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THE OVAL



STAFF ISSUE

2015

THE OVAL: STAFF ISSUE
SPRING 2015

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

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FROM THE OVAL STAFF,
A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Maureen and Mike

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Thank you!

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BARBIE GIRL

MADISON HINRICHS

I try on personalities
 like a Barbie tries on clothes.
With a simple outfit change
 I can be a
doctor
 actor
 poet
 or beautician.
 Just say the word and I'm yours.
Mattel mass produces girls like me.
 You can pick one up at your local
 super-store, and if you're lucky
 you may even get a bargain.
Oh, we may seem cheap,
 but we come with our own baggage
 and accessories, which of course
 are all sold separately.

DELORES | NICOLE SCHULZ



OUT OF NOWHERE

MILLY ALLEN

Before high school graduation, my grandparents invited me to their ranch near Jordan. The ranch was not an ideal escape, but it was an escape. I accepted the invitation, remembering the gallon-sized Western Family tubs of vanilla ice cream they kept in the freezer. My grandmother served scoops of them for dessert; you could have chocolate or caramel sauce, but not both.

I spent the two weeks leading up to the trip sorting and organizing my room, discarding everything I couldn't fit in my dorm room – old clothes, school papers, barely-used lotions and shower gels and bath salts from myriad gift sets. My mother wanted a craft room, and my room was the only place it could go. Each bag I tossed, each box labeled “DONATE,” my mother inspected. She was sentimental for someone who grew up on a ranch. Her hair was grey when I was little, but now it was white. She'd been the oldest child of three girls, but the last to marry and last to have a kid. Maybe that explained the sudden nostalgia hurricane; she found meaning in crayon drawings she forgot I made, in ugly Perler bead magnets from summer camp she previously refused to put on the fridge, in a Santa Claus paper plate I'd decorated with cotton balls glued to his beard.

“Remember when you made this, Jenny?” she asked, lifting up a dented castle made from a shoebox and toilet paper tubes. “You even made sure it could open up so you could play with it,” she said, touching the paste and cardstock hinges. “What a sweet little dollhouse.” I didn't correct her. I'd made it for the fairies, when I was thirteen – a bit old to still believe in them. I'd left it in my room, with an old Barbie kitchen bowl full of Doritos crumbs. They didn't come, and so I stopped believing.

Her sentimentality hindered the process, so I took to sorting through things when she was at work, and driving them to the dump or to the Goodwill in town before she got back to fix boxed potatoes au gratin for dinner.

I lived outside of Helena, in Montana City. Its name is misleading; it doesn't have its own zip code, but it does have three bars and a gas station. The ever-expanding subdivisions are easily navigated by bicycle.

I left my bike parked in the gravel bordering our driveway for easy access. To get to the gas station, I pedaled past several houses that had been on the market for over a year, the daycare I used to go to, and a car wash that only opened in the summer. Leaving my bike unlocked near the half-dead juniper bushes by one wall, I walked in to get a Butterfinger and an Arizona tea, to eat whenever I found a good place to do so. When I came out, I noticed a patch of bright pink flowers in the shade of a juniper bush.

The blossoms sat on short stems, close to the ground and to each other. When I prodded them, they were springy, like a mattress. I smiled; as a child, I would have imagined a fairy sleeping here, on its sweet, barely-scented bed.

I mounted my bike, and pedaled back past the car wash and daycare, and to another subdivision. I rode past their mailboxes, all stacked up on top of each other at the entrance to the subdivision – just like ours was. This land was a great shift from my subdivision, and better exercise, because of all the hills. After pedaling up a steep hill, I paused. Straddling my bike, I looked around me to see where I was. Behind the green house in front of me, there was a backyard with a weathered trampoline and a blue-grey shed the same color as the house.

My house.

The land was different, and I'd pedaled at least four miles to get here. I turned around and went back home, saving my treats for an evening in front of my computer.

After that bike ride, I spent as much time in town as I could, where I could go miles away from my house without ending up mere yards next to it. I parked my car in residential neighborhoods close to downtown to avoid paying for parking.

I walked back up to my car on a June evening, three days before I headed to Jordan. I'd already packed -- old clothes I didn't mind getting dusty, a couple "going to town" outfits, and six books. There were no movies I wanted to see – *Pirates of the Caribbean* lost its magic in the second film, and everything else was either a romantic comedy featuring a former Disney Channel star or a large studio's quasi-indie film, which were usually worse than actual indie films, and almost everything else closed at five. As I thought of going to Hastings to rent a movie or pick up a new book, I stubbed my toe against a crack in the sidewalk. I looked down to see the crack, pushed up by a tree root, smeared with blood.

I sat down and pulled my sandal off, and gingerly picked the large pieces of gravel and rock out of the wound. As I rummaged through my purse, hoping to find a packet of tissues or some fast food napkins to dab up the blood, I noticed a flash of color in the corner of my eye, a color I'd never seen before. I turned to look, ignoring the warm blood seeping out of my big toe.

I saw a fly; the nameless color was its wings, long and thin. It hovered over a patch of the fairy-bed flowers, flourishing in the shade of the tree and jostling each other on their springy stems. I looked at the thin, deer-bitten tree across from me; its leaves were still.

There was no wind.

Three days later, my toe still throbbing, my mother drove me to Jordan and stayed for a couple days before saying a quick and stiff goodbye to my grandparents – they were not only practical Montanans, but Scottish Presbyterians; emotional distance was the norm. My grandma was a Baird now, but her maiden name was Beattie. She said she married my grandfather because she didn't have to re-monogram her linens. It had to be at least half true.

Their fridge was decorated with more photos of cousins' weddings, shotgun and otherwise, but that was about all that had changed. My cousin Dan's wedding photo was the newest, seven months old. He married a girl in town called Alicia; she looks only slightly pregnant, but much happier than Dan. They'd tiled the kitchen floor in the seventies, the same time they'd installed the orange shag carpet. The carpet was still bright; Grandma vacuumed like some people went to church. It smelled like the two of them -- Grandpa's Old Spice, and Grandma's MiracleGro.

The first morning after my mother left, I woke up and made the bed, which I never did at home. I tucked the chenille bedspread, probably as old as my mother, into the corners as neatly as I could, and went to breakfast.

My grandparents did not drink coffee, just Lipton tea. I put the kettle on.

"Do you want a cup, Grandma?" I'd seen her high cheekbones in the photographs of her, up until the eighties, after she'd stopped bothering to dye her hair but before I was born. Now fat and saggy skin clouded the sharp lines.

My grandpa was already out working with Dan and another cousin, Jeff, who he hired for the summer. They were ten years older than me, but had about half as much what Grandma called "direction." They wouldn't be back until lunchtime. "Oh, no thanks. Want to make Rice Krispie treats later?" Grandma asked, spritzing MiracleGro on the houseplants that filled the sitting room. "Or maybe some chokecherry syrup or jam?"

I poured Cheerios into a white bowl. "Making jam sounds fun."

The chokecherries on the bush behind the grain elevator blinked, or so it seemed from how the sunlight reflected off their dark, shiny skin. The tiny pink flowers carpeted the ground underneath it. “Where did those come from?” I asked. I hadn’t been able to identify the flowers in books or through the Internet, but my grandma was pretty reliable.

“Oh, I don’t know; I think they might be weeds. They came out of nowhere. They’re hard to pull up -- I keep trying to dig them up, but those roots go right on to the center of the earth. At least they haven’t killed the tree yet. I think I’m gonna try salt next.” She stepped on top of the fairy-bed flowers, picking chokecherries and throwing them into an old coffee can with the label torn off. Avoiding the flowers, which I didn’t consider weeds, I joined her.

We didn’t make the jam until after “the men” were done with lunch. “It’ll make the house awful hot, and it won’t make a good break for them,” my grandma explained as she gutted and cut up a whole chicken in the sink. “Could you go feed the cats?” she asked, nodding at the scrap bucket – yet another labelless coffee can; I never knew where they got them because they never drank coffee, even when my mom was young.

I grabbed it and looked inside. “Will they eat potato peels?” I asked.

“They’ll eat what they eat,” she huffed, cracking the chicken’s breastbone as if for emphasis.

I dumped the scrap bucket into the cat’s food dish, near the walkway to their garage. The cat never came inside. She and her kittens heard, and came running.

My grandparents never named the cats. Like every cat before her, she was known as “the cat,” or if she made them angry, “that cat.” I petted the soft kittens while their mother ate. A few minutes later, Grandpa and my cousins pulled up to the house in the red Chevy truck. He called it the new truck; it was twenty years old.

“Thought she came fixed,” Grandpa said as he approached. His sweat-soaked brow and thick, cracked thumbnails were too real to have made it into that Thornton Wilder play. “We’ll take her in to do that in a bit, her and the couple’a the kittens we’ll keep. People used to drown kittens, you know – throw ‘em in a bag with a rock or some broken bricks and toss them in. I hated it. Always thought there was something disgusting with people who’d’a do that. ”

“They’re just cats,” Jeff said. He had even less direction than Dan, but a much bigger beer belly.

My grandpa frowned, taking his sweat-stained cowboy hat off to wipe his brow. “Get inside and wash your hands,” he commanded. We listened, entering through the garage and using the sink in

the mudroom.

After lunch, Jeff went straight to the old, blocky computer to play a sullen game of Minesweeper. Grandpa and Grandma went on their twice-monthly trip to Miles City, postponing the jelly making.

“We gotta move the trip up early, Ellen. Ashley Bruce needs some help fencing tomorrow – that wind took down ten yards of fence on her eastern border. All seven of those kids are younger than ten, so they aren’t much help.” Ashley Bruce’s husband, Bill, died a few months earlier, before calving season; my grandfather and three other ranchers in town divvied up her pregnant cattle to help her out.

They asked if we wanted to go; we all said no. The Walmart in Miles City was the same as the Walmart in Helena, and I wanted to read my book. Dan and Jeff had their own plans.

“Wanna shoot at some prairie dogs?” Jeff asked after Grandpa and Grandma left.

I tried to keep my face neutral. “No, not really.”

“Well, could you at least drive us?” he snapped, taking a chug of Bud Light. It had to be warm; he couldn’t keep it in the fridge. My grandparents didn’t allow alcohol on the ranch, partially because Dan and Jeff act like shitbags when they get drunk. He dangled the rest of the six pack from the empty loop.

“God, Jeff, she doesn’t have to drive, we’ll be fine,” Dan said. I looked at the beer in his hand, the six pack he was dangling by the empty loop. *When did Jeff hand it to him?* I looked back at Jeff, who still had a six pack. Christ.

“I’ll drive,” I said.

We took the old truck, pale green and rustier than the new truck, but still a Chevy. “Pavement Ends,” the sign said, and I slowed down as I hit the dirt road. After a couple miles, we turned off of it and back onto Grandpa’s ranchland. I waited in the driver’s seat as Dan and Jeff drunkenly fought over who would open the gate; they were each three beers in.

“I opened that gate for Grandpa this morning,” Jeff slurred.

“Yeah, but I opened all the gates all the other times *all* the other weeks,” Dan retorted, half-heartedly punching Jeff in the shoulder with his beer hand. It sloshed all over his lap, and the striped seats. *Grandpa will smell that.*

After Dan opened the gate and hopped back in, I drove over the rocky hills no one expects in Eastern Montana. “Stop here,” Dan said.

