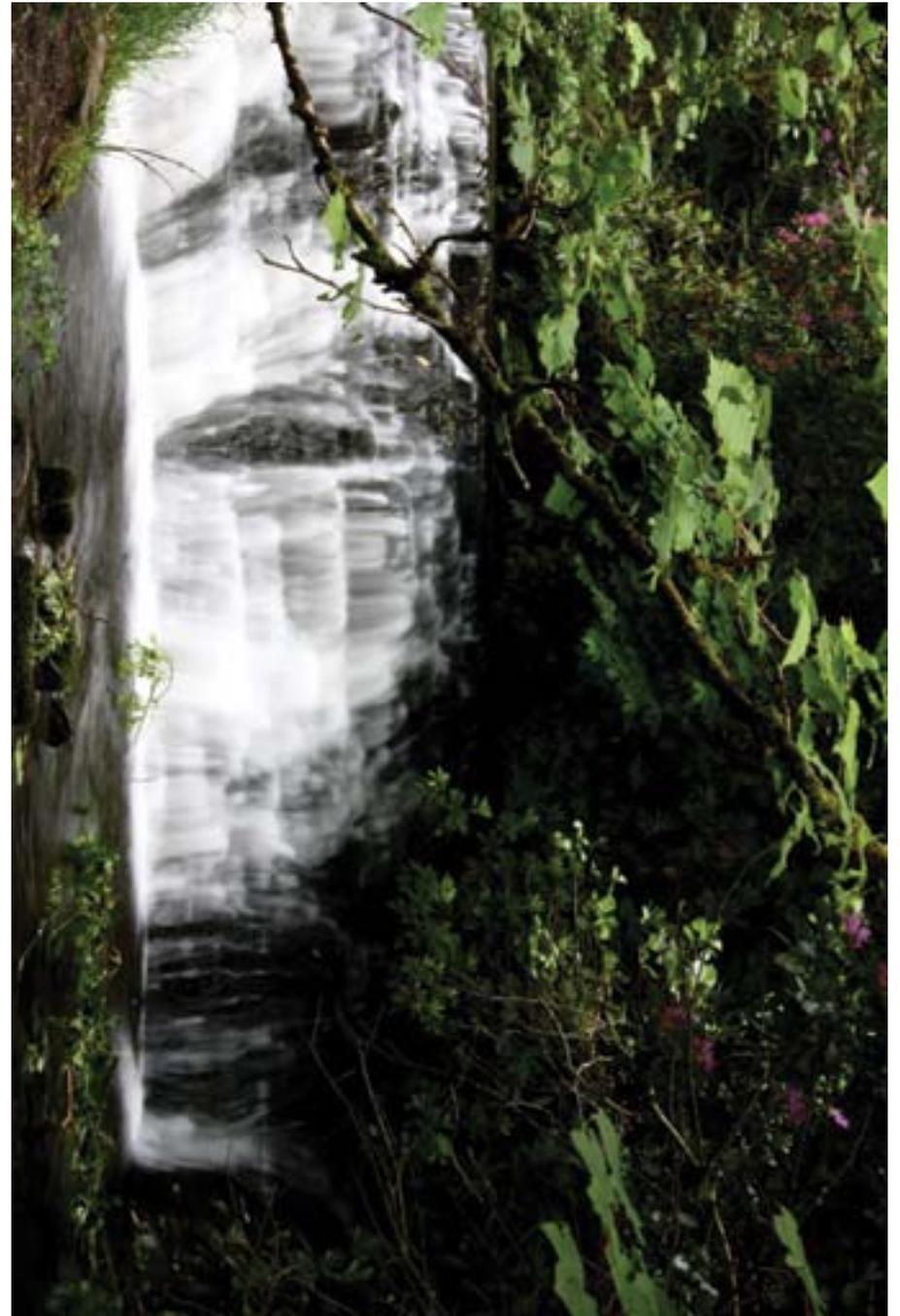


I wanted to go on a hike but it snowed and was really beautiful so I took a picture- Kevin Peterson



