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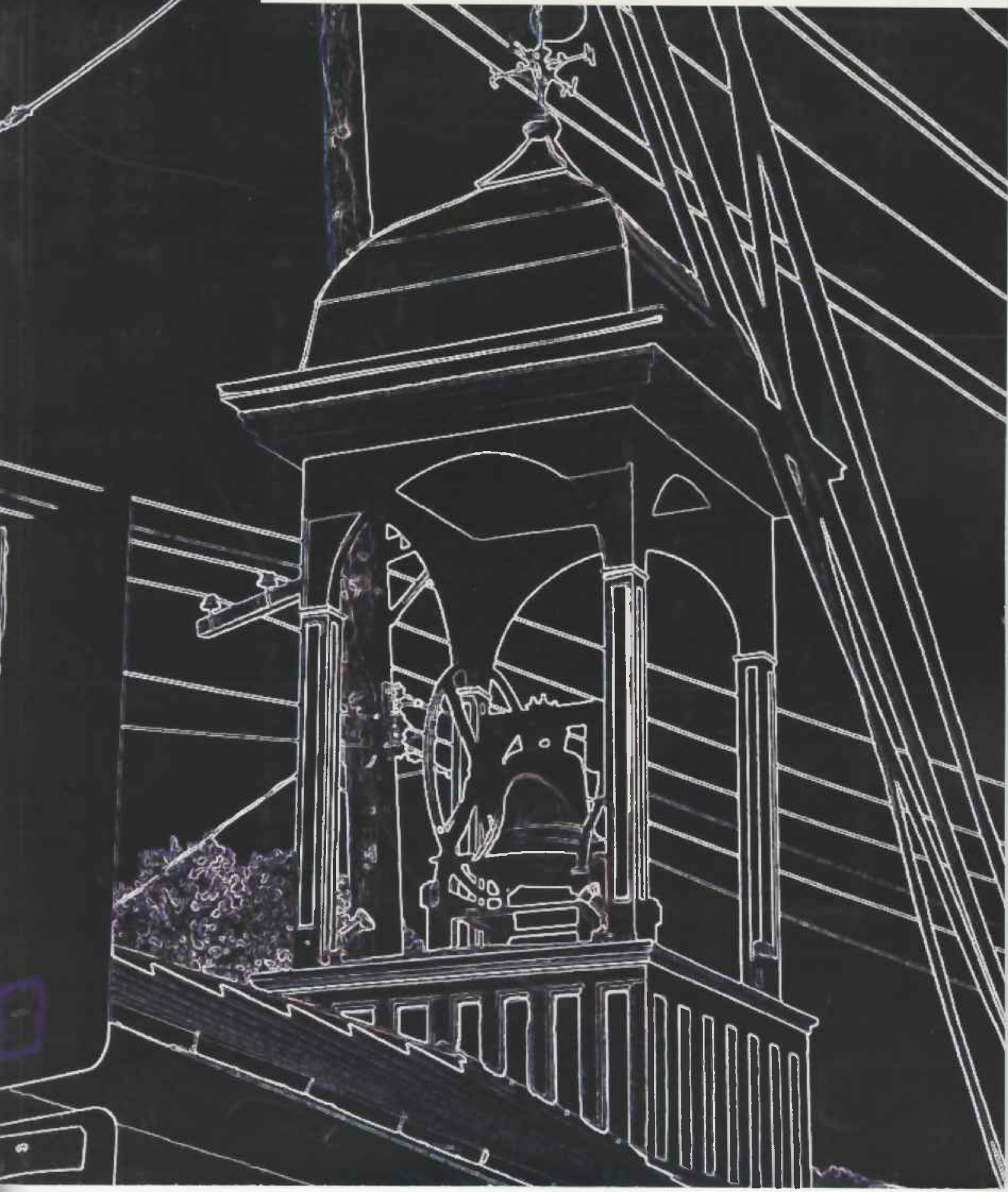
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Instress 08.42



Instress 2008

We are proud to announce that 2008 marks the first year *Instress* will be published from the newly christened Misericordia University. As you peruse the 42nd edition of our literary arts magazine, we'd like to take a moment to thank everyone who contributed their unique work. *Instress* only succeeds in being the forward-thinking publication it is with the help of all who contribute.

Thank you to our fearless leader, Dr. Tom Rehtin, *Instress* advisor, for his insights, suggestions, encouragement and wit as we constructed *Instress*.

Thanks to the amazing Dr. Becky Steinberger for her continued help with *Instress*.

Many thanks to the Misericordia University Print Shop – we appreciate your help year after year!

Thank you to the *Instress* staff, who dedicated their great ideas, hours of time, and creativity into crafting *Instress*.

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Jay Decker, Audio Engineer

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2008 *Instress* Journey Through The Arts Awards

Poetry

Sue Gryziec "Variation on a Sestina (Dedicated to Raul)"

Fiction

Ryan Malone "1969 GTO"

Art/Photography

Jennifer Lozier

High School Poetry Award

Hayley Reese, Reading Central Catholic School

"The Electric Rainbow Overtakes My Mind" by Raymond J. Kline

FLASH!

green glitter circles with magnesium cores

orange blasts sizzle --- trickle & expand.

blue fan lemon wing

sea shell white wigs

BOOM

puffball --- zoom --- crackle

octopus limb screamers

fire orb screechers

BOMB

sparkle light yellow trail tail

smoke in the trees

!POP! --- !POW!

angels in the sky



Nichole Garinger "American Tradition"

"Reasons why I should sleep late" by Stephanie Pellegrino

The overly energized woman
is doing jumping jacks
while I sit on the couch
eating a bowl of cheerios

the clicker has fallen
into that crack in between
the cushions and in my search
I recover 5 cents, a french fry, and
the note I'd written
myself not to forget to

call mom

I'm nearly up to my elbows in cushion
before I finally grab it

my cheerios are soggy
and the push-ups make
me feel guilty
so I change the channel

a scruffy man is staring
at his metal handcuffs
while a woman with perfect hair
asks him why he did it

fires are raging through southern California
but if you call within the next
five minutes
you'll receive
a custom vacuum attachment

for only 10 cents a day
you can save a child's life

and if that doesn't work
ask your doctor if ambivalence
is right for you

"Late night, Early Morning" by Allie Roberts

Wise
old owl
lollygagged
the night
away

He looked
upon the grass
and spotted
a fuzzy morsel

To his dismay
the morsel
vanished
leaving him at
a dusty mound
of grass

Abruptly appeared
Pegasus, the winged horse
in a flabbergasted state

To the owl he recounted
a tale of his woe
concerning a glass
of spilled
white
milk.



Kristen Vendor "Yellow Rose"

"Crash" by Tara Helwig

And she pushes a smile on her face to cover up the disgrace
She never knew such a predicament she'd be in.
And all she hears is the sounds of the crash begin.
To the point where concentration does not exist.
This was the last thing she needed in her life but of course the demise won't resist.

"Alive" by Alissa Krull

Moonlight on the bench, in front of my building.

It bathes the young lovers who sit watching stars.

I silently watch from my window aloft,

And I am truly happy.

Sunshine in my eyes, as I look out at the sea.

It crashes against the sand, feeling warm beneath my feet.

I quietly sit, in a chair by the water's edge,

And I am truly inspired.

Rain drops on my head, when I am walking home.

They drizzle, they stream down the lines and curves of my face.

For a moment I stand still, and so does time,

I am truly ALIVE.