We got out of the truck. I stood on the other side of it from them, using it as a barrier between me and the prairie dog village. "I'm gonna go on a walk," I said.

Jeff laughed. "Christ, they're just prairie dogs." Dan laughed, too. They started loading their guns, fighting over who had the better brand: Remington (Jeff) or Ruger (Dan). Dan was brand loyal; he even named his kid Ruger.

As they loaded their guns and drank more beer (they were four beers in now), I walked around to the cab to get my water bottle and hat. Feeling guilty, I tried to ignore the holes in the ground as I rummaged through the cab, my left leg sticking up for balance.

The bullet hit my calf at the same moment I heard the gunshot.

It couldn't have been silent, but I do not remember any noise after the gunshot. I crumbled to the ground, on my stomach. I tried lifting my leg above my heart, but it burned and all I could think about was how cattle feel when we brand them. I tried asking Dan and Jeff to help, but my tongue throbbed, and so did my fingers, my scalp, my heart, my feet.

That nameless color flickered at the corner of my eye again, and I looked up. One of those strange flies fluttered its long, thin wings in a spider web. The web dangled from the underside of a dry bush, like a hammock; it was as long as my forearm. As I wondered why no spider came for the fly, it alit from the web and fluttered around it, bouncing up and down on the hammock before it took off. *A fairy hammock.*

I do not know where I read to do this; probably *National Geographic*, or a historic fiction piece like a Dear America diary. I forearm-crawled less than a yard to the bush, ripped the web from its dry branches and shoved the least debris-ridden part of it into the wound on my calf. It hurt so much that I couldn't scream. As I looked back at the bright blood trail in the dirt, wondering if it really could all be mine, the wound darkened, and began to clot. I looked up to Dan and Jeff, astonished and drunk, and the fly on its stomach -- *its stomach?* -- on a branch of a dry bush.

Before I could look closely at it, they lifted me into the cab of the truck and drove over prairie dog villages, hills, and dirt roads. "Abrupt Edge," said the yellow sign, and I braced myself for the jolt when the truck's wheels hit the pothole-riddled pavement. We drove straight to Dr. Gene Johnston's house, and it took both forever and no time at all.

The doctor answered the door. "Evie," he called to his wife as he escorted me through his house to the office in back. "Call Glenn Baird. Got his oldest girl's daughter here, with a gunshot wound." My mother hadn't been a girl for three decades.

"I don't know if he'll be home," I said. "They went to Miles City."

“I’ll try his car phone first,” Evie Johnston said. She dialed the number from memory; like my grandparents, their phone still had a cord.

The doctor glared at my cousins. “I’ll take her from here; you two don’t go anywhere until you’re sober. What caliber?”

“Just a .22,” Dan muttered, baseball cap in his hands.

The doctor left my cousins sitting in the front room. He pulled the spider web out of the hole with washed and gloved fingers, and inspected my leg. “Bullet is still in there, but it doesn’t look like it hit bone. You stick the web in there?” I nodded. “Good job. I can’t put you under general anesthetic,” he said. “But I can give you a local.”

Gene Johnston was a few years younger than my grandpa. He delivered my mother and her two sisters, and everyone else in town their age or younger. He vaccinated them, too. He treated my grandpa’s ingrown toenails; he prescribed EpiPens for my grandma’s bee allergy. And with steady hands, he helped me lay stomach-down on the exam table, cut open the left leg of my jeans and injected a local anesthetic behind my knee. While waiting for it to kick in, he called Evie into the room. “Why don’t you use this phone and call up Dick Glennfield,” he told her. “Didn’t want them to leave if they heard you call him from the house phone.” Dick Glennfield was in charge of Jordan’s five-person police force. “Dan Moffett and Jeff Rowe shot their little cousin in her calf while they were drunk,” she said. “No, no, not the little cousin, just Dan and Jeff were drunk.”

“I think you should probably look away while I clean you up,” Dr. Johnston said, pulling a tray of sterilized equipment near the table: gauze, iodine, scalpel, curette, kidney dishes, and tiny forceps – the kind TV doctors used to pinch arteries shut. I looked away, and saw one of the strange flies hovering above the flower box outside his office window. “Don’t know where those tiny pink ones came from,” he said. “Evie just replanted this year. She said she didn’t plant the pink ones, but she likes them. Thinks maybe some other seeds got mixed in with her new perennials.”

My grandparents brought me back home, but left Dan and Jeff in the jail overnight. They helped me to bed, and my grandmother brought me a bowl of vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup and caramel sauce. I lay under the chenille bedspread in my room, looking at my pale face in the dresser mirror. My leg, cleaned and dressed, hurt as bad as it had when I’d been shot. As I reached towards the lamp to turn it off, one of the strange flies landed on my bottle of pain medication (the pharmacist, Dr. Johnston’s brother-in-law, re-opened for emergencies) on my side table, its elegant, nameless-colored wings striking in the lamplight. It could have been the shock, or the pain, but the fly had a face.

PATCHWORK | STACIA HILL



NON-FICTION

THE SHOCK OF THE REAL COLLECTED JOURNALS FROM HERE AND THERE **CHRISSEY WEBB**

Thursday, April 10, 2014: Dirty Devil River, UT

Not so gently reminded today that wild nature is not meant for the weak-minded. My shoes began to rub my heels raw after pulling each foot out of the unforgiving jaws of fast acting mud. Though we walked with the current, tromping through the water (shin- to thigh- deep) was enough work to have me exhausted by lunch. Amelia and I both had traumatic experiences. We forced ourselves to take them in stride, laughing when all we needed was to cry. Her brief slip in the mud resulted in our whole crew yanking her out, a few sinking themselves. I took a bad step off of a bank, misjudging the river's depth; its café au crème color erased any hope of seeing bottom. Then I was face down: the suction of the mud, the current of the river, the weight of my monstrous pack all working against my ability to upright myself. John yanked me up, gasping, by the prayer flags on my pack. First inklings of desperation and helplessness.

My thighs look like large pills, those colored pills, long and round, a line sharply separating the colors at the mid-way point. The length of my thin nylon shorts separates winter white from burned red. The night is warm, though my fried skin would radiate heat no matter the temperature. I choose to sleep another night in the tent anyways. Before settling in, I glance up at the night sky to remind myself why I'm here. Lacking lotion, I rub Vaseline all over my legs; sand immediately sticks to me.

...

Friday, April 10, 2015: Mansfield Library, Missoula, MT

I'm offered a chocolate Easter egg by a boy I've never spoken to, even seen or noticed for that matter. Confused, I take the egg. Feeling lousy, I assume he senses my inherent need of chocolate. It's not the first time an unknown male has offered me chocolate; it's the second. The first time I was buying spices in bulk to cook a turkey, which, ironically was also a first time event. The cashier, sensing my lack of domestic confidence, handed me a small, potentially foreign, chocolate bar. The label read "Daim!" I still have the chocolate in my backpack.

Dylan is over for dinner. All three roommates flirt, two of us knowing he's taken by the third. He eats spilled salad from his lap and discusses Texan manners, what his mother would say if she saw him do such a thing. His pants are dark blue, baggy corduroy, the kind you never really see sold but always see people wearing. Anyways, I take advantage of the opportunity to stare at his crotch, at those big climber hands groping for every last bit of cabbage. I usually don't chop my vegetables so finely; perhaps the chocolate egg had me unconsciously dreaming of fertility.

Saturday, April 12, 2014: Dirty Devil River, UT

Today I relished the most lackadaisical day since my pre-trips days of loafing in Billings. I left my sleeping bag only to pee, watching its quick absorption into the dry sand every time, and otherwise remained horizontal until 11ish to dip in the river. Dani, Amelia, and I stripped down and wallowed in the mud, comparing tan lines, burn lines, and far-off stories of adolescence. Today, the mud was friend, not foe, as we discovered the magical silkiness of purposeful sinking. Of course thunder rolled in not long after. I'm starting to believe the weather of the west repels contentedness more than I. I was exhilarated by the power of the first electrical storm I'd experienced in the desert. Breaking regulation and walking back to camp barefoot, we came upon a grouping of skinny, black, dry potato-esque roots protruding from the eroded stream bank. Running low on food, I immediately saw salvation in this homely tuber and collected a few: greasy fries! hash browns! chips! Salted starch, a staple I've since been without. Patrick, upon inspection, claimed he knew of only one potato-esque plant in the desert: *Datura*. Hallucinogenic, deadly, beautiful *Datura*; large, white-blossomed *Datura*, with scents nauseatingly sweet and intoxicating. Food cravings forgotten in the name of endlessly intriguing desert botany.

...

Sunday, April 12, 2015: Front lawn, Woodford homestead, Missoula, MT

Parker offers delicate New Zealand hot chocolate and biscotti—gifts from her parents. I suggest beer, one red ale and one Busch—gifts from my parents. She gets the Busch. I never claimed to be a good hostess, and I feel sickeningly like my father when I drink Busch.

Sitting in alley-found lawn chairs, weather indecisive but generally unwelcoming, I feel strangely mature, discussing plans for the future. She's wrapped in a blanket and is wearing a few sweaters, one came from the same dumpster as our faux hot fudge sauce in the fridge. I'm barefoot. We discuss our days, because we're roommates and not every conversation has to be so intellectual. She planted tiny flowers and learned sexy, new facts about her cowboy boss. I wore waders and picked up pebbles in Lolo Creek.

Wednesday, April 16, 2014: Dirty Devil River, Happy Canyon, UT

In Happy Canyon, you can hear the rush of the nearby river. I know this sound; it was the sound of camping as a child. But I could never tell if it was angry wind, or a promising river, or rushing cars. No question here—I know that turbid water and its sound of constant movement. Patrick's quiet strumming of the faithful ukulele interrupts the homogeneity; I don't mind.

The narrowest portion of Happy is stunning. Stone curves, sensuous in their form, intensify with evening shadows. The beauty is delicate, even feminine, and will leave soon. But this crack in the Earth will remain. Tomorrow the shadows will be just as elegant.

Sunday, November 16, 2014: Cabin in the woods outside of Bonner, MT

A poem

A responsibility, I'm told
Stomach the rewards,
Stomach the act.
Cuddling to limp
the nerves say no
Thumper wants to jump more

...

iron does not let go
“his eyes are open,
but he is dead”
now my first cringe

a severed black head
placed in the snow
frightening in purity

the blood,
wrongful in cheerfulness
gives warmth to black and white

something ancient makes it ok.
bare hands fracture legs
clean tools have done this before.

like removing a shirt
from a small child
more human, less fur

This is the liver,
and an offer to consume.
This is the heart,
and watch it beat in my palm.
This is the digestive system
and the shit never reaches full potential.

Friday, April 18, 2014: Hanksville, UT

We haven't been out of the canyon for a full day, but I feel myself staggering back into a “civilized” lifestyle. Already messing around on my phone, dedicated to that devilish little screen. Lathering my body to a state of unnatural cleanliness, making drier my parched skin than the ceaseless sand of

the Dirty Devil. Gulping down food without even a thought of its meaning, of its sacredness. It's a way of living unconsciously. I hope I don't so easily fall back into this trance at the course's end. But I must admit that music has been glorious to hear again. 14 days with nothing but a few known chords on the uke and the irrationally bad array of songs that would come, and never leave, my mind. The bacon cheeseburger and chocolate strawberry malt at Blondie's was a near spiritual experience. Perhaps I'm just a little overwhelmed.