Glen Car - Claire Young

art





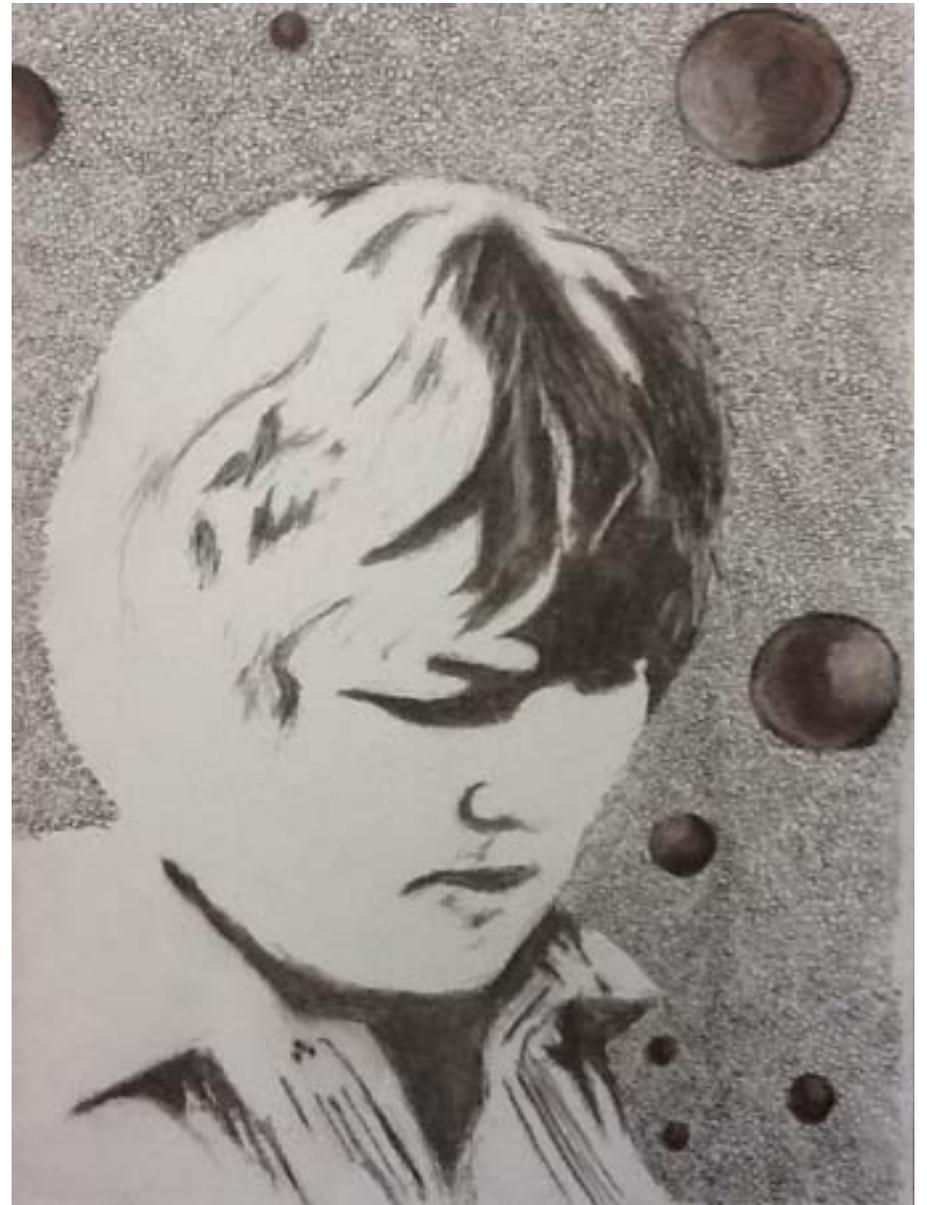
Airport Origami - Thom Adorney

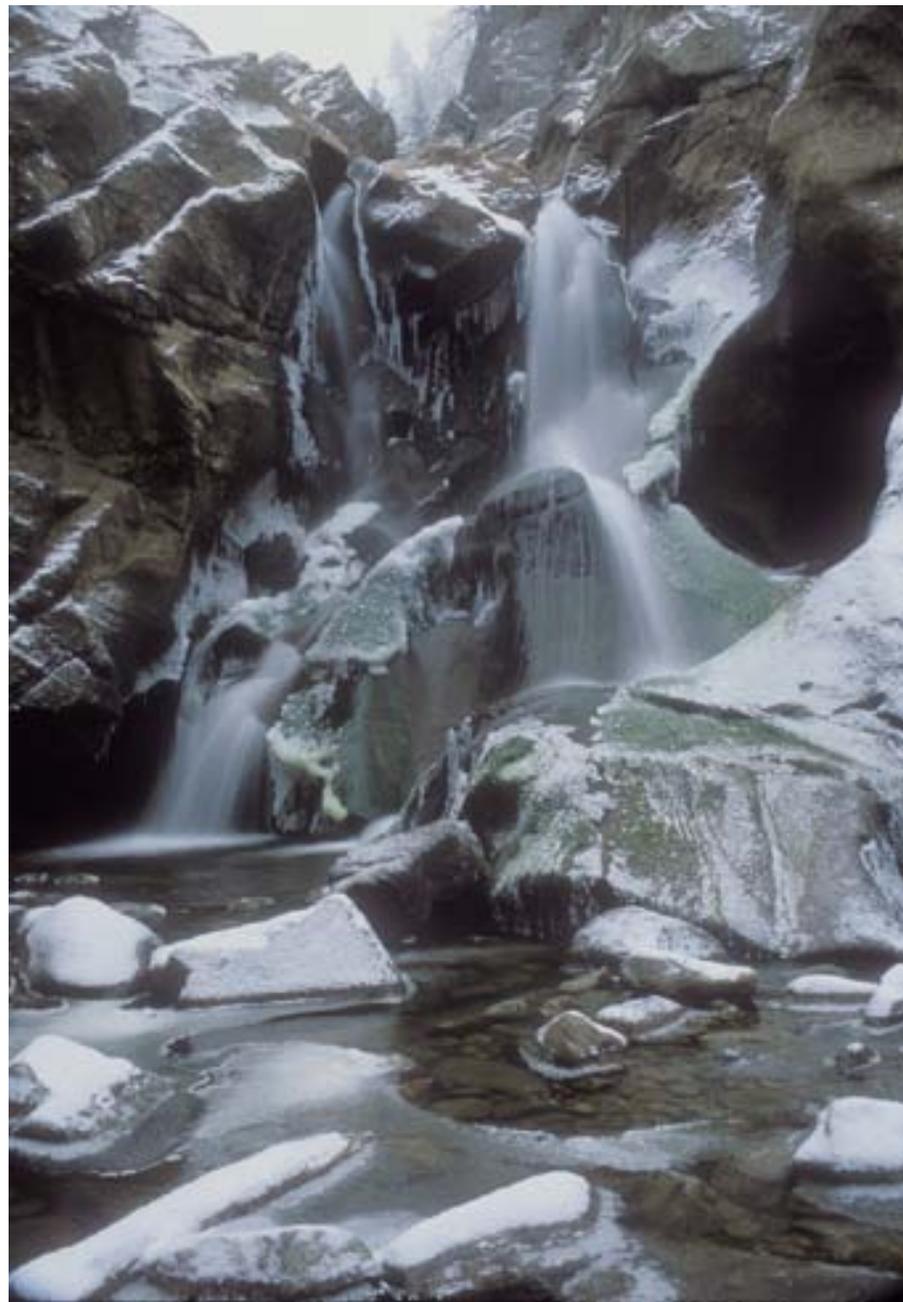
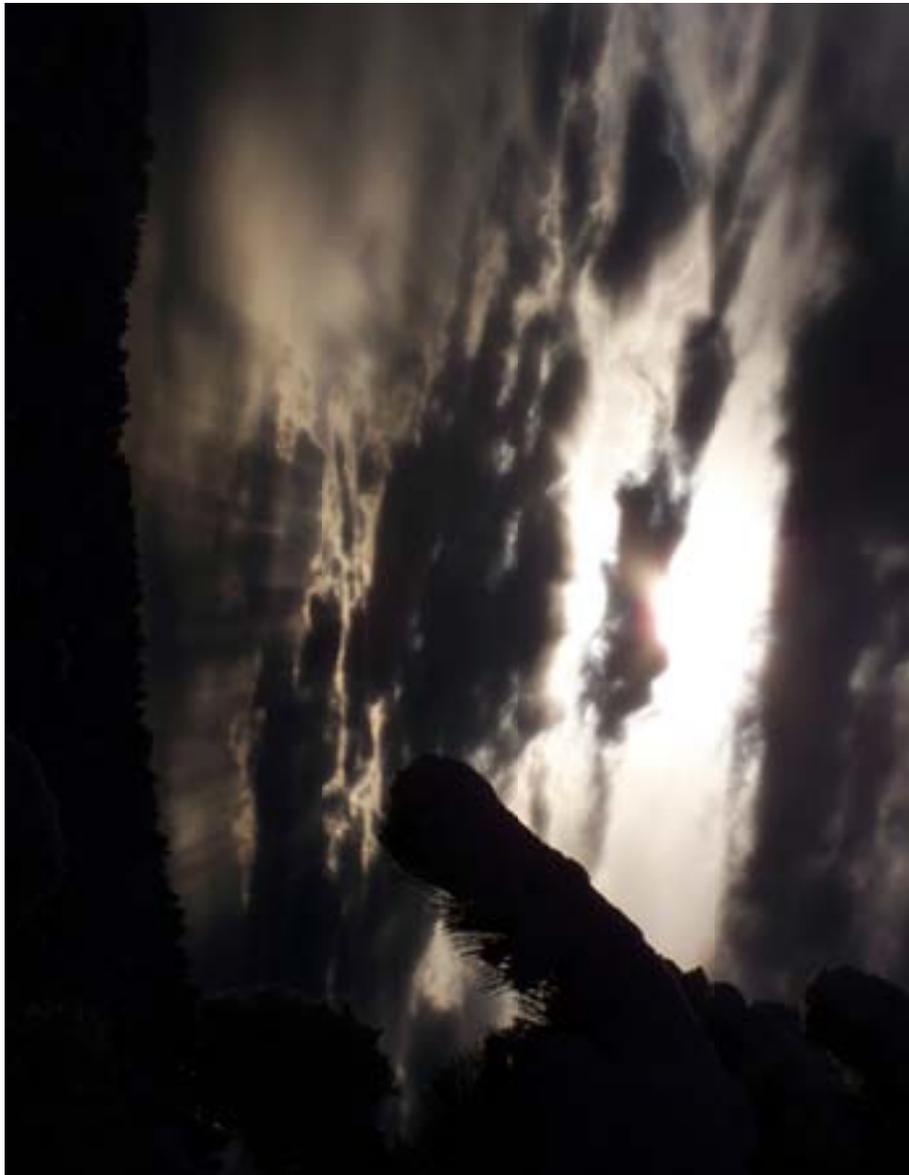