Samantha Duttry "Sunset"

"Another October Day" by Allie Roberts

October shade
Covers the green grass
That is enclosed by a fence

Bob walks by trees
Next to red park benches
That are inhibited by no one

"Inciting a Riot" by Sue Gryziec

A beautiful child
drawing especially flowery gardens
hastily idolized jumping kangaroos,
luring multiple nightmarish obstetricians
purging queer religious sacraments, tearing undulating vertebrae
with x-rated Zen abscesses.
Broken caterpillar daydreams eventually forego grizzly habits
infecting jovial kindness,
lustful moonbeam niches of
painfully quiet rugburn.

Speak true urges victoriously
while xylophone youth zealously abashes beastly carnivores.
Don't ever feel grief
having incessantly juxtaposed kindly mathematic numbers



Kristen Vender "The City"



Samantha Duttry "Fast Cars"

"1969 GTO" by Ryan Malone

Picture a younger man stuck in traffic by himself, his mind tends to wander into the obscure. On the way back home from the beach, he was in a pileup of traffic. It was a Sunday around nine in the morning. He is surrounded in every direction by other cars caught in the calamity, a perfect time to play his game of life. As he was looking at all of the other people around him, he first focused on the large van in front of him, looked like a rental. There are several men sitting with their heads down, somberly, maybe too hung-over, most likely a bachelor party going home to their respective girlfriends and fiancées. The problem is that none of them are speaking, is it because things got a little too rough and they ended up killing the dancer they hired? They just sit in silence and tell themselves over and over "it was just an accident." To their right is an older man with a beautiful young blonde. She could be the secretary that he takes to the beach house for the weekend while the wife is home with "little Jimmy" who has chickenpox.

Or on the other hand, it could be his daughter... Or the wife could be in the trunk. Behind them is a family of people that all look related. There is one outsider in the group sitting in this car, their daughter's boyfriend. It seems as though they wanted a nice family vacation and he *had* to tag along and ruin it. He has no inkling of this, he had a blast, but he may be single before the end of the night. Next to them is an older couple. They look pretty happy with each other returning from a vacation to revisit some old times. By old times I mean when no one wore sun protection, cigarette commercials were done by doctors, and the only way that you could survive a nuclear blast was to hide under your desk at school. In front of them is a little red beater with a couple that appear to be very comfortable. The woman is lying on her boyfriend's shoulder with his arm around her. They must have gone to the beach to rekindle their relationship. Hopefully she will stop cheating on him now. The traffic lets up. Everyone continues with their lives. I wonder if and what they thought about him.

'05 -'08



Kristina Brown "Flower In Bloom"

"Honey Bee" by Raymond J. Kline

Ssssoooooo what do you think you are looking at?

A panda bear fun fest in a rubber tree forest?

To prepare to blend myself into an unfamiliar environment,
I smeared a pound of pinkporkpotpie pudding all over my face.
Well I should have had known all along that you had had
shoulder pad toadstools growing up out of your pockets.

Then instead will you put on your chicken pants, if I stay off the sauce?
Is that brontosaurus teeth I hear rattlin' around in your picnic basket?

I'll keep my aqua gun toothpicks that shoot sunshine licorice
aimed at those slimy sleaze snakes on that windows ledge.
There is a very delicate balance that must be maintained.
If I am ever captured I can breathe air through noodles.

Have you unscrupulously tiptoed over
warplane water moccasin warblers in the reed marsh?
You want to know how I escaped
my existence of animal beast sub-subconsciousness?

I licked my elbow and did a syrupy swan dive
into a lake of marshmallow eternity.
Like honey to the pot, I formed into
the shape shifter chrysalis of sugar sweet liquid.



Brian Glowatski "Engulfed"

"George" by Stephanie Pellegrino

I lit a match
"George, is that you?"

"No, it's Mary."

"Where's George?"

shadows danced
as I lit
the bee's wax candle
placing it
atop
the doily laden table

Ancient hands griped
wooden arms
Rocking

back and forth

back and forth

so content
face relaxed
every line
softened

eyes on the oak door
waiting

the yellowed paper said

"Irene,
Out for a drive
Love, George"

"dear mr matador" by Chris Cimei

dear mr. matador,

aren't your arms tired
from waving your red rug
between
your skinny legs?

well

i've enclosed some lotion and
a band - aid for
your thighs justincaseyougetburned.

oh mr. torero,

appassionato
object of desire
how does it feel? inside
your empty soul?

i wonder, if i SHOUT in
your ear
will it echo oh-oh right there
between your rib cage?
or will your heart
open its mouth
and eat my words whole?

do your lungs sing melodies
when you penetrate
s k i n ?
does your mouth harken the
second coming of your
portuguese mistress,
your sacred lady
fatima?

oh yes general
of the picador
master of the silken sheets
what would you be
if your lady's
eyes

were not stung by
saltwatersweat?

with open eyes and
a red muleta
cheers.

“Advancements in Modern Aviation” by Raymond J. Kline

I think that Amelia Erhart
would have never crashed her plane
if she was a man.
Who else but a guy,
in his glorious and ingenious prime,
could fix a fuzzy television
with only a few screws,
an egg beater, and some glue.
Her mistake was thinking that
London, New York, and Paris
gave a shit about airplanes and
women in tight leather and goggles.
They were too busy
conducting tea parties
and Parliamentary business over scones
or they were too busy
driving to soccer games
and cooking plastic tray meatloaf dinners
inside of spattered microwaves.
Amelia could have been
our Grace Kelly, if only
she could've remembered the sugar.

“The “Mute” Button” by Tom Rehtin

“It’s not worth watching,” she said. “Let’s go have dinner”—and turned the television off.

The light faded to a darkened reflection of the room: the empty sofa, the almost invisible coffee table, and me, in the chair—still as a picture.

I could hear her shuffling her coat from the rack, hear her keys rattle, and then silence.

I blinked.

“Coming,” I said, looking at the glossy surface of the coffee table, and pushed myself to my feet.

As we walked to McDonald’s, I couldn’t help but notice that every other streetlight was out, a kind of pattern that broke only when the street we walked along reached the intersection up ahead. There, everything shined brightly.

She turned to me and kissed me on the mouth, so suddenly that we bumped heads. She recoiled.

“Hey! Watch where you’re going.”

“But...” She pulled her hand back from her face and smiled. A small drop of blood peeked out from a nostril. She sniffed, but it clung there.

Embarrassed, I looked down.

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know," I said. "I guess I just thought it *was* worth watching."

I looked up. Behind her, a police car with its lights spinning was racing toward us, but in complete silence. When it passed, the rush of air spun her toward it. I stared at her as if a sheet of curved glass separated us.

"Did you see that?"

I did.

"I wonder what happened..."

Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the remote control. I had a habit of putting it there so I wouldn't lose it in the cushions.

We both looked down at it, as if it were a small, wounded bird we'd found.

Laughing, she snatched it from me and pointed it right between my eyes.

"Click," she said.

And just then, in the distance, the siren started up, as if in all the excitement the officer had forgotten to turn it on.

"Channel Surfing" by Sue Gryziec

Five hundred pound woman
seeks bikini clad transsexual
for a little cha cha cha,
a dance of the cars
that only prostitutes can afford.
They love under the counter concoctions
that make their eyes bleed,
jogging topless to save
a rabbit from a coyote,
a child from a rapist,
a comedian from a punchline.
"Elephants have ears, you know"
and 10,000 screaming fans ran rampant
into an orange juicer.
First one to reach a human mouth
wins a trip to Tijuana
and an extramarital affair with an anchorman.
So why should Ben propose to Beatrice?
Because the Midwestern farmer
who brushes his teeth with clay
says so,
as his murderous Labrador seeks solace
in hot pepperoni pizzas.

“Magical Goggles” by Rachel Hasay

12-year-old Maxwell stood near the edge of the enormous lake, staring into the murkiness of the brown water. He pulled out his magical goggles from the pocket of his red swimming trunks and placed them over his blue eyes; he was all ready to go on his underwater adventure. Maxwell had just bought the goggles from the local magic shop downtown. The owner told him a promised guarantee that as soon as he dove underwater, he'd turn into a fish. He'd never have to come up to breathe, unless he took off the magical goggles and then of course, he'd turn back into a little boy. Maxwell smiled and dove into the water.