Tuesday, November 18, 2014: Studio, Missoula, MT

Tonight I earn \$20. I start by sitting, a large wicker chair. I've committed myself to the unwise position of a turned head, propped up with the left hand. Both quickly go numb and I know I'll have red splotches from the pressure. We break, Margot has brought snacks: chips and beer; a classic in my mind but not what I assume the artsy world to consume.

Napping comes easily now, due in part to the free beer but mainly the sprawled lying pose. I always worry my legs will flop open too far; I'm naked but there are still lines I don't want to cross. The room is full of females and just one gay man. Drooling should really be more of a concern.

Saturday, April 26, 2014: Navajo Nation

Our sweat became much more intense. Perhaps it was the mountain tobacco, smoked from a stone pipe, bright green in color, reminiscent of another familiar herb. I didn't know what the mixture of ten different native plants would do. "It's a deep bowl," William said, "toke as much as you like." We were later chastised for being such terrible smokers; I tried not to be offended, it had been a while.

He sang to us, explaining the significance behind each song. This is what I'd been wanting to hear. But I'm frustrated. William told us these cultural traditions are what give him hope in the face of the sometimes desolate social situation of his tribe and reservation, yet he hasn't passed these down to his children.

"My parents only hoped to give us a life better than their own," he told us, and he's making the same attempts now as a parent. But what is "better?" Certainly not the white, consumeristic lifestyle of the majority of Americans?

I lit the fire to heat the rocks. I saw colors and shapes in our third round. We sang Meg's melancholy rowing song, its slow and steady beat the only thing that kept my mind from floating away completely. But I loved it; I loved the worn comforters used as an insulating door, keeping the heat

stout in the earthen mound. I loved the sage and red earth we scrubbed on our naked bodies. I loved how close I felt with the desert, and these strong women. We used old corrugated cans to scoop warm water from a garbage can, rinsing ourselves, cleansing ourselves.

Monday, January 26, 2015: Missoula, MT

Parker got an abortion today.
I went to school today.

Tuesday, May 6, 2014: Night alone, Dark Canyon Wilderness, UT

I sit somewhere I'll never sit again. Here I'm as emotional as the intense red rock; its sand is embedded into my being and I glad. The solitude makes me attentive.

I wash my hair with yucca root, a traditional Navajo ceremony. My ceremony is solitude; my deity is the Wild. The pools on the canyon floor disappear in the evening; I walk to find water and find mountain lion tracks. Cliff fendlerbush is in bloom. Tonight I'll sleep beneath the stars.

Shirt comes off. Head of a side canyon, unnamed, my own—so like a womb. Pants come off. Boots stay on, feet are essential, if not glamorous. Wilderness is naked canyon yoga.

“Goodnight moon,” I whispered, and longed for a response.

Tuesday, January 6, 2015: Deli counter, Billings, MT

Semi-homeless man looks over our local, made-with-honey truffles. He says to me: “Look at that dread! That’s tight. You’re killin’ me. How much are those chocolates?” I don’t know if he’s actually interested in purchasing one, no one ever seems interested in purchasing one, or if he’s just putting on an air of potential purchasing so as not to feel awkward.

Me: “\$2.50.”

Him: “You’re killin’ me.”

...

Thursday, May 8, 2014: Dark Canyon, UT

“Water changes everything,” Meg wisely said. Dirty Devil’s water changed things, not always in the best way. This water is different. It’s clear and runs gently; its bottom doesn’t attempt to eat slow feet. We rediscover the power of our most primeval desire.

Water turns desert into jungle. We swim in deep blue pools, as mysterious as they are inviting, with reeds the size of trees. I let the roots touch my toes, and shiver not from the cold. Canyon tree frogs share the pool, kicking their plumb little hind legs like Jar-Jar Binks. Below our pool, the cool water cascades over a bed of bright green algae to create the first and finest waterfall I’d seen in the desert.

Crazy to think of how little time we have left out here. Too much confusion; too much distraction; too little time to sit and think and take in the pleasantness of this life; too many people and too few canyon tree frogs; too many worries about things other than food, water, and warmth.

Monday, December 8, 2014: Intersection of Franklin and Woodford, Missoula, MT

I wept over *Dances with Wolves*. Crying during films is one of my favorite activities. It’s easier to cry over situations and people I’m not really connected to than to cry over those that I really know, unfortunately. Society fears tears, or maybe I fear what society will think of me if they see me in tears. Anyways, tonight Kevin Costner and Two Socks were the outlet for my sadness.

I paused it during a buffalo hunt scene. There’s this skull I’ve been eyeing that lives in the flower bed (though no flowers grow) of an empty house down the street; it’s my understanding the skull is tragically underappreciated in such a home. I leashed Coca and took a small reusable grocery bag, the floral handmade one from my grandmother, walked the few blocks and it was mine. There was an unsettling uprooting noise and more resistance than I expected as I lifted him. But I left flowers in his place and consider it, one-sidedly maybe, a good trade. I celebrated at Rose Park with some animalistic noises, and my dog flashed a few judgmental glances my way. Here, perhaps, is something society fears more than tears: savagery.

Tuesday, May 20, 2014: Green River, Labyrinth Canyon, UT

Tonight I say goodnight to this life of backcountry tramping. No better place to do it. This camp ranks high on my list of most beautiful and welcoming. Stunning little nooks are linked together

by trails alongside steep canyon walls. Tamarisk is now in bloom; though invasive I can't help myself from thinking it luscious and tropical. Looking up at the interplay of familiar bur oak leaves and blue blue sky I think of Dandelion Wine: "Finest kind of lace there is," Father Spaulding says to the boys. It's summer and I feel it. There's little responsivity now that we're near the course's end. We float in the sun and sometimes paddle. We shit comfortably in a bucket affectionately called "The Groover," in individual little baggies complete with wet wipes wrapped in American flag decorated packaging. It rotates canoes daily, and now we've added sage to mask its ripe odor. Hot sun does not help; but I can't complain, 1/8th of that stank is mine. The canyon is narrow and well-traveled. Without groovers we'd be swimming in, camping on, even drinking all the shits of paddlers' past. Wind blew again against us today, preventing casual "float 'n bloats." But it's not every day you get to lose yourself in the rhythmic motion of canoeing. Hear the lull of moving water—purpose but no hurry. Tomorrow we'll pass Horseshoe Canyon, where we began two months ago. With luck I'll be a different person than I was then.

Dani and I swam naked under the moon, saying goodbye to this sacred body of water, this soothing teacher, this unruly friend.

Friday, October 31, 2014: Missoula, MT

Gussied up, unibrow and all, channeling my inner Frida. Then there was much dancing; I was sweaty and didn't even consider the smudging unibrow but felt tall and powerful, a rare breed of woman. Cooper played new, strange music I wanted to remember but couldn't.

Suddenly we were in the streets, Cooper, Nick, James, and I. Running through alleys; pit stop to dance and drink with strangers. Nick might have done a keg stand, but maybe that was a fantasy of granola meeting jock.

Shimmied through windows of the ROTC gym. Warm women's locker room, decorated distastefully, 70's-eque and unpleasant. Then the dark gymnasium, kicking a single artificial candle they found eerily on the window sill, and not saying much, not needing to say much. They got the big rope down from the ceiling, the kind we used to swing on in elementary school gym class. That's just what we did now; I was pleased to not trip over my long skirt, or tall bots, or intoxication. It was nearly silent; every noise I did hear sounded threatening.

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Wednesday, May 21, 2014: Green River, Labyrinth Canyon, UT

A letter

“All good things must come to an end,” Dani reminds me. My heart breaks. Perhaps this is necessary; perhaps this is not a break but an expansion of the heart. For my current capacity for friendship is fulfilled; my thoughts overwhelmed by the philosophical beauties of Earth; my vision engrained with the vivid alien landscapes I’ve called home for two months. But time passes, the river moves, and so must we.

Today we returned to Horseshoe very much a family, very much different from the awkward group that was here last. More flowers have blossomed, more trees have leafed out. The sun shines brighter, hotter, more intensely. The river grew mightier. And yet the wind still blew, on it riding the undeniable urgency of change.

Change. We became masters of this trade—changing homes nightly, changing perspectives, habits, lifestyles.

We came upon a slab, broken from a more massive cliff, decorated with petroglyphs. In it I saw an infinity symbol. What its original meaning was I will never know, but I found timely significance in its simple elegance. “Nothing is ever lost except that epiphenomenon known as human delight,” Ed Abbey said. I don’t foresee one ounce of delight being lost within this fine group of organic souls. Though we’ll soon go our separate ways, live our own unique lives, spread our enthusiasm here and there and everywhere, the power of this experience is infinite and will never be lost.

Happy journeys, my dear friends.

PTSD
MADISON HINRICHS

My life is happening all at once
 day
 night
 week
 year
it's all the same to me now.
 Now
 that I have come back
 Now
 that I have seen
What is this?
 This never ending,
 ever aching,
 pain
blossoming inside me,
 etched
 into my soul,
 etched
 into my mind.
When a car door slams,
 I see
 my once solid comrade
 shatter into a million pieces,

like broken words, blown to hell
across an empty page.

As a baby cries,
I see
his wife's tears
when I had to lie and say,
"Heaven gained another soldier."

I walk in the annual Fourth-of-July parade,
I walk as
crowds of people stand in line
just to shake my hand and say
"Thank you for serving our country."

Thank you, they say.
they say
thank you.

What is this?
They're thanking me?
They're thanking me and beneath my skin
I burn for the unforgivable sins of this hellish world.
My soul contorts as another mis-informed
civilian shakes my sweaty, blood stained hand.

They say thank you,
and all I see
is the starving faces of helpless people,
helpless people that I could have saved,
but I killed them instead,
and for what?
My government?
My freedom?
Bullshit.

I am free, my country is free, and those
starving faces were no threat to that,
and even if they were... Why is our happiness

worth so much more than theirs?

Sure, freedom comes at a price,
but sometimes it is too damn expensive.

Think about that next time you shake my hand
and say thank you.

Thank you
for killing innocent civilians.

Thank you
for following orders blindly.

Thank you
for playing God.

Thank you
for ruining your mind.

I see myself
point and shoot

I see myself
duck and cover

I see myself
scream and cry,
blindly in my sleep.

I see myself
walk and wave,
and smile for the children

I see myself,
throw them candy
across the empty air.
like the misplaced limbs
of another exploding soldier

I see myself.
I see my country.

And...
I
am
ashamed.

But the world just
keeps on turning.

EILEAN DONAN | ERIKA TIBBETTS



BIRDWATCHERS CLUB

ELLEN IPSEN

The man slammed the door on his faded blue Ford before he remembered he had left his brief-case in the passenger seat. He slowly searched his pockets for the key he had held mere seconds before — somehow they were already lost. He had been distracted all day at work and didn't finish the report that should have been done yesterday. Before going inside, he examined the cracks in his windshield. They looked like they had spread, but he wasn't quite sure.