“Bird Font” - Claire Young

art











rose



Humanity

Lauren A. Smith

More

You know, I can't say I'm fond of my reflection. Cast by malapropism, distorted by the light of miscommunication, it has ironically, been whittled down to a singular desire: Food. That's what people think when they hear my name, when they're admonished for holiday overindulgence, "Gluttony...that means you eat a lot, right?" Sometimes it's just so...exasperating. I'm more than that. I'm the definition of *more*, of *excess*; a want so strong it makes you say *need*. I am the mess the morning after, the vomit, congealed and crusty, splattered between the toilet and the tiles. I'm the M&Ms stuffed in your Beanie Babies at Fat Camp. The stubs of worthless wagers smoldering in your pockets, set ablaze by every loss that pushes you to pick again: another horse, another dog, another chance to break even or win big. I'm the tracks that race up veins beneath the long sleeves that conceal the price of your dependence. I am the compulsion of social networking, the repeated click of reflexive refreshing, the stalking of strangers. I glisten in the gravy that greases your chin, heedless of the nearby napkin. It's not enough until it's too much. Pleasures, passions, addictions, thrills. One more hit-shot-bite-game-bet-dance...C'mon...just one more... But that's the difference between me and Greed. You can keep going with Greed, but with me? You only last until you go too far.

Mine

It's all mine. Forever. I wanted it, I have it, and I'm keeping it. Who cares if you think I need it or not? It's mine and you can't have it. Really, it doesn't even matter what "it" is, only that I'll get it. I answer the cry of clinking coins, liberating jewels and wealth, ore and resources from foreign soil and far off lands. I am the Saint of Scrooges, unswayed by Christmas spirits. Call me selfish; call me miserly or stingy if you want. I'm Greed, pure and simple. I flash in the fangs of every lawyer and dare pregnant parents to pray for little doctors (already premed and practicing) in their wombs. I guided

Marie Antoinette to each designer dress, and in her empty treasury, my shouts joined the impoverished mob's mandate for blood. I'm the price tag that prompts five fingers to act, the bank account you never told him about. I am charity to combat taxes, a new car with the turn of every model year. I am the broken bones and body count that bolster the infamy of Black Friday in the hunt for holiday perfection. I'm not just the desire for luxury, I'm the corners cut to keep it: the watered down booze at the bar, the ten dollar bottle of water your dancing drives you to. I'm your car's new starter, installed when it was just a loose wire, the dollar-signed seconds that tick away the minutes of every consultation. You want me, but you can't have me because *I* have you.

Must Have

Don't lie, you want it too. You think about it every time that all-too-cheerful sunlight bounces off your neighbor's new car, blinding you with me, pushing everything you don't have into your head until the pressure forces that deluxe entertainment system to transform into the divine secret of happiness. Of contentment. It's okay, I see it too. I see the way she flaunts that new bust line with dresses designed for divas half her age. I see the wrinkles that vanished from his brow. Why can't *you* afford that much collagen? I am your fat rolls that seem redoubled next to Barbie's beautiful skeleton, the sports-car wind billowing through his full head of hair. Covetous, jealous, resentful. I am Envy, and me and my green eyes see you as clearly as you feel me. I am the tightly clenched corners of a cutting smile when the Jones give you a tour of the suburban palace they call "just a little summer home." I ride between the lines of every reflexive response to another's good news on your bad day. His new promotion, her devoted boyfriend, your cousin's well-behaved kids, your best friend's perfect skin. Why them? Why not you? They don't deserve it. There's obviously something wrong with them, right? There must be, to balance it all out; why don't you tell everyone

else about it? Make them see the monster, you don't have to say it to their face, just whisper it quietly. I'll keep watch over them...and you.