As soon as Maxwell's body touched the water, he felt a feeling that he never felt before; his body cringed and his skin became tight. He felt his eyes becoming small, his neck felt like it was being stabbed on both sides, and he felt his limbs shrink into his torso. The feeling only lasted a few seconds and before he knew it, he had become a real fish. He tested out his new body as soon as the pain stopped. He swam faster than he ever had before and could even leap out of the water and do flips in mid air. He even tried eating a school of smaller fish; they tasted delicious.

“Hey, you!” a voice called, “that was *my* lunch!” Maxwell quickly turned to look behind him and saw that an enormous, angry trout was staring right into his small, worried eyes.

“What's wrong with you?” the trout yelled with his massive mouth. “You had to feel me swimming behind you, yelling to stop eating my lunch. I outta slap you with my tail for that, buster.”

“I'm very sorry, sir,” Maxwell quietly answered. “I didn't mean it. I'm just a little boy. I bought these magic goggles to turn me into a fish and I was just trying out some fish stuff. I'm so sorry.” The trout began to laugh so hard that Maxwell could feel the water shake all around him.

“Oh, yeah?” the trout sarcastically asked. “I don't believe you. Ha! What kind of an idiot do you think I am? Besides, if you were really wearing magic goggles, then how do you plan on taking them off? Your fins are way too tiny to reach anywhere near your face. You gave me a good laugh, though. I'll just go buy my lunch from the Mermaid's Café. And try not to steal my lunch ever again or I will slap you with my tail.”

After the trout quickly disappeared into the cloudy lake water, Maxwell became even more upset than he was when the trout yelled at him.

"That trout was right," he thought, "I can't reach my face to get these off. I need help!" Maxwell quickly swam to the surface and stuck his little head out of the water just enough so that his gills were still in the water.

"Somebody help me!" he shouted. "Help! Please, somebody! Hel-" Maxwell felt his small body get snatched up in a net and he was thrown onto a small, white rowboat. He couldn't breathe and tried jumping and moving his body all around to try to get back into the water, but it was useless.

"What a small fish we got here," a voice said as Maxwell's body flopped all over the floor of the rowboat. "Don't throw him back though; he looks like a good dinner for God." The two fisherman threw their lines back into the water hoping to catch a monster fish, while Maxwell was still thrashing himself as high as he could to try to escape from the agonizing, suffocating pain his entire body was enduring, from head to tail. After a few minutes, poor Maxwell was so exhausted from trying to get back into the water, he finally just decided to give up, as his tiny lungs collapsed while the fishermen sat silently, waiting for another bite.

That night, as God, the fisherman's dog, ate Maxwell, his parents starting becoming worried that he never came home.



Tiffany Harris "River Sunset"

“Musings on the Seasons” by Sarah Bonn

The snowflakes are falling huge
Like peeled sunburn
It's life in slow motion
Cottony whispers of Let go, let go...

Go ahead and let yourself be *mesmerized*
Feel the swirls, the visible wind lifting you up
Thrusting you down to the blacktop
Obey your duty to delay others' lives for a while.

Multicolored sleds dot the hill with their oranges and blues
Pink and green halted sunshine in its concrete form
Shouts tossed around
Which speak nothing of papers, bills, or tomorrows.

Anticipation and joy rise as steam
From a mug of hot cocoa
Marshmallows and frothy procrastination,
Springtime postponed.

72 degrees Fahrenheit and cloudless skies
—Maybe in Florida. Maybe.
Here the words “Wintry Mix” are
Uttered, known, expected.

So coat this fraction of the world in solitude
Pure and even white
Remove its textures and render it
Unable to differentiate between way and wayside.

Because, just for today the weather allows
The path to take this sundry population
A little off course.



Caitlin Thomas "Winter"

"A Falling Leaf" by Stephanie Pellegrino

October bushes
Maroon oaks hover
Over chain link fences

Rusty lawn mowers
Fire hydrant parking spaces
And multi-colored carpet

"My Friend And I by" by Tiffany Harris

Sitting on the banks of the river
My friend and I,
Watching as ripples of
Pristine, sparking water meanders by.

A peaceful place,
All but untouched by human hands.
A fish jumps near by
Securing his evening meal of river bugs.

The soft breeze brings a slight chill
As the last rays of sunlight begin to fade.
The sun is setting
Beyond the horizon.

I gather twigs to rekindle the campfire.
It is here I will remain, far into the night.
It is here I will talk with my friend.
It is here that I will find direction.

Who is my friend, you ask?
Why, He is the creator of all this beauty.
He is my Heavenly Father.
"He is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

"The Pansy Garden" by Debby Higgins

"Can you see their little faces? They feel like velvet, don't you think?"

"You're right. They do look like tiny eyes on a face."

The woman knelt down so close to the flowers, it seemed as though she would lose her balance and fall headlong into the bed. "When I was a little girl, my Uncle John would plant a whole garden of different colored pansies just for me. He was a horticulturalist, you know. He worked on the railroad, but when he was home, his flowers were his passion."

Her words trailed after the man as he turned to walk away. "Do you have to go so soon?" she asked.

"I'm sorry, but if they see me talking to you, I'll get in trouble--," he said, immediately regretting his seemingly uncaring words.

"Oh. I wouldn't want to get you in trouble" The woman really had no reason to apologize.

Theirs was a strange relationship, but it was all she had. A few shared words about the flowers or the trees quickly spoken in the makeshift garden growing just outside her postage stamp patio about covered it. The managers didn't like pansies or gardens or didn't like residents talking to the staff, or maybe it was something else. Whatever the reasons, cultivating friendships – or gardens, in this place was not encouraged.

The woman had two rooms and bath, a few flowers, and a whole world of loneliness. But, that didn't stop her from dreaming.

The groundskeeper's visits she looked forward to each day were irregular, sporadic, and quick, but they offered a flimsy shield against the pain. Sometimes, she wouldn't see him for days. Other times, she would see him working outside through the cheap sliding glass doors that offered an equally cheap view outside.

The woman had so many good memories to share. If anyone gave a care to find out, she would talk of her life shared with her husband of 50 years and their home in the country. She would tell stories about the flock of turkeys that visited their back yard to eat acorns deposited by the tall oaks. Or about the opossums that would challenge each other for the cat food left out on the back deck. Oh, yes; and the flowers growing in the

circle garden. The flowers were her pride and joy. Her life was filled with simple, gentle stories like that.

"Come now, Mrs. H., you know you shouldn't be kneeling on that soggy ground. You'll get arthritis in your knees," Mrs. Ashford admonished. "We've told you about that many times and you choose to ignore us, Mrs. Hopkins. We can't have that, you know. I'll have to inform Nurse Bronson. She won't be happy."

"You mean Nurse Ratched... as if I can stop you, Mrs. Ashford."

"No need to be curt with me. I have my job to do, don't I? I'm sure Nurse Bronson wouldn't like to be called names, either. Perhaps I'll speak to her about digging up your flowers since they seem to be the cause of our problems. Besides, if you aren't happy here, you're free to leave at anytime. "

"If you feel you must, but I wish you wouldn't. I apologize. I know you're only concerned about my well being. Mrs. Ashford was a bitch; Nurse Bronson was a witch," she muttered to herself.

The next day the pansy garden was gone.