He could smell something cooking from inside and his stomach growled. Still, he saw his neighbor in the yard across the street and went to chat. He didn't particularly like small talk, but he went to chat. He found out his neighbor's laundry room had flooded, and could they possibly borrow two eggs? They were out.

Finally he headed in to the house. He remembered he had set up a new 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle on his work table and sighed. Now he would have to work at the dining room table. The atmosphere in the living room was all wrong for work. There was a painting in the corner that he hated and the lighting was too bright in one corner and the rest of the room felt like a shadow. But it was there or take apart the unfinished puzzle.

The man's wife was calling him for dinner but he hadn't finished his evening cup of tea — English Breakfast with a splash of milk. His daughter once told him it was funny, he only drank English "Breakfast" tea before dinner and never with breakfast. But he thought, English Breakfast is just a name and tea time was at 5:30 PM.

Dinner that night was good. It was some new recipe from the exotic cookbook his wife was trying out. Most of the new things she made were alright, but sometimes he wished they could have ordered pizza. He didn't say that. But that night dinner was good. Besides, they had ordered pizza the

night before and they were progressing towards being on first name basis with the delivery boy.

They quickly did the dishes before he sat in his favorite chair to watch a bit of the game. It was baseball season, his favorite. He also liked football season, but wasn't much of a basketball fan. His favorite team, the Minnesota Twins, were doing average. He wished they would do better, but he was loyal and would never want to be labeled a "band-wagoner."

The Twins lost and he looked at his watch. It was getting late. He had better start on that report. Instead, he decided to work on his jigsaw puzzle a bit first. Within an hour, he successfully finished the border. The border of the puzzle was the easiest and should be completed first. He refused to look at the picture on the outside of the box because that was cheating, but he knew this puzzle was some sort of forest scene. He looked at his watch, it was getting really late.

Finally, he sat down at his laptop set up in the living room. He rearranged to be closer to the light. With concentration, he finished the report in an hour. Maybe not his best work, but it was complete work. Good enough, it was time for bed. He was laying in bed when he remembered he hadn't brought the neighbor those eggs.

The woman had been busy all day. She had walked the dogs, gotten coffee with a friend, gone to work, and gone on a bike ride. She was always doing something. She liked it that way. When she got home, she pondered what to make. They had ordered pizza the night before, so she wanted to make something. Something new and exciting.

She got out her new cookbook. Her friend had brought it back for her from her latest trip. Her friend was always going on exciting trips and discovering the world. But she always brought the woman back a cookbook. The woman flipped through the book before settling on something — compared to some of the recipes she had recently tried, it was a plain dish but looked easy enough to make.

She absentmindedly started sautéing vegetables and looking out the window. There was a bird at the bird feeder that her husband had put up when they first moved into the house years ago. He still filled it and the birds kept coming back.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw her husband was home, parking his pick-up. He was examining the window. Or looking for something. She couldn't tell from inside. She didn't understand why he loved that truck so much. She knew he could afford something nicer. He worked a lot and wasn't a big spender. But he kept that truck and probably would until he died or it did.

Now she saw him talking to the neighbor — the ones she didn't care for. Their boys were always running around the streets as if they had no parents at all. That was okay though, she got along quite well with the neighbors directly to her left and three doors down to the right.

Dinner was ready, but her husband had yet to finish his precious tea. He finally came down and ate. He gave her a rare complement on her cooking. She disagreed wholeheartedly and found this particular dish quite bland. She would not be making it again. Next time, she would make something more exotic.

Afterwards, she did all the dishes. Her husband was doing something-or-other in the kitchen, but mainly just in the way. She was looking forward to watching a movie she had recorded on the TV, but by the time she got there, her husband was watching a baseball game, which usually took hours. They had another TV, but that room was always cold and her movie wasn't recorded there.

She decided to go up and read, but she only got a few pages into her book before she fell asleep with the bedside lamp still on.

The weekend was finally here and the man had exciting plans. In fact, plans he had been looking forward to all month. He was going birdwatching! He was going to get up early the next morning, drive to the wildlife reserve, and spend a glorious day tromping about the marsh, bird book and binoculars in hand.

He had recently inherited his son's iPhone, which he wasn't entirely sure how to use. He had gotten into many arguments with his kids about their generation's dependence on such devices. They got mad that he didn't see their calls for days after, but he didn't really see the big deal. Besides, he used his new iPhone plenty. In fact, he had learned how to download applications. He was very excited to try his new birdwatching app. It played five bird calls for every species. He had paid twenty dollars for it, which his kids told him was an insane amount for an app. But he couldn't think of a better way to spend twenty dollars.

His son used to come on these expeditions with him. His daughter occasionally used to come on these expeditions. Now they were both gone, but he would call them to tell them about his day. His wife had never come, she scoffed at the idea of birdwatching.

In four hours, he saw twenty-five species of birds. What a day! He was excited to tell his friends about it. He was meeting them at his favorite brewery later that night. He had even used his new app a few times, although he found he liked the book more. He didn't take photos but the day had been so beautiful that he had wished he had a camera. Or an artistic eye.

On his drive home, he wondered why birdwatching was considered "lame," as his son had eloquently put it. He didn't consider himself to be old yet, so why was everyone calling it a grandfather's hobby. He called his son to ask him, but his son never even answered his question. His son wouldn't stop laughing at him for forgetting that his iPhone had a camera. Maybe he was getting old. He sup-

posed it didn't really matter.

Besides, he was joining Birdwatchers Club next month.

The woman sat listlessly on the couch. All of her friends were busy. Her kids were gone. Her husband was birdwatching. She had asked him to go to a play that night, but he hated the theatre and despised musicals. Typical.

She absentmindedly flipped through a magazine she found laying on the coffee table. She tried watching TV. She took the dogs on a walk. She cleaned the house.

Finally, she tried calling a friend she had drifted apart from, but alas, she was too busy. She called her daughter who talked to her for an hour. Her daughter gushed about some new guy, some exciting class, some cool trip she was taking.

She decided she would bake something to fill the time. She settled on a classic – chocolate chip cookies. She started mixing everything together. She was excited because she hadn't baked anything in a while. Maybe she would even take some to her neighbors.

She went to the fridge for some eggs, but they were out.

The man came home one day. He couldn't find his wife anywhere in the house. He figured she was with a friend or running errands. He was content having the house to himself for a few moments of peace.

Dinner time approached and she still wasn't there. He was getting hungry. He waited a little while longer before deciding to start making something. Before he started cooking, he called his wife, out of curiosity. She didn't answer.

Later that night, she came in the front door silently. She seemed okay. He asked her where she'd been. She said she drove down to see their daughter. That was four hours away so she must have been gone all day. He was surprised.

That morning, she got up. Then she decided she wanted coffee from that one coffee shop. The neighborhood cafe near her daughter's new house had the best coffee. If she remembered correctly. She wanted that coffee. So she called in sick to work. On the way there, she cried a little, but she didn't know why. On the way back, she sobbed.

The daughter remembered a story she used to tell her brother. They only told it to him up at the beach cabin they went to every summer. Her favorite place. A place they hadn't been in year.

A mythical bird exists in the Daybob Bay Grove: a Snipe. Snipes change form and can look like anything. A tree, a chair, a sister. A Snipe is powerful and evil. A Snipe may be in the house. It may be in a bedroom. It may be anywhere. It is impossible to tell if a Snipe is there or not. If a Snipe is there, you need to catch it. If you don't catch it, you will have bad luck forever. If a Snipe doesn't find you, you're lucky. It takes years to catch a Snipe.

Once a young man came to visit Daybob Bay and with his wife and a Snipe discovered him because his life was so happy. The Snipe was there the day the man left his wife. He was there the day the man lost his job. He was there the day the man drowned in the ocean. The man didn't believe the Snipe was a problem, so the Snipe was angry and persistent.

The son didn't know what to make of this story. His sister told it to him to scare him, he knew that. But he couldn't sleep for a weeks, because he was convinced there was a Snipe under his bed. As he grew up, he knew for sure the Snipe wasn't real. And he didn't live at Daybob Bay. But every once in a while, he thought his family was followed by a Snipe. One they could never quite catch.

The woman sat on the porch swing. Her son had just sent her a message telling her he had a dream about the Snipe. The Snipe he used to run around with a pillow case and flash light try-ing to catch. She laughed at the memory.

The man came home and saw his wife sitting on the porch swing. She was smiling. He went out and asked her if she wanted to go birdwatching that weekend with him. He didn't know what he wanted the answer to be.

The woman coughed in surprise. The old porch swing creaked. She almost said yes. The man went back inside and made his tea. He half-heartedly smiled.

Birdwatching. Old men. Typical.

ISLA NEGRA

BRENDAN JORDAN

*“porque estoy triste y viejo,
y conozco la tierra, y estoy triste.”*
— Pablo Neruda

*“Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son
Eleazar; and Aaron died there on top of the mountain.”*
— Numbers 20:28

I would not return, could not
even find the dot on the map.
I keep rescuing caterpillars
with dry sticks—from the roadway,
the lawn where I stumble,
kicking my grief between feet like a
child kicks his blue, shattered yoyo.
I come back specifically for revelations, for kites
tossing orange to the wind, for Paul
writing to cottonwoods already killed, for melancholy
dogs walking with slack
leashes, for fishing lines,
for headphones
cutting contact; I come knowing cloudbursts
over northern mountains call, like spitting waves

& the colossal fall calling to a man on the edge
of earth; I come knowing
the clouds of daymoths, tennis shoes
draped like a tanning hide over the wire; this bridge
my own Isle of Elba lost within petals
that fall away, twice.

It is not only granite hills that form teeth
to puncture the electric dusk, not only trout
that gaze curses at the hands clasped
to rod & never the nettles that strike
first: It is also Aaron stripped bare,
not the last failed prophet banished to nightfall:
it is the same violet light
tapping the window with seedpods that missed
the mark: it is roadtrips leaking
guilt out behind them, five hundred miles
left: & it is the same collapsing bedroom
I wake alone from, alone to.

I go like Neruda to black shorelines
to pretend the last dying star of morning shuts
off like a lighthouse in sunlight, that tidepools
I've never returned to still harbor
the same magenta urchins, the starfish
stealing turquoise from salt, I go
to any shore once,
knowing how barnacles erode their mooring,
how some sea turtles get lost,
returning to alien coasts.

On top of everything, sequoias wrung chimes
from my younger hands; the monk's palm shook

with more dawn than any wafer; and still
I cannot imagine the meadowlark sings
for me, or the sunken kayak lifts ever
from the greedy river, of that all caterpillars
do not die in brown coffins they weave
for themselves. I cannot imagine Aaron
did not cry, muttering the old tales of red
fruits dripping juice like venom. I cannot
imagine the bristlecone (bound to its windswept
mountain) does not some days wish to burn
in the hearth, & curse the young lupines
still climbing the dizzy air.

DECLINE | STACIA HILL



NON-FICTION

EXCERPT FROM (SHE'S SO HEAVY) LAUREN KORN

00. Preface

“...Without a soundtrack, human interaction is meaningless.”
Chuck Klosterman, “Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs”

I wonder now whether or not I should have attempted to explain this collection with the following preface, but it being what it is – something a bit like myself: scattered and unsure, but completely aware of itself – I will assume responsibility and believe it necessary to have done so.