MmMm

That body. Those curves. What a smile! Did you smell her? I understand. They might call it a crime, but I'd gladly help you steal those sculpture abs. Don't worry, we'll get away on a glance. I love the chase, don't you? The drive, the pulse that quickens as I leer, predatory and primal. I am the pearls of sweat chasing fingertips down an arched back in the dark of a dingy hallway. My hand curls into every grazing grope on the dance floor, every pelvic brush-by that begets bought drinks or broken noses. I am the truth behind first sight, though love takes all the credit. Hairy-palmed and heedless of Heaven or Hell, those I inspire ache for satisfaction. Lecherous, perverted, horny, heathen. Why name me when you could *know* me? I am Lust, and I want to feel you. And your friends and your lover and your mother and your teacher and your high school crush. I am the need to touch just once, the guilty gaze that flees when caught like a little boy in a tree with his pants around his ankles. Every breath I take stutters, stalking with the desire...the desire for freedom of the flesh. I am the sudden search site that shields you from your roommate's unexpected entrance and question. He wouldn't understand your taste in porn. But I do.

Malice

He stole from you and now he's smiling in your face, laughing at your ignorance as you smile back. But you know the truth. You keep it deep down in the basement of your heart, cultivating its festering rot instead of saying anything. That's fine, you don't have to talk; just seethe and simmer until you bubble over, bursting with the

need to act. And you do, when we key his car together. She slept with him, with *your* best friend, on *your* couch, on the same stained cushions where you made your first child. Burn it. Drop the match and walk away. She wants him? Let her have him...along with whatever's left of the house. I am knuckles, broken and bruised, white before callous words pushed too far. I am the Porsche, beloved but sold by your ex-wife days after the finalization of the divorce that drove her settlement to demand it. Hate, rage, vengeance. I am Wrath, and I am the hell that they will pay. I am the blood that boils, the other side of a line crossed, the bittersweet smile turned upon a fallen foe. I am the Old Testament. I plot and I plan, punching joints and gouging eyes. Others will fear me if I am yours. I am what you want to do and *will* do because I. Am. Not. Thinking. Clearly.

Meh

I don't know why I'm doing this. I don't even feel like it. Does it really matter? C'mon, Mom, please don't make me get up...I was so comfortable...I *am* so comfortable. Do you want to join me? I guess you can, so long as I don't have to move. What's the point anyway? Who knows...who cares? I am the inspiration for the Clapper and hail remote controls as trusted friends. I am the vicarious life found through monitors and screens, and I fumble with excuses for truancy as I rub the sand from my eyes. I linger in the effort of every sigh expended at videos that fail to load within seconds. Don't they know that broadband has blessed us with a world without the need for the weary work of waiting? I...am...Sloth...and I am absent ambition. I am the chains that drag you back to sleep seconds after the alarm is silenced. I am the neglected "To Do" list on your day off, that perfect groove in your favorite chair that cradles you through hours of channel surfing. I am delegation when your co-worker didn't hear the boss give *you* the order. I am tasks abandoned after the first failed try...or half of one. I'm lazy, lethargic, and loved by you, even if only a little. And I...think I'll just stay here...

The War Jacket

Tori Osendorf

Me

The best for last. I know, I couldn't wait for me either. But I am too good for this. Maybe I'll quit and show them how worthless they are without me. You don't believe me? *Really?* Don't you know who my father is?! It doesn't matter; unlike me, you're readily replaced. Ego, arrogance, holier-than-thou. I am the apology that never comes because I cannot be swallowed, the bar brawl in front of the beauty. I am the brand names that tattoo my importance onto every public appearance. I am the surge of unity answering the insult before a war, for perfection is fragile and easily injured. Vainglory, shallow, narcissist. The royal we speaks of me. My status is the most important part of your day. I am the reason magazines frame your registers with the familiar faces of celebrities that give your monotonous life meaning. I am the magnet to every mirror, drawing her in to double-check that make-up mask. I am the model that never looks your way, the politician rewriting your laws. Everyone wants to be me, not that I blame them. But sometimes adoring me isn't enough, sometimes they have to sabotage me. It must be them, it's never *my* fault, for I have none; it's never *my* failure, for I can't. I am Pride, and I am better than you.

Mirror

You think you know us, and you're right. We walk with you in the light of life and whisper words of fear and regret when death's shadow looms. You echo our deeds in Sunday confessionals, and boast of our accomplishments to friendly crowds. We are the true muses of the arts and propel drama towards purpose. You cannot undo us, for past actions lie in permanence. Though shame and guilt measure the garb you have given us, we do not despair as you do, for even dressed in distaste, we are eternal as long as your line lives. The chosen of God or his sister Evolution, we separate you, our beloved parent, from the animals, for never has a beast borne children that it kept so close. Never has a beast known the bittersweet truth of its own reflection...

The white door with the blue pink and yellow butterflies opened, and a little girl of about six tiptoed into her bedroom. Her brown eyes were huge as she turned and placed the door back into its frame with a near-silent click. In her arms, she cradled a black jacket that was entirely too big to fit her properly. Careful not to let any part of it touch the floor, she scampered to her closet. Pausing briefly to pick up her small pink stepstool, she hooked the jacket onto a hanger. Her closet was not very full, it was laundry day, and there was plenty of space between her coats and dresses to hang the jacket. She put it against the wall, facing out, to at least hide it a little. It was huge compared to her clothing, floating from its hanger much longer and wider than anything that fit her six year old frame. She pushed a lock of sandy blonde hair behind her ear and smiled a sad, small smile.

She was never allowed to touch this jacket, much less anything else in her father's study when he had been alive. Since his recent death, her mother had grown protective of the study in such a way that bordered on dicey possessiveness. But on this particular day, after one of her now-habitual mourning sessions in his study, she had left the door unlocked. The girl had always liked this jacket, more than any of the other jackets in his study, because this one was one of a kind. Her father didn't have another one even similar to it, this long leather trench coat, with its red band with the black lines on the left arm, and the silver bird pin on the front. So she took it. When she had asked her father about it in the past, he told her that he would explain its history when she got older.

But now he was deceased, and would never be able to tell her about it. She reached out and touched the hem. She knew the jacket was old, both because he had told her so and because she had detected what smelled similar to her grandfather's aftershave as she carried it to her room. Seeing it now, in her own closet, she was a little daunted by it even as it piqued her curiosity. It had a presence to it, a sort of dignity all its own, like it could pull itself off the hanger and leave her room; it didn't need anyone to wear it. She stared up at it from her stepstool, jaw a bit slack, until she heard a

door open in another area of the house and her mother walk in from the back yard. Next, in a voice choked from recent sobbing, her name was promptly called.