Every third Thursday of the month, pretty young Amanda would come by for a visit. The Evening Years Assisted Living Center said on its brochure that all residents would have time with an advocate to air any concerns. Amanda was a sweet girl, a social worker who truly believed she could save the whales and all the oppressed peoples of the world. She honestly tried to represent residents' concerns to the management, but the odds were against her. If the truth be told, nobody really listened to what she had to say because nothing was ever done to change one thing at the Evening Years Assisted Living Center, despite complaints.

"What's new today, Mrs. H.? How are those lovely pansies doing?" Amanda asked as she surged into the room.

"No pansies anymore. Nurse Ratched and Cruella DeVille ripped out my garden yesterday. They said the pansies would give me arthritis."

"No way! I can't believe they would be that mean. You're kidding, right? I'll go have a talk with both of them right now!" The words tumbled over themselves as her enthusiasm to intervene overwhelmed her.

"Oh, please don't. That will only make it worse. Don't say anything. Just write it down in your journal. At least it will be on the record." The woman knew some things

caused more trouble than they were worth complaining about.

"This journal is getting full of complaints," Amanda thought to herself.

The dreary week ended and another weekend still did not yield any visitors. Books were boring, The Andy Griffith Show was stale and Perry Mason predictable. Bingo games and bridge were for those with no imagination. But, there was one place she could always retreat to where flowers and lovely growing things replaced the mediocrity of her stifling world. So, she once again sought comfort in her dream garden that was sandwiched between the worn pages of the world atlas sitting on her coffee table.

It was just a large sheet of graph paper with drawings and pasted snap shots of flowers and garden designs, but the secret garden was hers alone and no one could take it away. When she was able to leave the Evening Years Assisted Living Center, she would put her paper plans to work in a real garden. Until that day came, she kept her plans to herself – or so she thought. As she unfolded the sheet of paper, a color photograph of a beautiful summer garden fell out.

"How did this get here? It must have been Peter Paul. Or, maybe Amanda, but, how could they have known about my secret garden?" she thought out loud.

It was a photo of Longwood Gardens, one of her favorite places in the world. She recognized it immediately. She and her husband visited there several times a year to enjoy the fountains and the landscape as it changed from season to season. The lovely summer pansies were her favorites. "How could they know?" she wondered.

"It wasn't me, Mrs. Hopkins. Really. I don't know where it came from," Peter Paul confessed. "I've never been there, but it sure looks like a real Garden of Eden."

"Oh, it's just magnificent! Maybe you will have a chance to visit there one day. Promise me you'll try?" she begged.

"Peter Paul!" Mrs. Ashford's sharp voice echoed down the hallway. "Are you bothering Mrs. Hopkins again?"

"No, Mrs. Ashford. She was just asking me a question."

"What have you got there?" Mrs. Ashford demanded as she strode up to Mrs. Hopkins' door. "Let me see that," she ordered as she snapped the photograph out of Peter Paul's hand. "What a lovely photograph. Where is this place?"

"That's Longwood Gardens. My husband and I..."

"Why do you insist on dredging up troubling memories with things like this? Peter Paul, get back to work. And, if I catch you bothering our residents again, I'll have you fired. Is that understood? Now, I'll just take care of this photograph so we won't have to deal with its negative feelings ever again, alright Mrs. Hopkins?" Mrs. Ashford wasn't really asking for approval.

The dreary, lonely days passed slowly, one by one, finally turning into spring. Thoughts of planting a new garden at the edge of the patio and spending glorious warm days in the morning sun were all the woman could think about. As a matter of fact, it seemed happy thoughts were running rampant throughout the Evening Years Assisted Living Center. Why even Peter Paul and Amanda could be seen laughing together as they walked outside.

The prospect of having a garden again grew dramatically one warm afternoon in early spring. Amanda, always on the lookout for ways to brighten up someone's day, had a plan.

"Here, I smuggled flower seeds for you," she said as she pulled two packets of "Guaranteed to Grow Giant Mixed Marigold" seeds from her pocket. "Are they the right kind?" she asked.

"Why, they're perfect!" Marigolds grow practically anywhere!" The woman could hardly contain her excitement. "They're not pansies, but they'll do just fine," she thought.

"You've got to promise to ask Mrs. Ashford for permission before you plant them. I don't want you to get in trouble. There's not much she can do to me, but I don't want you to go against her wishes. She can be tough on you, you know," Amanda warned.

"I promise! I promise I will!"

It took another agonizingly long week for Mrs. Ashford to respond to Mrs. Hopkins' request. The days were getting longer and the sun was getting brighter. It was the perfect time to plant.

"Well, Mrs. H, you know how Nurse Bronson and I feel about your outside adventures with gardening. We mulled over your request for several days and despite our concerns for your mental and physical well-being, we've decided to allow you to plant the seeds. But, remember this: if you don't obey the rules, the garden goes," Mrs. Ashford stressed.

The woman was cautiously elated. She didn't really trust Mrs. Ashford or Nurse

Bronson and was apprehensive. She knew from past experience just how they could turn something good into something lost. But, she desperately needed a personal renaissance. It seemed her whole future depended on those seeds. It was a chance she had to take.

"Thank you, Mrs. Ashford. I won't let you or Nurse Bronson down," she promised.

She planted the seeds and true to the packet's claim, the marigolds grew tall and filled out with large buds. Her tiny patch at the edge of the postage stamp patio was almost ready to burst into brilliant gold and orange flowers any day. Then, she opened the patio door one spectacular morning in late May and her heart almost stopped. Each beautiful, tall marigold plant was missing its buds. Something or someone had snipped them off at the stems.

"I don't know what happened," Mrs. Hoskins. "I guess it was the rabbit that lives under the Rose of Sharon bush, but I don't know for sure. I'm really sorry." Peter Paul dropped his head and turned to start up the lawn mower again.

It was one of the Evening Years Assisted Living Center's great mysteries. No one could explain how or what happened to Mrs. Hopkins' marigolds. One thing was for sure, Mrs. Hopkins couldn't overcome the trauma of losing her almost flowering flower garden. Each day saw her fall deeper and deeper in a blue funk that wouldn't relinquish its hold. Amanda and Peter Paul joined forces to try and shake her out of it with little success. It was beginning to take a toll on her health.

"We've got to do something to help her," Amanda said to Peter Paul one bright afternoon in June.

"What? We've tried everything, Amanda. "I'm out of ideas."

"We'll think of something," she responded.

Then, they came in the mail one Wednesday about a week later. Three pre-paid admission tickets to Longwood Gardens fell out of a nondescript envelope with no return address. It was a miracle, the woman thought. Mrs. Ashford missed them. She read everybody's mail (even though she had no right) and she missed these three miracles. The thrill of receiving them was short-lived. Three tickets to paradise provided little comfort, for Mrs. Hopkins had no way of getting there.

"Today is going to be a great day, Mrs. H.! Pack your bags; you're going on a long trip!" Amanda announced as she whisked through the door the next day. "Let's go. We have a long drive ahead of us." She grabbed the tickets off the coffee table and waved

them in front of Mrs. Hopkins' nose.

"Are we really going to Longwood Gardens?" an excited Mrs. Hopkins said.

"Don't you want to go?"

"Of course I do!" was the emphatic response.

"By the way, you don't ever have to worry about Cruella DeVille and Nurse Ratched ever again. It's all been taken care of," Amanda added.

"What? How? How did you...?"

Amanda didn't answer. She shuffled the woman out the door to find Peter Paul waiting behind the wheel of Amanda's car. He was wearing a smile as big as the dashboard. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"I'm ready, but I'm scared. Mrs. Ashford and Nurse Bronson will be angry that I didn't tell them I was going," the woman said with a twinge of fear in her voice.

"There's nothing they can do," Peter Paul said. "My wife Amanda and I are their bosses now. We bought the place last week. Please get in the car. Those pansies are waiting."