Here, I have gathered together a number of essays. Introducing each essay is a list of albums that were released during the year in focus. Admittedly, these lists are long, but I've kept them as-is, pre-edit, because the mere fact that I was unable to reduce them to a more pleasing (read: lesser) number says a lot about the person (and the very stubborn writer) that I am. I struggled with the image of myself that would inevitably be projected in these lists: the obsessed girl-child that knows every Mariah Carey song by heart, the awkward adolescent that loves the boy- and girl- bands of the '90s, the twenty-something that yearns for a depth that can embody an appreciation for both Bruce Springsteen and for Dinosaur Jr.

Although this piece was intended to be one about the role music has played in my life, its final form is and will be more of a reflection on the relationships formed by music than on the music itself.

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01. Nineteen Eighty Eight

AC/DC – Blow Up Your Video
Megadeth – So Far, So Good... So What!
Robert Plant – Now & Zen
Leonard Cohen – I'm Your Man
Ted Nugent – If You Can't Lick 'Em... Lick 'Em
Morrissey – Viva Hate
The Pixies – Surfer Rosa
Joan Jett and the Blackhearts – Up Your Alley
Joni Mitchell – Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm
The Talking Heads – Naked
Tracy Chapman – Tracy Chapman
Butthole Surfers – Hairway to Steven
Iron Maiden – Seventh Son of a Seventh Son
Eric Clapton – Crossroads
Public Enemy – It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back
Prince – Lovesexy
Rod Stewart – Out of Order
Van Halen – OU812
Bob Dylan – Down in the Groove
Hall & Oates – Ooh Yeah!

Jimmy Page – Outrider
Iggy Pop – Instinct
Patti Smith – Dream of Life
Slayer – South of Heaven
Pat Benetar – Wide Awake in Dreamland
Salt-n-Pepa – A Salt with a Deadly Pepa
Jane's Addiction – Nothing Shocking
Bruce Springsteen – Chimes of Freedom
New Kids on the Block – Hangin' Tough
U2 – Rattle and Hum
Ozzy Osbourne – No Rest for the Wicked
Frank Zappa – Broadway the Hard Way
Sonic Youth – Daydream Nation
Dinosaur Jr. – Bug
Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young – American Dream
Guns 'n' Roses – G N' R Lies
Jerry Garcia – Almost Acoustic
My Bloody Valentine – Isn't Anything
Social Distortion – Prison Bound
GWAR – Hell-o

I should have been an Aries, but my mother smoked cigarettes when she was pregnant with me, so I'm a Capricorn instead. She went into labor three months before my due date – our due date – and was airlifted from Helena, Montana to Salt Lake City, Utah, the night of her older brother's New Year's Eve party. She had a C-section five hundred miles from home and celebrated the New Year in a hospital bed.

I was born January 2, 1988, at 12:59AM.

02. Nineteen Ninety Three

Jerry Garcia and David Grisman – Not For Kids Only
Nirvana – In Utero
Phish – Rift
Dinosaur Jr. – Where You Been
Superchunk – On the Mouth
Ace of Base – The Sign (US Release)
New Order – Republic
Bad Brains – Rise

Mariah Carey – Music Box
Tears for Fears – Elemental
Billy Idol – Cyberpunk
Cyndi Lauper – Hat Full of Stars
Fugazi – In on the Kill Taker
Bjork – Debut
The Breeders – Last Splash
The Melvins – Houdini

Rush – Counterparts
Iron Maiden – A Real Dead One
Pearl Jam – Vs.
Kate Bush – The Red Shoes
Wu-Tang Clan – Enter the Wu-Tang Clan (36 Chambers)
Iggy Pop – American Caesar
The Cure – Show
Yo La Tengo – Painful

The Lemonheads – Come On Feel the Lemonheads
Salt-n-Pepa – Very Necessary
David Bowie – Black Tie, White Noise
Tool – Undertow
Aerosmith – Get a Grip
Run-D.M.C. – Down with the King
Pat Benetar – Gravity’s Rainbow

“As far as I’m concerned, the ‘90s was the best era for music ever...”

Rob Sheffield, *Love is a Mix Tape*

The basement in the house that I grew up in wasn’t renovated until I was in high school, and it being an old house meant that I spent my childhood weekends running my fingers through orange and brown shag carpeting, at eye level with wallpaper of the same color, and thinking it completely normal to want to butter the ceiling, add salt.

On one wall of the basement sat a large, wooden case made in haste by my father who needed a space to store his constantly-expanding vinyl record collection. As a five year old, this case was enormous, covering the wall in its entirety. As an adult, I realize now that there’s no way the case could have reached the length of the wall, most likely covering a third of the wall, half at best. On the adjacent wall sat the stereo system and television console. Below the television, VHS recordings of two-in-one birthday parties and pirated movies were somewhat organized by genre; below the stereo, cassette tapes lined up in rows, un-alphabetically and in plastic cases that weren’t their own.

It won’t be until I reach the awkward age of twelve that I will realize that having grown up listening to cassette tapes of Jerry Garcia singing about teddy bears picnicking was something that could (and eventually would) project me into that certain social aesthetic known as the neo-hippie; my full evolution into dreadlocks, Birkenstocks, and marijuana won’t come until two years after such a revelation.

03. Nineteen Ninety Four

Meat Puppets – Too High to Die
Fugees – Blunted on Reality
Green Day – Dookie
Cake – Motorcade of Generosity
Beastie Boys – “Some Old Bull Shit” and Ill Communication
Pavement – Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain

Willie Nelson – Moonlight Becomes You
Beck – Stereopathic Soul Manure; Mellow Gold; and One Foot in the Grave
Cheap Trick – Woke Up with a Monster
Elvis Costello – Brutal Youth
Nine Inch Nails – The Downward Spiral

Insane Clown Posse – Ringmaster
 Soundgarden – Superunknown
 Selena – Amor Prohibido
 Bonnie Raitt – Longing in Their Hearts
 Proclaimers – Hit the Highway
 Morrissey – Vauxhall and I
 Phish – Hoist
 Hole – Live Through This
 Rollins Band – Weight
 Superchunk – Foolish
 Illmatic – Nas
 Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds – Let Love In
 Johnny Cash – American Recordings
 Allman Brothers Band – Where It All Begins
 Sonic Youth – Experimental Jet Set, Trash, and No Star
 Violent Femmes – New Times
 Stevie Nicks – Street Angel
 David Byrne – David Byrne
 Aalyiah – Age Ain't Nothin' But a Number
 Spin Doctors – Turn It Upside Down
 Alan Jackson – Who I Am
 Rolling Stones – Voodoo Lounge
 Riders in the Sky – Cowboys in Love

Elliott Smith – Roman Candle
 NOFX – Punk in Drublic
 Prince – Come
 Neil Young and Crazy Horse – Sleep with Angels
 Public Enemy – Muse Sick-n-Hour Mess Age
 Dinosaur Jr. – Without a Sound
 Amy Grant – House of Love
 Usher – Usher
 Notorious B.I.G. – Ready to Die
 Built to Spill – There's Nothing Wrong with Love
 Massive Attack – Protection
 R.E.M. – Monster
 Weird Al Yankovic – Permanent Record
 Dave Matthews Band – Under the Table and Dreaming
 Slayer – Divine Intervention
 KoЯn – KoЯn
 The Melvins – Stoner Witch
 The Sea and Cake – The Sea and Cake
 TLC – Crazy Sexy Cool
 Pearl Jam – Vitalogy
 Mary J. Blige – My Life
 Sublime – Robbin' the Hood
 Spoon – Nefarious

On top of my father's wooden vinyl record case sat the first of what would be numerous gag gifts: a jewel case. Inside the case, a photo of a girl-child on a swing shielding her eyes from the sun and looking searchingly at a looming figure in front of her.

From 1994 – the year KoЯn released their full-length, self-titled debut album – until 2006, the cluttered top shelf of my parents' record case became home to their schizophrenic CD collection, which included numerous copies of the seven albums had KoЯn released during that time, as well as copies of Enya, Amy Grant, Willie Nelson, The Beatles, and sound recordings of cowboy poets in Nevada.

04. Nineteen Ninety Six

Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds – Murder Ballads
 Iggy Pop – Naughty Little Doggie
 Hanson – MMMBop
 The Descendents – Everything Sucks
 Neutral Milk Hotel – On Avery Island

The Cranberries – To the Faithful Departed
 Paul Westerberg – Eventually
 Backstreet Boys – Backstreet Boys
 Butthole Surfers – Electriclarryland
 The Cure – Wild Mood Swings

Brian Jonestown Massacre – Take it from the Man; Thank God For Mental Illness	Silver Jews – The Natural Bridge
Slayer – Undisputed Attitude	Marilyn Manson – Antichrist Superstar
Patti Smith – Gone Again	The Lemonheads – Car Button Cloth
LeAnn Rimes – Blue	КоЯн – Life is Peachy
Sublime – Sublime	Phish – Billy Breathes
Fiona Apple – Tidal	Wilco – Being There
A Tribe Called Quest – Beats, Rhymes, and Life	NOFX – Heavy Petting Zoo
Social Distortion – White Light, White Heat, White Trash	Ghostface Killah – Ironman
Riders in the Sky – Cowboy Songs	The Spice Girls – Spice
Bad Brains – Black Dots	Space Jam – Soundtrack from the Motion Picture
Nirvana – From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah	Prince – Emancipation
	Bjork – Telegram

I was eight years old the Christmas I was given my first compact disc, and I don't remember knowing about the technology before the moment I tore the wrapping off of Elton John's *Don't Shoot Me, I'm Only the Piano Player*. It seemed odd to me even then that my parents would choose this particular album, as neither of them had or have any particular affinity for it or for Elton John. I do know my mother fairly well, however, and have surmised that there must have been a 3-for-1 deal at Wal-Mart the Friday after Thanksgiving that year; LeAnn Rimes, The Spice Girls, and Elton John seem, in this context, logical picks. (EDIT: As it turns out, although *Don't Shoot Me...* was released in its original format in 1989, it was released on CD in 1996. Perhaps Jane Fisher just snagged a handful of New Releases.) Also, apparently, worth noting: it may have been the first CD I can claim to have owned, but it wasn't until a friend wrote "Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid" on a dollar bill and passed it to me in English class as a sophomore in high school that Elton John played even a minute role in my life; my romantic entanglements with the film *Almost Famous* (in which Kate Hudson croons Elton's "Tiny Dancer" to a moon-eyed Patrick Fugit and a bus full of pseudo rock stars) are copious (but not to be dwelled upon here, in this particular tangent).

This was also the year that my mother gave our family's outdated desktop computer – in all its black screen, neon green type perfection – to her own parents, believing this to be the most appropriate way to teach clueless sexagenarians the technical skills associated with owning one's own word processor. [Insert reference to the 1990s computer game, *The Oregon Trail*, here.]

With the advent of the compact disc came the birth of the many people who play songs on repeat. With cassette tapes, listening to the same song twice was hard labor. Not only did you have to have the patience to sit in front of your stereo (or in the passenger seat of your father's sand-colored Toyota Land Cruiser, or hand-to-hip with your Walkman) with your index finger pressed down on the rewind button, but you had to be familiar enough with the album to be confident in your ability to

rewind (the frustration associated with rewinding a tape too far past your chosen song's beginning, to have to listen to the preceding song – a song you didn't like all that much to begin with – was palpable (to all parties involved), and having to continually press the rewind button if you happened to miscalculate a song's length was just as crushing to one's fragile I'll-pick-the-music ego). Vinyl records posed a similar problem, except the price was much higher: not only does one run the risk of scratching a record (and as an eight year-old, this risk was high), but one's tolerance for the sound of that scratch only extends so far.