“Coming!” she yelled back and stepped down from her stepstool, picked it up and put it in its proper place. Upon returning to her closet, she gripped the door and began to push it closed as she looked up at the jacket. Then she paused. Her father had always displayed all his collected jackets proudly, and this made her feel wrong about locking it up in the dark. She skipped to the light switch, flipped on her closet light and, satisfied, she shut the door. Then she left her room.

Her wall clock with Mickey and Minnie Mouse on the face ticked its seconds hand around its circular frame once more. It was the only noise in the room.

In the closet, the jacket hung as it had in the girl’s father’s study: quiet, elegant, reserved. It held its own existence and did not tread on that of others. As it once had.

The other garments hung in a varied mix of silent auras. Closest to the jacket hung a polka-dot halter top dress with lace. After that, a periwinkle purple dress with sleeves, an old grey threadbare sweater, and, farthest away, a baby blue winter coat. Sitting on the floor was a pair of pink rubber rain boots, and a crumpled pair of faded boy’s jeans, used for camping.

The polka-dot dress coughed loudly, “Excuse me,” it said in a girlish voice.

The jacket said nothing.

“A-*hem*,” said the polka dot dress. “*Excuse me*.”

“Hm?” said the jacket. Its deep male voice was dry and quiet.

“Hi! Are you the girl’s new coat?”

“No.”

“I know you,” whispered the threadbare grey sweater.

“Oh. Alright,” continued the polka-dot dress, “because I was going to say, you’re kind of big for her.”

Silence.

“Sooo...” The polka dot dress felt the other dresses and coats watching them. “Then, why are you here?”

“She took me.”

“From where?”

“Her father’s office. Then she put me in here. You saw.”

The quiet forcefulness and seemingly constant irritation in the jacket’s voice made the polka dot dress say nothing else.

“You have a little bit of an accent,” said the left of the pair of rain boots. “Where are you from?”

“Yeah,” agreed the right rain boot.

Silence. It felt to the other garments that everything they said annoyed the jacket. The baby blue winter coat surveyed the jacket suspiciously.

“Far away?” asked the left rain boot.

“Yes.”

“How far?”

“Far,” the jacket said, a little louder, a little angrier.

Silence.

“I, uh, I like your arm band,” the faded boy’s jeans shyly chimed in from the floor.

This intermission of silence was not like the others. It pulled away from the other clothes, as if the jacket was receding into itself. As if a subject had been touched that it did not want to talk about.

The winter coat said to its fellows, “I’ve seen that symbol on that red band before.” It felt the attention of the other clothes on it, now.

“Once, in a museum the girl’s dad took her to.” It paused. “The people who wore those were bad people.”

“What did they do?” asked the periwinkle dress.

“They killed people,” said the coat, simply but venomously.

There was a specific kind of gravity that settled in the closet at that moment. A gravity made up of a very naive sense of right and wrong, and very defined lines between virtuous and sinister; to kill someone is to make a villain of yourself.

The light from above felt to the jacket like a spotlight, hot and unforgiving. The tension in the closet only grew as the gravity settled and became rigid.

“Yes,” it finally said. “My wearer, he did many bad things, for many, many years.”

“I know you. I do,” whispered the old grey sweater once more, barely audible. Its focus had never once deviated from the jacket. There was a tension emitting from the sweater was thin and hard like an unseeable laser beam. Otherwise, the jacket ignored its existence.

“But it’s in the past now, isn’t it?” the boy’s jeans asked the jacket in a mousy, childish voice. “People can change. So... So their clothing can, too, right?”

“Have *you* changed?” The winter coat spoke down harshly to the jeans, “You’ve been annoying from the moment you got here. And you haven’t been anything *but*. Dirty *boy’s* clothes shouldn’t be here in the first place, anyway. You should go back to the thrift store where they *found* you.”

“Exactly,” added the left rain boot. “Once a killer, always a killer. The jacket hasn’t changed, either.”

“Yeah,” agreed the right rain boot. “He’s vile!”

The jeans withdrew inward and said nothing more.

“I want you to stay away from our girl,” commanded the thread-

bare grey sweater, dead-pan.

“I cannot help what she does,” stated the jacket. It spoke steadily, methodically, as though every word was carefully hand-picked and laced into its sentences like beads on a string.

“Your wearer harmed too many children. And *my* wearer was her grandmother. She doesn’t know what your people did to hers.”

“Mm,” said the jacket. It stowed the information away in its astute memory.

The sweater added, “Not that that means anything to you.”

“You killed little kids?” asked the periwinkle dress in its quiet, smooth voice, disgusted.

“What would make you think it was ok *believe* in something like that?” exclaimed the winter coat.

“Didn’t your human ever have any kids?” murmured the boy’s jeans.

“Don’t be stupid,” said the left rain boot. “If he’d had kids, he wouldn’t harm *other* people’s kids.”

“They took,” said the sweater, sternly, overshadowing the right rain boot’s enthusiastic agreement, “so many people from my wearer’s home town.”

“What did they do to them?” squeaked the boy’s jeans.

“They... I don’t know firsthand, child. But from what I learned in later years, it was awful. My wearer, they made her stand and watch, helpless, as his wearer shot and killed her mother, father, and young twin sisters right in front of her. She was only 17.”

The jacket felt the jeans’ inquiring, softly prying attention move back onto it.

“So...” said the polka-dot dress. “What happened to your girl, then?”

“She... got away from them. She ran. Far,” the sweater struggled with its words, as it pulled the memory back. “She ran very fast.”

“Is that true?” muttered the boy’s jeans to the jacket. “Did you really take people from their families? And kill families?”

“But *that* swine,” spat the sweater in the direction of the jacket, “its wearer chased after her, after slaughtering her family. He headed the capture of people from their homes, then pursued her and tried to murder her, too.”

“But she got away?” asked the periwinkle dress.

“It is,” the jacket spoke a little more gently, beneath its breath, to the jeans. “My wearer and his accomplices captured and murdered everyone deemed inferior.”