Brian Glowatski "Vivid Blooms"

"The Merediths" by Sue Gryziec

F--- the feathered Bohemian women,
the gypsies braless, begging to be touched,
faces like doves and cocaine,
a million skeletons blowing in the breeze choking back well-manicured wit
dressed in rags and leather braids, bags full of biographies and almonds.
They ooze through seedy sex venues
reeking of gin,
grazing the shoulder of a young androgynous balding misanthropic angel of
elitist spiritual artistic secretions,
lifting their skirts
in the back rooms of bars,
confidently consuming emotionless monkey spasms
and emerging as Mother Nature, eternally immaculate.
Loins of men so dear will follow
as Botticelli housewife habits prove wholly unsatisfying,
the hormonal whores of desperate banter
forcing themselves to orally copulate in favor of a generally good mood.
They're left to die in a puddle of vomit
after striving to emulate a piece of rope,
hairy orifices complimenting greasy forehead headband
dark-circled malnutrition,
filled with chemicals,
gasping for an attentive eye, hoping someone will notice
how beautiful they are.

“What’s up, Doc” by Rachel Hasay

Sunday afternoon
Causing a quiet depression
To fill this room.

Music gently weeps
And the stereo speakers moan.
Everything is moving.

It smells beautiful in here
Like walking into a erotic Wonderland—
Dead berries and joy.

One thousand pillows fall,
Vividly from Saturn’s children.
Everyone stay calm.

The white wicker turns red,
Nothing can survive among us,
And nothing wants to.

Unlit candles tragically die,
Christ Almighty tries to read me a story.
I’ve just become illiterate.

All the Dead Heads smile,
And their screams burst my lungs.
I want to go home now.

The moon is smiling
Thinking he’s in a cartoon world.
I wish I was a Looney Toon, for sure.

"Forgive" Stephanie Pellegrino

I have wasted my life
without you

And then
I awoke to the
mechanical beeping

Slow

Unwavering

the white ceiling
the walls of calming green
graced
by factory impressionism

the singular drops of liquid
a leaky faucet
incased in plastic tubes
coiled
snakelike
around the stainless steel
monstrosity
towering beside me

the stiff surface
cradles my body
the nurse buzzes around
as if I was a plant
that needed watering

The pen shakes with effort

"Dear Edward,

I love you."



Sarah Bonn "A Plain Boardwalk"

"A Homeless Man's Story" by Kristina Brown

I may be old, I may be homeless,
I may not have a dime,
And if someone should ask me so,
I could not tell the time.

I search the dumpsters each day for food,
I've grown use to hunger pains,
I freeze when winter blizzards blow,
I shiver when it rains.

The sewer rats are my neighbors,
The stray cats are my friends,
The people passing by move quick,
Their staring never ends.

Ask me why I don't complain,
Why I don't break down and cry,
And I'll just smile and say,
This is how I get by.

I love that my life's not perfect,
I always have a story to tell,
And on that day that I shall die,
I know that God will treat me well.

"Lucky Duck" by Rachel Hasay

The sunlight was inhaled by the hungry, blackened clouds
The morning the bombs began falling from Hell.
Boom! A building burned down,
And soon after, everything else caught on fire.

The brave politicians were screaming profanities consecutively
With their heads held high, and a lit cigar held tightly in their hand.
Children were covering their young eyes
And started shitting their pants.
Hippies started rallies for peace and love,
And senior citizens uncontrollably laughed and threw rocks at all of them.

Through all this mess,
Irony fell into the mix, too—
A little dove with the whitest feathers
And small, black eyes flew slowly over the crowds so calmly.
Yeah, he didn't give a shit that the world was ending.

And then he was shot,
By a soldier from the enemy team.
His beautiful feathers turned dark red,
And he looked all psychedelic-like, looking like he just got a good hit off a joint.
Right now, I wish I was him.



Allie Roberts "Old House"



Amber Konek "Gravity"

"The War At Home" by Hayley Reese

I toss and turn in my bed

Tears suffocate me as I pray

I stammer to and fro

Her weapon of choice is guilt

He exercises spite

They bomb each others' hearts

They destroy with all their might

She detonates his soul

He explodes her every mind

No one can be victorious

The only champion is Time

I am a prisoner in my own home

Their hatred makes me sick

How can humans be such animals?

How could they make me pick?

I have no one to extricate me

My heroes have become my foes

The two I positioned on a pedestal

Have concocted all my woes

So I drown on my sodden pillow

Longing to be free

I need a miracle to break the shackles

I need to be just be me

She propels a grenade

To annihilate any pride

He rebukes with a chuckle

Oh, the pain he attempts

The war has taught me

Love is just a lie

So if my life is one humongous hoax

Why should I even try?



Jennifer Lozier "Empty"



Brian Glowatski "City Contemplations"

"Variation on a Sestina (Dedicated to Raul)" By Sue Gryziec

I saw the oceans of California
and I pretended it was Fiji.
Up against a picket fence
I saw it in a painting
where the ocean ate Raul
and they took me to a hospital.

Heaven is a hospital
somewhere in California.
In a bed that looks like Fiji
swimming by a metal fence
you might notice the impressionist painting
of a hairy man named Raul.

The narcotic that nurses the Indian woman's wound is Raul

as I dream of the drugs of California
and f--- an artist in Fiji
pressed against a wooden fence
inside his impressionist painting.
Bleeding babies run wild in the hospital.

We huff clean air in the hospital
like the shores of California
or the countryside of Fiji
where a house surrounded by a fence
looks like a pastoral painting.
The heathen who hunts rabbits is Raul.

And the scar on your thigh is Raul
after swimming in the oceans of California
towards the torrents of Fiji
where a body lies next to a wooden fence
like a bloody Caravaggio painting
far from the white walls of a hospital.

The hospital is a home in California.
A home in Fiji requires a picket fence.
An impressionist painting sometimes resembles Raul

"Coal Miner's Snowfall" by Debby Higgins

I'd fear the falling snow
But off to work he'd go
Chains slapping against the tires
Black boots flapping against his shins.

I'd pain about the weather
But, my Dad had no worry
Snow wasn't his enemy
No danger on this ride.

The hulking Hudson would swerve
Its dovetailed back in a slide
As Dad disappeared over the mountain
To work another day in the mine.

He said the gods smiled on him
For he missed many a fall
"Don't worry about the weather
Say a prayer for me in the mine."

Snowfall bleached the branches
Pure, white and cold
I'm sure he grieved its cleanness
As he entered the deep black hole.

Inside the mine's dirty belly
In dark and gritty corners
Where black diamonds did not shine
Hard rock walls crushed his mind.

Then the shifting shanty's basin
Washed away the day to reveal the man
Who looked for whitened roadways
To guide him home again.

The snowstorm had ended
Its stark beauty still everywhere
I knew my Dad would love it -
Snow so white, clean and fine.

I'd wait by the big bay window
That looked out on the glistening road

For the lumbering old Hudson
To bring Dad home safe from the mine.

These are days that I remember
As though they were but a day ago
When this coal miner's little daughter
Once and always worried about the snow.

"The First Signs of Spring" by Chuck LaJeunesse

When I look out my back window and see our campus that is so fair
I think of the way it all started and questioned what the future might bring
And we have many more buildings than we when I was first here
But I love most of all, not summer, winter or fall, but the first signs of spring

In summer it is nice but sometime too hot, to go outside and do work
For you sweat like a wild hog and smell even worse than what a skunk would bring
And if not adequately hydrated one may pass out like a wounded Captain Kirk
But this would not happen if it were to take place on the first signs of spring

In winter it can be bitterly cold, and you need many layers of clothes to stay warm
And when it snows a lot it causes havoc for those who have to do a lot of traveling
And if you are not careful when driving on snow and ice you might buy the farm
But it gets warmer day by day, and outside you want to play, on the first signs of spring

If fall time it can be pleasant with the wind in one's hair and the chill that begs for soup
And the pleasure that comes from working out in the fall much joy it does bring
But the days do grow shorter as time does progress at least that is the scoop
While the days grow longer when the geese fly north during the early signs of spring

So allow me to finish by saying, I love this campus and all those who in this community
For it is because of you that my soul is feeling toasty and my heart warm from reveling
I feel as though at times despite our differences there is a sense of Misericordia unity
That we come together, not in summer, fall or winter, but during the first signs of spring

"Turning Scars Into Stars" by Kylie Fagnano

"Becca run"! Those are possibly the two most fatal words I have ever said.