So, when rewinding became a matter of a one-touch press of a << track button on a CD player, or even on the remote to that CD player, abusers of such a luxury surfaced. My sister was such an abuser, and in my own moon-eyed or love-sick moments of elementary school, I was, too. One year after *Don't Shoot Me...*, I will insert the Titanic soundtrack into my three-foot SONY boom box and play Celine Dion's My Heart Will Go On on repeat for hours.

I will insist (read: pretend) that I have grown out of this teenage habit, but my sister will utilize the repeat button on every one of her car's stereo systems and break her way through a handful of iPods with her constant use of the Repeat One option.

HONEY DOES NOT ROT

SARA BICKLEY

I must still have feet, because I walked here.
I must still have eyes, because I can read this.
I must still have a right hand, because I am writing it.

The hairs must grow in as fast as they fall out,
or else I would be bald.

The warmth of the sun must linger,
or every night the world would freeze.
What is the meaning of “heat death,”
fire or ice?

We could all stand to be a little more humble, I guess. Death,
where did you leave your stinger
and how long ago?

THE LAST OF IT

DARIAN DOVGAN

When I pull up to his house, I see the old fish tank sitting empty on the curb.

“Wow,” I say to my boyfriend, Kurt. “I never thought he’d get rid of that thing.”

“It looks so old,” Kurt says.

“It is,” I say.

I drive my mother’s decrepit minivan, the final remnant of the once full nest. It bumps over the cobblestone driveway like it is still familiar. But it’s meant for other roads now.

She was excited when I said I would go, always concerned with that silver cord tying him and I together. Still dipping her fingers in it:

“Oh, I’m so glad,” she said. “You need to see him.” She buzzed through the kitchen, a wound up toy, opening and closing jars, opening and closing cabinets. Her tight-bound fingers stitched in and out of everything.

I nodded because this time, she was right. This time, I did.

“Yeah,” I said. “It will be good for me. Maybe he will be different.”

“I’m sure he will, Honey,” Mom added. “Divorce changes people.”

We wait outside by the garage door because the code is different now and I don’t have the luxury of knowing it. He’s changed all the locks and doorknobs so everything feels an eerie kind of similar. I tell Kurt that he will be out any minute to let us in. But even I’m not sure.

“What kind of fish?” Kurt asks, pointing to the tank.

“First we had glassfish,” I say. “My sisters and I went and we picked them out. You know, the ones they inject all the colors inside of.”

Kurt nods.

“But we didn’t know that back then,” I say. “Otherwise we wouldn’t have bought them. And one big bottom feeder, so we didn’t have to clean the tank. They all had names but I couldn’t remember them now if I wanted to. They died after a few years. Then Dad went out and bought a bunch of cichlids. They weren’t very fun though because they just went at each other all the time. Eventually there were only the two parrotfish and that was all that was left. They were still going, last I was here.”

Fish: the victimless family pet. It wasn’t surprising that fish were what we ended up with. All the talk of puppies, but it never would have worked. It had to be fish. Maybe it was a good thing he was throwing the tank out.

“I’m nervous,” Kurt says. “About meeting your Dad.”

“Don’t be,” I tell him. “It’ll be over quick.”

Soon we are shuffled away into his sleek red car. I let Kurt sit in the front. Partially because I know he should and partially because I don’t want to. Dad turns on the spa music, his go-to track. Maybe he’s more complex than this. But for years now I’ve thought I’ve had him boiled down, condensed into music that only plays on Sirius Radio.

“Who is your favorite president?” Dad asks Kurt. And the questions begin.

I fiddle with my ring. Mom’s old ring; the first one Dad got her. Real sapphires, late eighties sapphires, before they were cooking up gems. It’s cut so I can pull it bigger and squeeze it tighter when I want.

“My third pregnancy I swelled up so much I had to cut it,” she explained to me once. “I just never got around to getting it fixed.”

What does that tell you?

Kurt says George Washington, and I am surprised by his answer. Not because I think he really loves George Washington, but with the cleverness of it all. Politically neutral. Kurt will do just fine.

I think about my favorite president. Abraham Lincoln. Not because of anything he did. But because in third grade a classmate of mine said she kept a piece of his beard inside a plastic baggie in her attic. I liked that.

“What about Abraham Lincoln?” I say. “He was a true patriot.”

Dad doesn’t say anything, but changes the song. And I wonder why I even bothered to ask.

Outside, we merge onto the highway and the palms shift to forest. I don’t know where we’re going. Dad said that for dinner he wanted to treat us. Something different, he said, while grinning like an idiot and staring at Kurt.

After the divorce, Dad got a new girl. A young blonde named Lisa. She drank profusely and

talked about her tits. But she had an autistic son. She always pulled this picture out of her wallet of him with all the waitresses at Hooters.

“Look,” she’d say. “Look! Look! Johnny has his own table there, all the girls love him.”

It was Hooters. But there was something admirable in it, so I couldn’t trash-talk her with Mom in the kitchen those nights when she was drunk.

Dad stopped eating microwave pizza and started going out. With Mom he never went out. I know what that did to her, amongst other things. What Mom didn’t know was that dating was all about the masks. They come off eventually.

He takes us to a Brazilian restaurant with sixteen-dollar appetizers. Dad orders three of them. Cheesy mariachi music blares out of the speakers. I guess nobody has told them it’s a Mexican thing.

“So what kind of movies do you want to make?” Dad asks Kurt.

I pick around at the cheese plate, rolling grapes into molded dairy. Kurt says he just wants to make movies, good movies. Dad remembers that Kurt is a film guy from a brief phone call we had months ago. Dad doesn’t remember anything else.

They keep talking. The waitress smiles at me sadly from across the room. She’s clearing a table. But even out of earshot, she knows. What woman doesn’t? Picture book girls, maybe. Thin stories with yellowed pages in the school library: Dad cooks dinner, Dad plays ball, Dad loves.

Kurt and Dad order a huge plate of lobster paella, to split.

“Come on,” Dad says. “You love lobster. We can do it for three. You can’t miss out on lobster. You’re on vacation, you’re in Florida.”

The bait is set. Somewhere, sharp silver teeth hide under leaves, at the ready.

I order a pork loin instead. It comes out on a wooden plank, still sizzling off moist clouds of fat, surrounded in a thick of green. Garnishes. I never cared much for arugula, anyway.

“Can I eat that?” I ask and point to a yellow flower placed on top.

The waitress tells me it is a Nasturtium. An edible flower. I’ve never seen anything past hon-eyesuckles.

Dad and Kurt buy a round of drinks. I sit out because I don’t like Scotch. Dad watches Kurt’s new film shorts and I can see he’s adopting him, grooming him to be his number one fan. Every once in a while I catch his eyes. He knows what I’ve told Kurt. He also knows how much it hurts to be disbelieved. Behind his skin panels, I know his plan.

I eat the Nasturtium. It feels like tissue paper on my tongue and tastes like nothing. Dad orders dessert, even though nobody wants it, just because he can. We eat less than half and then sip black

coffee out of thin, bone cups.

After dinner, Dad invites us inside. The house is still tall and white, but the air feels different in its massive emptiness. It smells like bleach. Dad takes Kurt out to the porch to smoke Cuban cigars.

“Smuggled them right out of Mexico,” he says.

“Wow,” Kurt says, “What would have happened if you got caught?”

Dad shrugs and smirks. “Oh you know,” he says.

“When did you go to Mexico?” I ask.

“This summer.”

“Oh,” I say.

He’s wearing the same coal slacks and white button up as usual. Mom used to order them in bulk from an expensive made-for-fancy tailor. He lives his life like this, in black and white, only subsisting in monochromatic. His eyes are more sunken in than I remember, like kalamata olives pushed hard into dough. And his hair, where it’s left, fumes up in wiry white coils. I hope I age better.

In the dining room, the fish tank is gone. The tile is discolored in the place it once sat. All of Mom’s things have vanished too: the antique bronze figurines, blue like the Statue of Liberty, the gold-framed painting of mother with child, the heart shaped cake pans she used to hang on the walls. All that is left is the old piano. But it plays out of tune.

My bedroom isn’t my bedroom anymore. All of my things are marginalized to one corner: the wonky alligator head, the old school photos, and the coconut with the googly eyes. I marvel at how my whole life can fill just one eight by eight tile. The rest has been stripped out and away. Repainted and remodeled. It even has clap-on lights

I go outside with a glass of wine. Dad tells me I have to get my things soon. He is selling the house. I look at the backyard: the sun setting by the old oak, the acres of grapefruit and lime trees. I played there once. I wonder if this will be the last time I ever see it. It doesn’t feel morbid. The place is now just an almost believable backdrop, a painted set with cardboard cutout trees.

“Let me have some of that cigar,” I say. “I want to try it.”

Kurt passes me the cigar and I take a puff. Dad scrunches his eyebrows.

“What?” I ask.

“I wouldn’t expect that of you,” he says. “It’s not ladylike.”

“I don’t care,” I say. “I’m not here for you, my life isn’t about what you think I should or shouldn’t do.”

Dad nudges Kurt.

“She’s got that same little crease as me,” he says. “Right between her eyebrows. Gonna need Botox one day, girls can’t have that.”

He laughs. Kurt laughs. I smoke more of the cigar and get dizzy. Nicotine high. Oxygen deprived.

“This cigar is pretty good,” I say. I am getting cocky. But it doesn’t matter. Kurt nods and squeezes my hand under the table. I don’t squeeze back. His muddy teardrop eyes, drawn tight as a tablecloth, stare past me. Set on Dad. I feel sick. I put the cigar down in its plastic holder.

I wonder if this is how it feels to be starved for a month and forced to watch somebody else eat. My stomach flips over and over. It feels like there are leeches inside me.

I first knew the sensation when I was a child. My sister and I did the same task. We drew a picture. Hers a lion, mine a pig. We knocked on Dad’s office door and he let us in. He spent more time in his office then.

“Look Daddy,” we said. “We drew you pictures.”

Dad said *very nice*. He took both of them. It was a few weeks later when I noticed the lion, taped up on his office wall, and the pig, nowhere to be found.

Mom told me that night how he didn’t mean it, her golden bangles clanking as she stirred a pot of stew, wild curls pushed behind one ear.

“He loves all of you girls equally,” she had said. She always thought she could protect us. Later on, I learned what it was really about. Competition: pitting us against each other, two scorpions in a box. He liked to watch us squirm.

“How is your writing going?” Dad asks.

We pause, eye contact. Humidity closes in around us. We sit for a few moments, rocking, smoking.

“It’s been good,” I say.

“Why don’t you ever show me any of it?”

“I don’t know,” I say. “You just don’t seem like you want to read it.”

“Of course I want to read it,” Dad says. “You know I would love to read it.”

“I guess I could send you some of the things I’ve been working on.”

It is the strange moment. A lull in the natural rhythm, the few seconds where novelty sits at the lip of life. It is the eye of the hurricane, the green before the tornado. That short period where you wonder about the frays in your own brain.