“She got away. But he sent more after her. She was running for days...” the jacket made a noise of agony at the recollection. “She was tired and cold and hungry... blisters on her feet... she was crying, scared, lost...”

“And they wouldn’t just leave her alone?” asked the winter coat.

“Why?” asked the jeans, with a curious calm that the jacket found slightly jarring.

“Killing them was supposed to make everything better,” it replied, simply.

“She could’ve dropped dead by the end of it,” continued the sweater. “She was limping with bullets in her calf and shoulder on top of it all, when she reached a forest, where she hid, and they hunted for her.”

“And we enjoyed it. Extremely.” the jacket added, talking to the boy’s jeans still.

“But they lost her,” concluded the sweater.

“Also, my wearer was a widower with a son,” the jacket said gently, but firmly, as if this was the most important afterthought of all.

“What are you muttering about?” snapped the winter coat at the jacket and the jeans. Immediately, the jeans shied away. The jacket retained its composure with grace.

“No respect for those you harmed,” grumbled the sweater. “No regrets, no remorse. You’re a monster.”

“Never regret who you ever were or what you ever stood for. Even if it was incredibly wrong and ridiculous,” stated the jacket.

“Ugh, just stop talking!” cried the polka-dot dress. “You’re just so... repulsive!”

“Yes,” growled the winter coat. “No regrets. I’ll bet your wearer loved to look back and remember fondly.”

“Probably had dreams he was back there, killing people. Probably had a smile on his face when he woke up,” said the left rain boot, haughtily.

“Yeah,” grumbled the right rain boot.

At that moment, all talking ceased. They heard the girl’s tiny footsteps coming down the hallway.

The bedroom door opened, then closed quietly. The soft padding of socked feet approached the closet door, and it swung open, revealing the girl on the other side, gripping the door with one hand, and holding half a sandwich with a few bites out of it in the other. She was chewing slowly as she gazed up at the jacket, and remained as such until she finished eating. She wiped her hand off on her pants.

She reached out and touched the jacket gingerly with the tips of her fingers. It had energy coming off of it, she felt. If she closed her eyes, she could imagine a person inside, standing tall, strong, and steady, as her father once had. The powerful yet gentle yang energy drew her in close to the jacket, and she moved forward and wrapped her arms around the lower part, clinging to it as if she had been lost in a crowded shopping mall and had just been found.

She looked up at the jacket, with the light shining down from above, and a sudden impulse struck her. She glanced over her shoulder, listening to her mother move around in the living room for a short while before settling on the couch.

Reassured, the girl retrieved her stepstool, then pulled the jacket from its hanger. On the stepstool, as if it were a pedestal, she put the jacket on herself and stood proudly. For the first time in months, she cracked a true, genuine smile, devoid of sadness, that was missing its front teeth. She hopped off the stepstool and rushed to her mirror. She stood before it, hands on her hips, chest puffed out, still grinning.

The jacket, designed for an adult man, hung extremely baggy and loose on her, and the excess material lay out behind her like a long leather cape.

“I’m Batman!” she cried out quietly. She bounded around her room, and leapt over objects. She laughed and giggled, “Gotham needs me!” the jacket dragged on the floor and followed her every movement. She leapt onto her bed and bounced to the other side, where she extended her arms above her head and splayed her fingers wide. The cavernous sleeves slid down her thin arms. The red band on the left arm shone brightly amongst the wrinkles.

“Nobody panic! Everything is going to be alright!” she sprung from her bed, the jacket billowed behind her. She landed with a soft thud.

From the closet, all but the boy’s jeans watched with a mix of horror and disgust.

Gradually, the girl slowed down, using up her energy supply in her playful maneuvering. Her belly was pleasantly full. She yawned and stretched.

Jacket still on, she climbed onto her bed, eyes growing heavy, and placed her head on her pillow.

She curled up within the folds of the jacket, and took in the scent that smelled like her grandfather dressed to the nines. Sleep took her.

In her dream, she was gazing up at an old man with hard grey eyes. He stood before a mirror, clasping together the last of the buttons on the jacket, which fit him perfectly. He was also wearing dark pants, boots, and a black hat, which also had the silver bird on the

front of it. Grey hair protruded from beneath it.

When the last button was pushed into place, he turned and looked down at her. He had deep creases in his face, and he was subtly biting the inside of his lower lip. They stared at each other without blinking.

Outside the door of his tiny apartment, very far away, there were angry voices, and footsteps.

“How long have you been running?” She asked him. She looked around the small home, which had few possessions, and was practically bare. It was night time outside.

“Years,” he answered, with a thick German accent. “They have found me now. They are coming for me.” He shuffled past her, over to his bed, and slowly sat.

“You’re not going to run away again?” she asked.

“No,” he said as he situated himself of the old mattress. “I am tired of running. I am ready to answer for what I have done. I am ready to be finished.”

“That doesn’t look very comfy for getting captured in.” She, herself, was in pink and white striped pajamas and unicorn slippers.

He looked at her, “This is what I wore back then. This is what I will be wearing when they get me.” He paused as an afterthought struck him. “And this uniform really isn’t that uncomfortable.”

“Oh,” she said. She walked over to the bed and climbed up. He watched her with heavy eyes as she settled herself beside him. “What did you do to make them so mad at you?”

He took in a breath, exhaled. “A lot of bad things.”

“Oh,” she said.

“I had a family once,” he continued, “but they are dead now. My son was about your age when he died. During the war.”

“Oh,” she said. “They’re coming closer.”

“I hear them,” he replied.

Experiment

Katrina Pawlowski

When we were asked where they came from, our responses were all rehearsed. “Outer space. We were unable to communicate with the creatures to obtain specifics, but that’s the most honest answer I can give. Aliens,” I said to the woman wearing the laminated press badge. “We couldn’t have predicted this, we were caught off guard,” I said in my coldest drone as to empathize with the outrageous body count. These creatures, the ones we quickly labeled aliens, were actually terrestrial abominations.

The creatures were taller than a person, with large serrated claws for hands and gangly prehensile feet. Their skin was largely scaled, overlapped like a sectional exoskeleton, but unrecognizable as anything from this world. They were fast, agile, and with a toughened hide, nearly bulletproof. They were aggressive, much more aggressive than they were supposed to be. Some would describe them as reptilian; others claim they’re more like insects. The truth is – they’re both, and more.