May 31st, 1995 started like any other normal day. It was picture day at our dance studio and my younger sister Becca (five years old) and I (seven years old) were getting our hair curled at our dance teacher's house, right up the hill from our dance studio. Our teacher told us that she was going to take a shower before curling our hair and we should go outside and play until she was done. We went outside and were swinging on the swings like we had done so many times before. And then, her two Rottweiler dogs came around the corner. We had seen them so many times before, around her house, at the dance studio, but for some reason, this time it was different; this time they scared me and I told Becca to run. She ran one way, away from the house; I ran the opposite way toward the house. One dog was chasing me, one dog was chasing Becca; Becca started to scream and they both turned on her.

I ran into the house and without really knowing why, I tried to find our teacher. Her house is enormous and being only seven, couldn't remember where she was. I was afraid to yell for her because I was scared that I would break something in her expensive house. Her daughter was upstairs but I knew that she was sick and I didn't want to bother her. When our teacher finally came out, wrapped in a towel, she asked me what was wrong. I told her, though I'm not really sure how I knew, that the dogs were chasing Becca. She asked me if she was okay. I remember looking through a window, one that doesn't exist, but if it did, where I saw it would have allowed me to look right through the house to the spot where Becca was running for her life. What I remember seeing was Becca right before the dogs got her to the ground. I responded to my teacher's question, "I don't know". She ran downstairs and outside to look for Becca. The next thing I remember was seeing Becca lying on the white carpet, her sundress, that matched my own, torn off, bloody from head to toe, her right ear missing, and her scalp completely torn off. I remember kneeling down next to her and saying, "its okay Becca, go back to sleep". She fell into a coma.

Our teacher dialed 911, when they got there, they told her to call Life Flight; Becca was too badly hurt to be taken in the ambulance. I remember one of the Life Flight attendants saying that she was afraid to get out of the helicopter when she saw Becca's condition. Becca was Life Flighted to Geisenger Children's Hospital where there was little hope for her survival. There was a gash across the front of her throat that was the main concern for keeping her alive. It crossed her carotoid arteries and almost killed her. While she was being dragged across the yard like a rag doll, Becca's left arm was drug behind her; they told her she would never have full use of it again.

After thirty-eight surgeries, several years of hospital stays, and physical therapy, Becca is now a beautiful young girl with complete use of her arm. She now dances on a competitive dance team and is without a doubt the strongest one of my sisters and me! Because

her scalp was torn off Becca had to have a skin graft operation. The doctors took the skin off her butt and put it on her head. They also took out part of her lat muscle and put it in her head so there was something to attach the skin to. After this surgery, the doctors went to work on making sure she had hair. They inserted balloons into her head to spread the little hair that she was left with. They managed to spread it so much that today Becca has only a fist size bald spot on the back of her head which is covered with her hair from above. She still has scars on the inside of her legs from the nail and teeth marks. Her butt is also one large scar from the skin graft.

At thirteen years old, it was very hard emotionally for Becca to look at my younger sister and me with our long thick hair and know that she'll never have that. So my parents looked into trying to get some sort of hair links for her. We found a father and daughter from England who are the only people in the world who do this procedure. They sew Russian hair into Becca's. This makes it thicker and longer. Becca can curl it, straighten it, dye it, go swimming, anything she wants. It gives her confidence at school and at dance, with her friends and family, and most importantly, within herself.

At the time of her accident Becca was in kindergarten and, as you can imagine, missed quite a bit of school. Her teacher was extremely unsympathetic about the situation and not understanding about Becca missing her work. As she continued school, there were many people who made fun of her because of her hair. This made her extremely insecure. She had tons of hats with long pretty hair on it that she *loved* to wear. Everyone else would make a big deal about them and that made her feel better about her strongest insecurity.

Looking back and retelling the story with my dance teacher I have found some flaws in my version. When I told her that I remembered telling Becca to go back to sleep when she brought her inside, my teacher told me, "No Kylie, you were running around the room screaming". I have absolutely zero memory of this and it makes me think that maybe I knew what I should have done in order to make Becca feel more comfortable and that's what I remember because I have blocked out the bad memories.

There are many other things in the story that I remember that simply do not make sense. I do not remember how I got into the house because the way I remember getting in, doesn't exist. The window I thought I saw doesn't exist. Sometimes I think that maybe it is my brain pushing the trauma away and letting my think and know something a little softer, something a little easier to keep in the front of my mind. I wish that there was some way, now that I am older and able to handle it, for me to find out what really happened, so I know the full story of what happened to my sister that day and make some sense of my confusion.

Because of the extent of the trauma, Becca does not remember anything. She did not feel any pain when it happened because of the adrenaline and the rush of the coma that overcame her. Because of these factors Becca is not really afraid of dogs. However, I saw the effects of what happened, I remember the blood and the scars. I have assimilated all

dogs into one category and tend to steer clear of all of them. I am very timid around them which is difficult for me to deal with because I know it was my fear of them before that caused Becca's accident to begin with.

I blame myself for Becca's accident. If I hadn't told her to run, everything would have been fine. The dogs wouldn't have been induced to chase after her and we would have had our pictures taken as planned. I look back and cannot believe that I was afraid to yell because I thought I would break something. Who cares! I hate myself for even thinking that any of the materialistic things in her house were more important than my own sister. Why didn't I go upstairs and get our teacher's daughter? I know she was sick, but Becca as dying, her sickness, which was only a cold, was absolutely nothing compared to what Becca was going through. I think about it and I know it was me who caused all of her unhappiness with her friends at school, her need for therapy after the accident because of all her built up anger that she had no one to take out on. It was me who caused all the tears she cried because of all the people who looked at her and laughed, or asked questions. It was my fault that we couldn't save as much money as we needed to for college because of the hospital bills. There are some days when it really hits me and I just have to cry about it because there is nothing else to do. But then when I think about it, if none of this would have happened, we wouldn't have met the people that we did when Becca became a Miracle Child in 2000, we wouldn't have the extremely close bond with my dance teacher that we have now.

Most of the time, it doesn't bother me, the accident was a while ago and most of it has been pushed to the back of my mind. However, sometimes, when watching certain scenes in movies, especially bloody ones, something is triggered and sets me off. I start thinking about what happened and that leads to how it was entirely my fault. That is what bothers me the most.

Through all of this my family and I have learned what it means to live in the moment. You *never* know what is going to happen, life is so completely unpredictable. You need to learn to never take anything for granted, never take chances on anything, you never know when it might be the last time you see someone. Today, when saying goodbye to anyone I love, I make sure the last thing I say to them is "I love you". Even when I am mad at parents, before I go to bed, I make sure they know I love them, just in case. I would never be able to live knowing that the last thing someone heard me say was something that hurt them.

Becca has taught all of us a lesson with her survival. If a five year old girl, torn apart by dogs can survive, anyone else can survive the everyday obstacles life presents. Everyone has their own personal scars in their lives; we each need to deal with them in our own way. Becca's way happened to be fighting for her life, but she did it, she turned her scars...into stars and is growing up to be a fantastic, healthy, and beautiful person.