“As long as you don’t write about me,” Dad says, like he is joking. But he doesn’t joke. Not about that.

Dad walks us out before we leave. He tells Kurt it was a pleasure. He says he will watch all the movies he recommended. Then he tells me to work hard, to stay in school. I give him a half-baked hug.

Kurt asked me once before why I hated him. I told him the plain things first: the violence, the lies, the negligence, and the pain. The gritty details. Those soap opera elements to my all-too-real life. Sad stuff, the stuff people scowl at and apologize for, even though they had no hand in it. Then I told him about my sick dreams, my hollowed out hopes. I said, “You can’t possibly understand it. But every time it’s like placing my bets, fingers crossed for the win. Maybe a pat on the head, or just something would make it worth the while.”

Kurt said that he couldn’t understand. He had grown past that many years ago. Kurt didn’t need anybody else.

“You can’t ever grow up living like that,” Kurt had said. “You just keep yourself a five year old, forever waiting to open your presents.”

Kurt and I get into the car. I start the engine. Dad taps on the window so I roll it down for our final words. The post-goodbye goodbye.

“I’ll miss you,” he says.

“You too,” I say.

“That’s a nice ring.”

He points at my little hand wrapped around the steering wheel, pale in the silver island moonlight.

“I got it from a friend,” I tell him. “It’s crazy the kind of stones they’re making with science now.”

Most things in life change. It is the unwritten rule you learn early on. Change. Animals die, people shift, and you grow old. You come to expect it. But some things never change. Memories: the iridescent glassfish, floating through the water like ghosts. And dreams: Ground-dad day, any minute now maybe real father will come out.

Dad waves to me and says to keep in touch. I say I will. I roll up the window.

“So,” Kurt says. “That was your dad.”

“Yeah,” I say. “That was him.”

We drive off, passing the fish tank and the place where my childhood is buried. And that was the last of it.

INTO THE FOG | COURTNEY CATHERS



SCARLET FRONT DOOR

NICOLE SCHULZ

Dear Home,

I wish I could be with you still, in spite of all
I know about you, of everything I know you will

never be or become or say or love. To hear
your heavy laughter again, your tears of joy

in the corner room on the second floor.
The arguments over money that did not exist.

Your endless troubles with a glass of wine
in the evening. I want your anger, the words
you will never get out of your mouth, that turn
your face and neck bright purple and your eyes
into knives that cut me with every little glance.

All your terrible monsters who I have befriended,
who hid in the woods, in the house, in ourselves.

The plans we threw away; to go beyond the
tall, decaying fence we pounded into the earth

so often, beyond the dribbling creek that never
seemed to quench our thirst. But I still hope

to see your crooked nose and the scares
the sun left, the bruises the moon made,

to open your door once more.

NON-FICTION

OOMINGMAK (OOMING-MĀK) JEREMY BROOKS

I awake to the blaring sound of the default Verizon ringtone, an insult to the silence that drags me out of sleep and into an energizing rage. It doesn't make it past the third riff. Struggling through the hardest part of the day, I sit up to drain the sleep away and try to keep my head bowed to avoid the middle bar of the bunk, a lesson I am slow to learn. My bunkmate and I groan simultaneously. He turns over, asleep again, and I throw on my blue work coat, still wet from the downpour that's promising to last all week. It is four a.m. Alaska Time, and the summer sun would have just begun to summit the mountains, had they not been shrouded by the breath of rain. As my muck boots splash through the westernmost tip of the Tongass National Rainforest, I can hear the screams for food and company. It has been four hours, and Musk Ox calves only have two settings; starving or wet and starving. Grabbing their bottles from the intern kitchen, I push aside my desperate need for sleep and replace it with thoughts of the two calves. Tsuni (sue-knee), who had been born two weeks after I arrived, was strong and healthy, weighing around 40 pounds. Nami (nah-me) however, who had been born on my second day, weighed only 18 pounds, 3 less than when she was born. I was afraid to walk over to their shelter. I could see two black shapes, but only one was standing at the gate, crying out for life.

I remember when my direct flight from Chicago to Anchorage pulled into gate A12; it was a balmy 75 degrees, and 18 years, 362 days and 6 hours of pent up energy and excitement was shaking in my cramped legs. Everybody has a dream – to climb Mount Everest, to be an astronaut – but mine was rooted in my dad's childhood stories. Mine was a King Salmon hanging over my grandpa's fireplace. Mine was Alaska. When I stepped off the plane and onto the tarmac, Alaska rushed to

greet me. The Chugach Mountains thrust out a hardy handshake, the blue sky reflected the welcoming ocean, and a bald eagle gave a courteous nod as it flew over. My sense of belonging swelled as I walked to the baggage claim to begin my summer as a Naturalist Intern at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center.

The Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center (AWCC) is a refuge for injured animals and those affected by humans (cue the trash-bears and porcupine pets). Most were destined to live there forever, but there were three species that were going places. The wood bison, similar to the plains bison of Yellowstone, had been slaughtered and hybridized to the point where only 24 pure wood bison were left worldwide. Now there is a herd of 3,000 in Canada and a total of 150 in the U.S. One hundred of the U.S. bison have now been reintroduced in the plains of Alaska near the village of Shageluk, and the rest remain at the AWCC. There were also elk, which as a species had not been in Alaska for over ten thousand years, but were going to be introduced onto several islands to supplement the diets of native Alaskans. Finally, there was the musk ox, there through a partnership with the University of Alaska in Fairbanks for research on diet and habitat. They are a remarkable species; they thrived in the last ice age and were found across Europe, Asia, and North America. Their fur, called Qiviut (kiv-ee-et), is considered to be the warmest fiber in the world; it is warmer than wool and softer than Kashmir. A scarf made out of Qiviut will sell for around 200 dollars, making them another name on the long list of species nearly hunted to extinction. They are just now making a comeback in the wild. I had done my research on the AWCC, but now I was ready to get my hands dirty in the land of the midnight sun.

Now standing at the baggage claim, Erin, the Intern Coordinator, saw me first. Nursing a 24-ounce can of monster with her short unruly hair supported by a buff, she introduced herself and helped carry my luggage to the parking garage. It took us thirty minutes and four trips on the same escalator to find her truck. When she finally remembered where it was I couldn't help but notice a heavily taped cooler sitting in the bed. "I know this is kind of a rough way to start out, but we had our musk ox calf die last night. We need to take it to the post office to have it sent off for a necropsy." Rough indeed, but I shrugged it off; neither of us wanted my first day soiled with death. Two weeks later, we received an empty cooler, a bundle of decaying blankets and a report. One of the other mothers had gored the calf at two days old, the over-aggressive bitches. The cooler was simply hosed out and bleached, and the blankets were put through the washer and dryer in the intern housing. My clothing still remembers; my shirts are tinted orange from the iron in the water and the fabric wrinkled and faded.

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The frantic moans from Tsuni die down when I get to the gate. I slam my size-14 boots into a sterilizing bucket of bleach and don a pair of rubber gloves, ripping them around the wrist as my hands shake from the rain and cold. I lift the simple latch that separates them from the swooning tourists and wedge my way through the narrow gate. Tsuni, her hair matted down in dripping strands, greets me by ramming her head into my shin, teeth searching for a teat to suck on, and I repay the favor by rubbing her dripping ears and whispering “good morning to you too. Now, where’s your sister?” Carefully stepping over Tsuni, I walk around the side of the small wooden structure that does nothing more than put a roof over their heads, and peer into the opening. Two black beads stare up at me. Nami lies with her legs folded tightly against her body, her disproportionate head lifted slightly to acknowledge my arrival. Her fur is dry and curly, and with the back of my hand I trace her unique streak of white fur from the top of her head to her lower back. The straw directly behind her is green and runny; her hind legs are caked in shit. She probably has not moved in several hours. We have been giving her 4.5 ounces of children’s Pepto Bismol instead of formula off and on for the past month, but not anymore. She has lost too much weight and will not make it unless she gets nutrients, shits or not. Having followed me in, Tsuni again rams my leg and I stick out two fingers for her to suckle on before I swap them with her bottle. I encourage Nami to stand up and take her bottle while Tsuni sucks away at her 12 ounces. Unmoving, the two black beads look beyond me, out into the blur of rain.

I remember the day Nami was born. I was sitting in the living room of the bunkhouse after work, and Teal, a previous intern who now did a mixture of maintenance and animal care, yelled in from the entrance that everyone needed to help get a newborn musk ox calf. The calves are separated from their mothers because the soil lacks essential minerals, specifically copper. Without supplements, the calves will freeze to death come the frigid winter. In previous years they tried putting the minerals in the main enclosure, but the adults would prevent the calves from getting any. To complicate things further, the calves have to suckle from their mothers at least once to get some essential nutrients and vitamins before being removed. Remembering my first day and the cooler in the back of Erin’s pick-up, I jumped to my feet and headed for the enclosure.

The AWCC has a unique way of doing things. When I ran out of the bunkhouse, there were two brave souls on a four-wheeler mentally preparing to steal a baby from an 800-pound mother whose species have been known to literally crack each other’s skulls in half when fighting. I’d rather be fending off a bear with a shovel, which happens to be another on-the-job skill AWCC employees learn. I am posted at the gate, ready to slam it shut when the four-wheeler comes tearing through,

while the others stand ready to throw fruit over to the main herd in hopes of distracting them. Ready as we will ever be, the signal is given and the four-wheeler engine revs to life as it shoots through the gate towards the mother and calf. I had never considered the sound an angry musk ox makes, but it drowned out the motor of the four-wheeler. When the pair entered the enclosure, the main herd took off to the other side, but the mother spun around, her head stretched to the end of her neck and her black eyes bulging out of their sockets as she let loose a challenging roar that would put a lion to shame. Instinctively, the calf stayed between the mother's legs, but as the four-wheeler approached I could see doubt and panic come over its face. Unsure of what to do, both the calf and mother scattered in opposite directions. In one fluid motion the two on the four-wheeler sped up to the calf, scooped it up and spun around, high-tailing it out of there. I will never forget the mother's look of pure hatred as generations of evolution kicked in. She roared, pointed her thick horns at the four-wheeler and me, and charged. With the mother close behind, the four-wheeler flew through the gate and I slammed it shut, forcing the mother to skid to a stop, blood-shot white sticking out around the edges of the giant marbles of her eyes. She roared for three days, standing up on the high hill in their enclosure, desperately searching.

We immediately took the calf into an enclosure far away from the angry mother and left it alone to recover from the shock. A few hours later we went in, found out it was a girl, and began getting her adjusted to being around us and feeding from a bottle. It took 19 hours before she finally drank from her bottle, a good 12 hours earlier than any musk ox calf before her. Two weeks later one more girl was born, giving us interns the opportunity of a lifetime, to take care of two musk ox calves and watch them grow up.

Bottle-raising musk ox calves is a big commitment; they have to be fed every 4 hours, including midnight and 4 a.m., they have terrible diarrhea because the only thing they are eating is nutrient rich formula, and you have to change your clothes every time you go in and out of their enclosure to prevent spreading disease. If anything, baby-wiping a musk ox's hairy ass is great birth control and the closest thing to a baby I plan on having for a while. But more important than all the hard work we were going to be doing, was coming up with names. We were trying to come up with something meaningful. All the calves in the past had been named after "Alaska" things; Chugatch and Wrangle were named after national forests; Mukluk was named after traditional native foot wear, the list goes on. Fortunately, we had a great idea.