They could fly, swim, and survive in many extreme conditions. This is how they spread so quickly, in and on airplanes, ships, and other vessels. Their widespread, seemingly instantaneous appearance just fueled rumors of ulterior transports. Their absurd outward appearance made it easy for the masses to believe that they were, indeed, extraterrestrial beings. The kind you see on television, only real. Breaking down their doors, tearing people apart for no reason other than their inherent instincts. Not quite predatory in nature, since that implies hunting for food. These creatures could not biologically process nutrients, a design flaw that worked to our advantage. No one thought to ask how they got here; they were satisfied with the fairly ambiguous term “alien” enough to accept it without doubt.

We rehearsed and spoon fed the best lies we could come up with to motivate and inspire. Using recognized experts in a variety of scientific fields to spew our nonsense, the press recited the final solution unerringly. The powers-that-be then said that these creatures couldn’t process anything in our atmosphere, and the planet had restored its own sanctuary – with our “help,” of course.

What we didn’t tell people was the truth. If we did, the damage would be far greater than the initial escaped subjects. People would revolt against all world powers, against any authority figures they may have trusted, against all of us if they knew. “I’m sorry, the reason your entire family died wasn’t because of an outside invasion,” wasn’t something I, or anyone else, was prepared to present. We stopped the plague. We exterminated the threat as a species united. Victory was ours. Viva la Earth. Fuck all those other planets.

This incident may have destroyed a million homes, and a million more lives – but it’s brought us together as an entire species unlike anything before. This end justifies our lies; we told them they were invaded and they – human beings – won. “Ignorance is bliss” has never been more true. I’m sure someone will poke their nose where it doesn’t belong eventually to uncover this delusion. Hopefully, these hypothetical scouts will have enough sense to let go of their so-called nobility to see how this lie has benefited mankind.

The project has since disbanded with the vow of silence under penalty of torture, but the peace remains. Worthwhile widespread tranquility. At such a lofty cost are we not all monsters?

The Final Heartbeat

Chris Gillock

It was dark. Not the best environment for a job that was so important. The confined space he found himself in only exacerbated the circumstances. A bead of sweat slowly descended from his brow down to the tip of his nose. His eyes locked onto the entrails of the mechanism before him. The metallic heart of the monster was rhythmically pulsing, approaching its final beat.

Bu-Bump... Bu-Bump...

Concentration was his world and distractions were but dreams to him. The rubber coated veins of the monster were of the upmost importance. One would deliver utter annihilation to all he knew, while the other would return him back to his normal life.

Bu-Bump... Bu-Bump...

His eyes followed each vein back to the heart and lungs of the beast, but the answer he was hoping for was not there. "I need more time." The mechanical monster did not answer his request. He breathed. It helped. With renewed concentration he once again examined its organs but found the same results.

Bu-Bump... Bu-Bump...

His sweat now poured into his eyes, painfully blurring his vision making his job even harder. The moment had come.

Bu-Bump...

He had to slay the demon now or all would be lost.

Bu-Bump...

He chose. Only a few heart beats remained.

Bu-Bump...

He steadied his shaking hands and, with a killer's instinct, sliced through the blue vein of the monster. It was over in an instant as the heart of the mechanism beat for the last time.

Bu-Bump.

Ambrosial Purgatory

Daryl Coburn

The plate was called *The Sinful Salad*, and it looked horrid. The purple discolored veins on the crispy lettuce resembled spider webs. The olives were the size of peperoni, though oddly shaped. Every time I looked away I'd believe there was movement on my plate. Every time I returned my gaze a shiver crawled up my back; it was haunting me. This plate was made to repulse me. It was named to entice me. The longer I stared at my plate hoping for an answer, the guiltier I felt for being so apprehensive.

It wasn't disgust that stayed my fork. There was something else about this salad. Something told me my soul was in jeopardy should I choose to take a bite. I've tried looking away a couple times. Every time I did a wave of deceitful memories came rushing into my head: relatives, loved ones, everyone I knew encouraging me just to have a taste. The guilt was unpalatable. The memories were falsities suggested by my dish.

This salad and I were somewhere in particular. I couldn't recall where. I'm certain I wasn't always sitting here with this salad. It must have been a new addition to my life. Before the salad, I was here with someone else. They left me here. They left as my despondent predilection developed into obsession. The distant memory of what occurred moments ago played in my mind. I felt no attachment as I watched her body language suggest anger, or frustration. How long had I been here?

Something's changed. Sound is floating around my head, I'm unsure of what it means. The salad is still violating my personal space in much the same way as my loud and smelly Aunt Olga does, making me feel like a monster for every unappreciative thought I have. If this ever ends I will be cautious to never find myself in this salad's company again.

The plate has moved! It's gone now. Oh god, I hope I didn't offend it! I look around; I see I'm in a restaurant. As I become aware of where I am for the first time in my new life, the manager approaches me.

"Sir we're closing now. You can pay at the counter." I obeyed his

flimsy suggestion. It was pleasing in contrast to the harsh demands I had just endured.

I step through the front doors. The night is dark, the air is cool, and I feel comfortable again. Turning around I see a large sign, cautioning me to not return. It says it like this:

Village Inn

Letter Down

Dan Ciobanu (non-fiction)

The sun is a shining beacon of delight. It might as well have two scoops of raisins in its hands. The neighborhood birds are chirping their song of satisfaction. I see a blue-bird whistling musical notes atop the gutter on my house. It is out of tune. The bird throws me a wink. I throw one right back. Life is good. It has been a great stroll from the local movie theater and my movie was awesome – *awesome!* I am now ready to throw down on some violent video games. Nothing caps off a perfect day like decapitating a Nazi zombie.

I am fifteen and way too cool for school.

I am untouchable.

I bust open my front door, leaving only my smug, radiant shine. The prompt swing of the door turns inside chatter into whispers; my approach down the hall turns the whispers into silence – the eerie kind. I sense an unsettling atmosphere. I become trapped in the eye of an emotional hurricane. I inch around the corner to the family room: a living area known solely for its fireplace and scratchy couches. However, today, the room’s meaning will forever change.

My mom and sister are sitting in the room with my school backpack sulking betwixt them. *Oh... shit.* My pupils expand to the size of pennies. I’ll need this coinage to pay the ferry man – for, I... am... *dead.* A mountainous range of my entire sophomore year school papers span the family room table. Assorted stacks of my scholastic “achievements” sway from the breeze of the back sliding door. *Hm, an escape?* My assignments, my quizzes, my projects, and my tests are all on display. Each paper is neatly organized in order of grade: “A” to “F.”