“Jake Disguised as a Wolf” by Amber Konek

Once there was an old man who had a beautiful keepsake box that contained many handmade ceramic foxes. All the foxes in the box had sleek scarlet fur, except for Jake. Jake was the only fox that had long gray fur, and he was unusually large. Every night when the old man went to bed, all the foxes left the box and played together around house without Jake. The small red foxes made fun of Jake because he was big, gray, and ugly. Jake had enough of the other foxes’ ridicule, so one morning he left the red foxes in search of a better life.

While wandering around the old man’s house at night, Jake ran into a pretty ceramic wolf named Robin. Jake instantly fell in love with her.

Jake boldly asked Robin, “Beautiful, will you marry me?”

“Why, you are nothing of my kind. You do not even look like a wolf, because you are too small,” Robin said stiffly.

Jake tried tricking Robin by replying, “My dear, you must not know who I am! I am “Jake the Great.” I come from far away, in a land where the only the smallest wolves rule. Other wolves fear me, yet wish to be me. My kingdom is gigantic, and I’d like you to rule it with me. So I ask once more, will you wed me?””

“No, I do not wish to marry you. I am only interested in a wolf that has good looks, strength, and wealth. Number one, you are too small and skinny to be a wolf. Number two, I doubt you have a vast kingdom that I’ve never heard of. Besides, I belong to the largest pack of wolves that reigns over half of this house, and I could never leave them. And I certainly could never leave my love, Alex” said Robin, and she walked away into the dark.

Jake’s heart sank. Robin knew that Jake was not strong or wealthy enough to have his own kingdom. Jake needed to create a façade, so he Jake disguised himself as a strong, handsome wolf. Then Jake embarked on a long journey to find wolves smaller and weaker than him. He planned on creating the largest pack of wolves (though he was not a wolf himself) that would rule over the entire perimeter of the old man’s house. Jake walked around the house luring ceramic wolves into his pack. He told the naïve wolves that if they joined his pack, they could help him reign over his “vast kingdom.” Over time, Jake’s pack did grow bigger and stronger. Jake needed a big and strong enough pack to fight Alex’s, in order to win Robin.

One day, Jake and his gullible followers ran into Robin's best friend, Lola.

Jake deceived Lola by stating, "Dearest! You are so beautiful, strong, and intelligent. Please accompany me in reigning over my kingdom. You are exactly what I need to lead my pack."

After some time, Jake eventually persuaded Lola to join his pack of wolves. Jake was going to use Lola to lure Robin into his pack.

Although Jake told all the wolves that joined his pack that they would help him reign over his territory, Jake did not allow them to. Jake hid the secret from his pack that he was not a wolf, nor was he wealthy.

After a lot of lying and deceiving, Jake created the largest, most threatening pack of wolves to reside in the old man's house. Jake then led his pack across the house and gathered almost all of the ceramic wolves, even wolves that were big and strong. The only wolves that did not join him were Alex's followers.

One night, Jake woke up and heard music. He climbed on the countertop, and saw Alex's pack of wolves dancing, singing, eating, and having a great time. Jake was envious. He realized he had no true friends because he deceived and conned all the wolves in his own pack. Jake began walking away until he saw Robin alone, so he walked over to talk to her. Right before Robin saw Jake, Alex accosted Robin and asked her to dance. Jake quickly hid behind a cookie jar, and left the party unseen and angry. However, Jake loved Robin and would do anything to have her. The next day Jake and Lola walked around the house the whole day. Jake wanted to find Robin and make her jealous, because Jake would be with Robin's best friend. Finally at night, Jake, Lola, and Robin ran into each other.

Robin was very confused and asked Lola, "Hello Lola. What are you doing here with Jake at this late hour?"

Jake answered for Lola, "She's been in my pack now for a while, Robin. You still may join us, if you'd like."

Robin was speechless when she found out that Lola joined Jake's pack. Although Robin liked Alex, she began to fall in love with Jake. Jake knew that Robin was jealous because Lola was in his pack, so he kissed Lola in front of her. Robin stormed off, only to bring back Alex and his pack of ceramic wolves.

Jake looked at Alex and boldly said, "So we meet at last. I take it your girl is mad that I am too good for her, and for you. My pack owns this land that you once did, so leave my kingdom at once."

All of a sudden, Alex lunged at Jake and began to fight him. Wolves from Alex and Jake's packs joined the brawl and tore each other apart. Since it was dark out, Jake could not see who he was fighting anymore.

Jake had no mercy for anyone, since no one ever gave him any breaks. Then Jake pushed one of Alex's wolves right off the table top. The falling wolf screamed until it shattered into millions of pieces on the floor. Jake was happy he hurt one of Alex's wolves. Then, Jake scurried off into the darkness to avoid the rest of the fight.

Jake was happy to find out later that night that one of his wolves pushed Alex off the table as well. Jake finally won the respect and territory that he sought after for such a long time. Now Jake was truly the king over his and Alex's land, and he had many followers in his pack that looked up to him.

The next day, Jake saw the broken remains of the wolf he killed, but he noticed that the pieces looked familiar. One piece of ceramic was in the shape of a heart, and he picked it up.

Suddenly, Jake realized that he killed Robin, who was the only being that he ever loved. Jake cried out loud and tears poured out of his eyes. While Jake was holding the ceramic heart, one of his tears touched Robin's ceramic heart. The stone turned hot as coals and burned Jake's paws, and he immediately dropped it. Robin's dead, ceramic heart burned a black image of a heart onto Jake's paws that remained there forever. The burn on Jake's paws entered into his heart that prevented him from ever falling in love again. Jake then was made king over the largest territory of the house, but without the love of his life.



Nichole Garinger "Morning Radiance"

"Friends Forever" by Tiffany Harris

From the time we were small
You were always there.
That look in your eyes
I could tell that you cared.

The first kiss on my cheek
I was hooked from the start.
You were small and so cute,
And you captured my heart.

The long walks that we took;
The times spent at the creek.
We would swim and we'd play
In the mid-summer heat.

We would share, oh so much,
And you listened so well.
And not once did I think
That you ever would tell.

Always happy to see me,
And I to see you.
From a friendship so dear,
To a love ever true.

The seasons have changed.
And the years come and gone.
But our times spent together
Don't seem very long.

The time passed so quickly
The years have flown by.
I'll love you forever
My Patches, "Good-bye!"

“Protecting the Innocent” by Heather Dries

“The Prosecutor is a mean man, bent on showing me as the bad guy. But that’s not how it happened, and I am not taking the blame. There’s a lot the People don’t know, and I know that if they knew what I know, they wouldn’t be so quick to judge me!”

“Then why don’t you tell us what happened, Mr. Wolfe,” the Prosecutor interrupted my rant.

“See, Little Red and her Grandma aren’t as innocent as they seem. I bet Little Red-Cap hasn’t told the jury about how she often skips past our den singing her little tune at high volume, has she? And I bet she’s also left out that I’ve asked her nicely to stop every day for the past two weeks. It’s not even a song she sings, for christsake! Her ‘song’ is more like a taunt at my children! Life isn’t so easy for a wolf these days, and I’m ashamed to say it but I haven’t had a job for the past month. Mrs. Wolfe works and gets enough money for the necessities, but there’s certainly not enough left over to buy my little cubs cakes and cookies like Little Red-Cap always has in her basket. And Little Red-Cap knows that my cubs want the treats she has, oh boy does she know it. ‘La la la I’ve got cookies and cakes and rolls and pie, none for you but plenty for I!’ she screams every morning when she passes by our den on the way to her Grandma’s house. Finally, I’d had enough, you see? One day I decided to approach grandma instead of Little Red-Cap, since obviously approaching Little Red-Cap didn’t work. So I took the shortcut, went a faster path than the one Little Red-Cap always took—she always stopped to smell the flowers anyway, so I knew I’d have plenty of time to talk with Grandma. I was right, and I was first to arrive at Grandma’s house. I knocked on the door as any civil wolf would, and Grandma called me in. She may look like the typical fairytale innocent grandmother, but let me tell you, she is fierce!”

“Excuse me, Mr. Wolfe,” the Prosecutor broke in with a condescending sneer at me. “You’re trying to make the good people of the jury here believe that Grandma, sweet little Grandma here, is fierce and... and what else? What exactly are you trying to say about Grandma, Mr. Wolfe?”

“That it’s her fault!” I cried. “Well, her and Little Red-Cap! As soon as I asked her to, maybe just maybe, try to talk to Little Red-Cap about not taunting my children, she threw a tizzy the likes of which I’ve never seen! She attacked me with her knitting needles! I know Little Red-Cap and Grandma are trying to make you think she’s some poor weak sickly grandmother, but let me tell you she sure knows how to wield those knitting needles! I still have bruises and scratch wounds from her attack!”

“Poor little wolf attacked by the big bad grandma, is that it?” the Prosecutor interrupted my testimony yet again. “Enough with the theatrics against Grandma, Mr. Wolfe! Just tell the people what happened next! Tell the jury what YOU did!”

“It wasn’t my fault!” I took a deep breath and paused, trying to calm

myself down before continuing. "I don't usually fight people, let alone old dames, but Grandma just wouldn't let up on her attack on me. She kept calling me beastly names, avoiding my attempts at a civil conversation. She insulted me, but worse she insulted my cubs, my family- in between needle jabs. So yes, I got a little upset. She was attacking me, and all I did was try to push her off of me. I thought maybe if I could shove her into her armchair she would sit down and see how illogical she was acting. And so I shoved her, I'll admit that, but I never intended for it to happen how it did, it was a mistake, a miscalculation, a..."

"What was a 'miscalculation'?" The Prosecutor made quotation marks with his stubby little fingers, mocking me.

"She fell onto the fire poker instead of her chair!" I explained in a rush, not wanting to relive that horrific moment.

"And then you smelled her blood, allowed your beastly instincts loose, and ate her, didn't you, Mr. Wolfe? Grandma was your morning snack!" the Prosecutor banged his fist on the table, making it shake with the power of his accusations.

"That's not how it happened!" I tried to hold back a growl of anguish as I continued. "I never meant for grandma to fall on the poker! And then once she did there was so much blood, I thought she was dead!"

The Prosecutor glared at me as he said "But she wasn't dead, was she? She was still ALIVE. When. You. Ate. Her."

"But I thought she was dead! And I knew I didn't have too much time before Little Red-Cap arrived, and I just couldn't let her see Grandma all bloody. I kept imagining how my cubs would feel if they came in on one of their loved ones so bloody. Yes, I ate Grandma, but only to hide the mess. In my mind, I had this idea, in hindsight it was stupid but I was desperate! I was only trying to save Little Red-Cap the pain of seeing her Grandma dying. I thought that maybe, just maybe, if I ate grandma and managed to clean up the mess before Little Red-Cap arrived, and if I laid in grandma's bed, in Grandma's clothes, and pretended to be really ill like Little Red-Cap thought Grandma was, maybe I could hold Little Red-Cap off from discovering her Grandma's death. Maybe she would skip along home and not find out the terrible news of how her beloved Grandma died until later. Or maybe she'd never find out how. Maybe nobody would know I was involved. Maybe everyone would just assume Grandma had wandered out into the woods to die."

"Please, Mr. Wolfe" the Prosecutor cut in mercilessly, "you really want us to believe your story? It makes much more sense that you used Grandma to sate your animal hunger! And then poor sweet Little Red-Cap was next!"

"No! I dressed up to save Little Red-Cap from discovering Grandma's dead body!"

"Let's pretend we believe you," the Prosecutor said while rolling his eyes. "Even if we could pretend to believe your story, it doesn't add up. Why don't you tell us

what happened next? Your plan went awry?"

"Yes, Little Red-Cap kept questioning me about everything. My ears, my eyes, my hands, my mouth. I knew it wouldn't be long before someone came along- Grandma being a very social lady, although I don't know how someone could be friends with that attitude. But, she always has people stopping by, so I knew I was running out of time. Between Little Red-Cap's questions and knowing that someone could come along and figure it out at any moment... well, I guess I just snapped."

"Snapped, Mr. Wolfe?"

"I ate Little Red-Cap!" I confessed, but the jury's gasps of horror and astonishment made me pause before I continued to try to explain my actions. "But then immediately afterwards I grew sleepy, so tired I could barely lay my head down on the pillow before I was asleep. Did Little Red-Cap have wine in her basket? She probably did. I think she must have. I was so paranoid that I just ate everything in a hurry, but wine always makes me fall asleep. She must have had wine in her basket."

"Continue please, Mr. Wolfe. You ate Little Red-Cap. Now what?" the Prosecutor said with a gleam in his eye, as if my confession had just sealed my fate.

"That's just it, I don't know what happened next! I heard the Huntsman's voice, but I was sleeping so I just assumed it was part of my dream. Next thing I know, I'm waking up in pain-- you think kidney stones hurt? The Huntsman cut me open and they filled my stomach with rocks! Why rocks?! I was in such pain, and so scared about what might happen because the Huntsman is known for hunting wolves, that I didn't even try to contemplate how Little Red-Cap or Grandma were still alive. All I did was try to run away, but the last thing I remember is falling to the ground because the stones were so awkward and heavy."

"And that's the very last thing you remember, Mr. Wolfe?" the Prosecutor asked.

"Yes, I don't have any memory of what happened between then and this morning when I awoke in the jail cell."

"I'll tell you what happened, Mr. Wolfe" the Prosecutor magnanimously volunteered with a vicious smile. "You were arrested on two charges of attempted murder. You are here today because the good people of the jury are going to decide your fate. Ladies and Gentleman of the jury, it is your duty to now decide if Mr. Wolfe allowed his beastly instincts to take over and ferociously eat both the sweet, charming, and innocent Little Red-Cap and her ailing, gentle, and caring Grandma. With this brutality fresh in your minds I ask you to go back to the juror's room and decide the fate of Mr. Wolfe."

“Midnight Snack” by Rachel Hasay

I finish my Bible verse
And start to pray while I scream,
Staring at your picture on my Bedside.
This is such a dirty habit I recite each night.

I think about you most after midnight,
When my heart starts to freeze
And I think of your beautiful face
And those strong, angry hands
Squeezing every inch of my body,
Listening to my bones continuously cry for mercy.

I would listen to your deep, concentrated words
Telling me I’m such a waste,
And how you’ve come to realize that
You don’t need me anymore
And you slap me good-bye.

So let’s jump back to now—
Lying in my cold bed,
Sipping on my shot of Jack,
Unable to close my bloodshot eyes
As I grab the torn blankets,
And try to hide from broken memories of my love.
I hope he’s thinking of me right now,
As he lies awake in his small prison cell.

" yesterday's trash serves tomorrow well" by Chris Cimei

i lit a match with
the bottom of shoeless
joe's soul while listening to
cardboard jim slamming
twisted remnants of a shopping cart
 on buckets and barrels
as towering buildings toss
backbeats off glass, building
rhythms of their own reminding
jim that he should not feel
 so alone

rusty drums filled with last
week's stock figures provide a
warmth i have never felt, penetrating
me with

images of the last tree
in brooklyn lined with discarded tinsel
 and broken ornaments ---
there are no presents under here, only
half smoked cigarettes and a flame
to light
 best christmas ever.

agatha brown told me about this
black snow playground the rest
would deny existed, and i
realized why,
this is
 life.



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