I catch sight of a small Sherpa climbing my largest mound of disappointment. He seems to have built many base camps on the ascending piles of paper. Between the “C” and “D” stacks he must have fought a severe incline. And the “D” to “F” scaling was not any easier. The Sherpa is about to reach the “Summit of Failure.” He is carrying a tiny flag – but I cannot see its symbol.

I snap back to reality and discover my mom and sister visually fitting me for a straightjacket. My neurological collapse has begun. My endorphins are in front of a synapses’ firing squad. A mixture of fear and rage flood my mind. *I taste revenge.* It tastes heated.

My captive backpack trembles with apologetic stagger. My pupils recoil to the size of a sniper’s crosshairs. My trigger finger tw-twitches. I begin to inwardly select my deceitful sister’s tombstone – something cheap, no doubt. Maybe... even an unmarked grave. *Yeah.*

“Oh, hi, *Dan,*” smirks my treasonous sibling. Her incisors glint with trickery. I have never seen her so happy. My sister knows this. She seems to know much these days.

My mom is holding my “F” riddled report card that I had neglected to give her. The choices had been either a) a terrible punishment or b) a terrific movie – I may have chosen incorrectly. I ponder how my sister had even found my hidden “Pack of Shame.” I had meticulously stashed it in the back corner of my closet. In the way, way – *way* back. It was even tucked behind my old elementary school graduation outfit, for good measure.

Did I put back those boxes? I analyze for a moment. I am confident that I did. At least, I am confident-*ish.* Maybe... my mom will grant me a mulligan?

Yeah, why not? It could happen.

“Dan,” my mom utters with a devastated timber in her voice. “What is all this?”

“I-I...uh ... I’m not too sure, Mom.” My heart beats to the brink of atomic explosion. “Well, what do *you* think they all are? He, he ... *he?*” My grief-stricken joke falls on furious ears.

My sister snorts with glee.

“I know what they are, Mother,” she grins at me. I begin to carefully plan my revenge. *I will need a vat of acid ... or two.*

She snorts again. I cringe.

“Dan, I’ll ask you one more time. What...is...all... this?” My mom’s hand stretches over a year of humiliation and disgrace. I can see the Sherpa has now planted his flag atop the summit. It waves a big black “F” emblem. And, oddly, a happy face on the flag’s other side.

Snort.

“Well, I *guess* they are my papers, Mom.” The interrogators watch my left hand quiver. It seems I am still holding my movie ticket. The torn stub drops in slow motion – as does my convulsing stomach. The universe halts as we three watch the ticket nestle itself between my shoe and my backpack. *It appears I walked through mud today.* “Mother, would you like to see Dan’s “F” stack again? I organized them for your perusing ease.”

My sister throws me a wink.

I am livid.

With a soft, spiteful breath I whisper: “you *biitch*.” My sister hears me. She always does. Evil has such great senses. *But terrible fashion sense.*

“Dan... please just go up to your room. I have to think about this... Okay?”

“But, Mom?”

“*Okay?*” My mom’s head is a bloodshot brilliance. A New York sewer drain lets off less steam. Her eyes spark and I wait for a fire to ignite. *I am deeply concerned.*

Snort. Snort.

I grovel upstairs to discover my room in shambles. The camouflaging boxes from my closet are resting on my bed – exactly where I had left them. *Dammit!* I suddenly feel nauseous. I make a break for the bathroom. Snorts echo throughout my collapsing mind. They are amplified by my mom’s arctic silence. Chilling stings tango up my spine.

My first step into the bathroom opens up vengeance tundra.

Donned in my thinking snowcap, I have a sudsy epiphany. *A sudsphiphany!* And armed with an “Icy Blast” bar of soap – I begin my diabolical deed. Making tranquil sense at the time, I water-up the processed lard and begin to soap up “my sister’s” bathroom. Inch by rigorous inch, I lather the tiles, the porcelain, and even the other soaps. I am not quite sure of my ultimate goal, but I am heading in the right direction. *I can smell it.* It smells of icy frothy avengement.

The bathroom is now a lathered wonderland.

With every rolling hill of sudflakes and soapy snowman, I detach from any concept of time. Every lather-fueled endeavor pushes me closer to revenge, but farther from any distinct reality. At one point I begin to question the location of my sister... and my mom. I suddenly become quite concerned about their absence. Have they found any other papers? Do they know what I am doing right now? Are they *watching me? Is the Sherpa okay?*

I quickly check my surroundings bathed a paranoid sudor. My eyes begin to twitch; my vision wobbles. *I smell of soap.*

I make sure to lather up the inside doorknob to complete my suds de résistance. I carefully close the portal to the chaos. I then take a moment to pray – hoping God is still on my side, but still ready to call in a favor from Satan.

As I walk down the stairs and recuperate from my crisp madness, I begin to contemplate my actions. Why the bathroom? Why not her room? *Why soap? Was I actually to blame? Nah.* The time is nigh. A commitment has been made. The bathroom and I have a pact. Now is the moment to flush out my dirty dealing sister and deliver her fate.

I sneak down the stairs – back to the notorious room. I hear only strange silence.

A storm is brewing.

I creep around the corner to see only a cleared off square table. Not one family member is in sight – not one. I do a second survey of the area. Not a soul. Yet, my backpack is hunched over between

the itchy, cursed couches. *Huh, the fireplace is burning.* The pack is frazzled and frightened, but it is also zipped up and distinctly repackaged. It sits in the fire's majestic glow.

On top is my movie ticket.

I unzip the large pocket and discover a carefully folded paper.

In blue ink, the note reveals:

Your movie must have been really, really good.

So, your sister and I just *had* to see what all the *fuss* was about.

While we are gone, I suggest you clean up your room – and your closet, of course.

Love, Hugs, and Kisses,

Mom

P.S. Have you ever cleaned up that much soap? Have fun, *Sweetheart.* =)

The note is shrewdly written on the back of my report card. I slump into remorse.

On the ground rests a small, tattered “F” emblazoned flag – splattered with Icarian blood.

Then, I hear a tiny plea for help... from the fireplace.

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