That summer was the 50th anniversary of The Great Alaska Earthquake of 1964. At that time, a little town called Portage sat right where the AWCC sits today, and on March 27th they were hit by a 9.2 magnitude earthquake, the second largest in recorded history. The town of Portage dropped

10 feet and a tsunami 15 feet high flooded up the Turnagain arm, washing away the city. If you drive on the Seward Highway you can still see old log cabins that were scooped up by the water and deposited like silt on grasslands now over a mile away from the ocean. Over 400 million dollars of damage and destruction was wrought and 130 lives were lost. We thought we could find a cute name for a musk ox somewhere in that destruction, and we did. We chose to break apart the word tsunami into Tsuni and Nami, and thus the dynamic duo was made.

I found myself in a very fortunate position as we settled into our daily routines. I was the main dietician, meaning that I got to work at 8 am, an hour before everyone else, to prepare diets and, more importantly, feed the musk ox calves. The other interns would have to negotiate who would get to take the other feedings throughout the day, but I got to start my day with the best wake-up call imaginable. At first Tsuni and Nami were nervous around me, only approaching me to drink from their bottles. I remember my first time feeding them by myself, they instinctively stood together, attempting to form a wagon circle for protection. When I showed them the bottle, they hesitantly broke ranks to drink their formula before rushing off again. As time wore on, they became more comfortable around me, sticking around after finishing their bottles to see if I offered any other food. They started with my muck boots, licking the tops and sucking on the straps. But then they discovered the wonders of pant legs, and from that moment on the cuffs of my pants had permanent saliva stains that still cause my pants to fold at odd angles. I took advantage of the time close to them to find their weak spots, noting the particular pleasure they got when I rubbed their ears. Each day they would stick around longer and longer, even running to my voice if I called to them when walking by on another task. Eventually both straps of my muck boots were broken and even the antennae of my radio was fair game when I would go in just to sit with them. I discovered they each had a particular way they liked to be petted; Tsuni was content to proudly stand with her head held high as I vigorously scratched up and down the length of her body. Nami, on the other hand, would only be content if she was suckling on something at all times, even taking a liking to Tsuni's ears and tail. My favorite thing to do was take off running and have them come charging after me. They would usually only last about a minute or two and then be ready to plop down and nap beside me as I rubbed their ears.

Even though I was the first one up, I would usually be the last one to go back to the bunk house. "How are your little girls?" would be the first thing I heard as I climbed up the stairs leading to the living room. Grinning from ear to ear, I'd reply, "Wonderful as always." Most days we would give behind the scenes tours, and my first and last stop would always be my little girls, first to get me and the group excited and involved, and last because I straight up loved getting to see them, and my group usually felt the same way. I always started off by telling my favorite fact, that "Oomingmak" was the

Nunavut word for Musk Ox, and its literal translation is “the bearded one.” That would always get a chuckle and comment or two about how I had become their mother and even looked the part.

Before I could get Nami to start on her bottle, I heard the raspy sucking that signified Tsuni had finished hers, so I pulled it out of her mouth and set it on a shelf by my head. Looking for more, Tsuni began the ritual of ramming my shin, sucking on my boot strap and moving on to whatever else she could find. Still Nami sat there, unwilling, or perhaps unable, to move. I gently ran my fingers through her soft qiviut, whispering to her that she was going to be fine. I moved my hands underneath her and eased her up off the ground, jumpstarting her legs to start kicking out. She managed to stabilize them beneath her and awkwardly walk over to her water bowl, her legs stiff and complaining. The water seemed to spark new life in her and when I offered her the bottle, she sucked down all 4.5 ounces of the formula. It would probably run right through her, but at least she was getting some nutrients. I took the opportunity to wipe her hind legs with baby wipes as much as possible, and I replaced the straw where she had been lying. Her burst of energy left as quickly as it came and she lay back down in the same spot. I sat there beside her rubbing her ears and keeping Tsuni company for close to an hour, distantly watching the rain fall. Finally, I gave into my desperate need for a few more hours of sleep and managed to stand up and move without stepping on either of them. But my departure was not unnoticed, and as I closed the gate and began walking back to the intern kitchen they begin a low moan. As the sky cried and stomachs churned, I smiled, listening to the two voices call out into the night.

On my final day of the summer, I spent my last few hours sitting in the warm sun with them. I collected a bit of their qiviut and now keep it in a small bag along with a water color of them one of the interns painted for me. They are my only piece of decoration in my room besides a framed photo of the bunkhouse I lived in with the inlet of the Turnagain Arm and the emerald mountains of the Chugach National Forest rising up in the background.

ARBROATH | ERIKA TIBBETTS



TWELVE YEARS

STACIA HILL

to weave between hardwood ponies
floor glazed and shined gold
electric bubble light-bulbs popping
dragons breathe music box melody
whirring in air, catching dingy rings
of hard plastic in hooked fingers
horse hair manes stiff to touch
toes hooked in iron stirrups

ice water slips over under between
sand speckled toes, polished blue
ocean unromantically cold
wind blown sand littered
with carcasses of dead crabs –
gulls gather, rubber kelp draped
beside shattered sand dollars,
dried jellyfish

rain falling flowing into an ocean
where wishing stone crabs tickle
the sand with small sharp toes. mirrored
walls of buildings complement each other,
withstanding wet rust. stone walls green
from algae and crumbling bit by bit.

air warm and humid – vapor blanket
wrapped around shoulders, gentle rays
of sunset evenings by the lake. palms fan
overhead, paper strips peeling away
from the trunks. night heat running
on sidewalks, glossy cars dot streets
dancing under lights, tasting lemonade

sapphire jeweled lizards
scrape slowly against hot stones
dry air enters the lungs
easily, a lightness only found
in warmth.

imagine the feeling of flames
against skin as a million fireflies
hover in stasis between trees
of woods. steps squelch in water.
under clove scented leaves
small orange salamanders wait

CEDAR CHEST

VANESSA MATTFELDT

Not five minutes after waking up and I already have a pen in my hand scribbling away in the journal Dr. Wright gave me two weeks ago. It has three hundred pages, one hundred and six of which are already blackened. When Dr. Wright first gave it to me, I laughed when he said I would need a new one within a month. I thought, there is no way I can fill that many pages in such a short amount of time, but at this rate he was right. I hear Alan in the kitchen and toss my journal angrily on the bed; I woke up late. Alan knows to wake me up if the alarm doesn't. It's 6:08. I hop in the shower, acutely aware of the minutes ticking.

Bacon and scrambled eggs wait for me on the nightstand when I get out of the shower. A note sits on the tray: 'I didn't want to wake you. You looked so peaceful.' I crumple it up and toss it in the trash. I sit on the bed and try to enjoy the breakfast Alan made for me before the clock starts breathing down my neck. I meticulously crunch on my bacon, planning out the day ahead of me. I have Mrs. Price's fifth grade class coming into the library today to work on their history projects. I imagine their grubby hands defiling my books and spreading their germs across my library. I can see it now, a young Thomas or Zachary picking his nose and wiping it down the pages of one of my copies of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I would have to go over and scold him, maybe even yell a little if he didn't show signs of apology. Oh gosh, the look on his face. And Mrs. Price! What'll she think? I shudder and drop my bacon seeing the time on the clock. Alan really should have woken me.

I reach for my journal to jot down number two, but it's not where I tossed it on the bed. I jump up and throw the pillows on the floor, searching for the familiar leather cover. I rip the blankets off the bed. It has to be here, there's no way it could be anywhere else. Unless Alan moved it. I scan the room, taking in the open door to the color coded closet, the blanket my mother crocheted, the alphabetical

stack of books by the door. I let out the breath I had been holding when I spot it on the desk next to the bills. I reach for it, but stop, noticing the pen sticking out the top. I hadn't put that there. Did Alan read my journal? He knows not to even touch it and yet he moved it. The pen is stuck between pages 96 and 97. I scan what I had written thirteen hours ago, feeling the familiar tightening in my chest. I flip to page 107 and scribble down numbers two and three. I'm angry at Alan, but can't dwell on it further. I've wasted four minutes and for all I know he just moved it to make the bed. Which I now have to remake. Great.

I head out the door with nineteen minutes to get to Hale Middle School, plenty of time to spare, but I can feel the gears in my mind going and the inside of my elbows start to sweat. I lock our yellow door and make it down the driveway before throwing the car in park and hurrying back to make sure the door is actually locked. It was, as it always is. I have seventeen minutes now. I know that I'll make it to school on time, Alan and I made sure to buy a house close enough to the school for this exact reason, but two blocks away I notice that the gas pedal is pushed a little too far to the floor. I slow down and at a red light jot down number four in my journal before it turns green. The man in the truck next to me gives me a look and my tires spin when I leave the line. I watch him turn in my rearview mirror and let out the breath I was holding. I am determined to start this day off as normal as possible.

I find a parking spot and am relieved to find that most of the kids are still outside playing before classes start; I don't like having to walk through a sea of eleven through fourteen year olds. I'm always afraid I'm going to accidentally trample one or get trampled myself. Luckily, the hallways are empty. I pass the teacher's lounge where the scent of strong coffee and the booming laugh of Principal Reyes fill the hallway. I catch his eye but hurry past, afraid he'll usher me in. I make it to the library unscathed. I unlock the doors and flip on all the lights before unlocking my office door. The smell of new books wafts over me from the box behind the counter; a new shipment of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for Mr. Enebo's sixth grade class. I want to fan one before my nose, but enter my office instead and set my purse on the desk. I turn to put my lunch into the mini fridge before realizing that I didn't pack a lunch today because I thought I was going to be late.

Now I'm going to have to buy lunch from the cafeteria. I'm going to go early, so that it's not busy with kids eating their own lunches, but I have a study hall right before lunch period. Maybe I could let them out early, but then they would have nowhere to go but the cafeteria. I only have fifteen kids that period; so if I let them out sixteen minutes early they can get their lunches early and eat, giving me enough time to get food after them but before the other kids are released for lunch. Or I could just drive to the deli, but I'm only allowed thirty minutes for lunch, and if traffic is backed up, I

would only have ten minutes, maybe, to eat and get back in time for the next period. Wait! Did I even bring my wallet?

I dive for my purse and tear out my wallet, relief washing over me. I've been pacing and have lost three minutes. The bell is going to ring any minute, and I haven't gotten anything ready for the day. I storm out of the office, angry at myself for wasting precious time. I grab errant books around the library and place them on a cart, starting up the computers as I walk past. I pick up a student's notebook and remember the journal sitting in my purse. My heart is hammering in my chest and my palms are clammy. I roll the cart behind the front counter and put the notebook in the lost and found box next to the computer. The library looks clean and the computers are booting up nicely, all with two minutes to spare.

I check the doors to make sure they're open but that no one is coming into the library yet. I close my eyes like Dr. Wright told me to do and start breathing in squares; breathe, two, three, four – hold, two, three, four – relax, two, three, four. I do this until my mind is clear and I can't hear my heart in my ears anymore. I grab my journal and write in it until the bell rings and Mrs. Price's history class comes marching through my doors. I help the students log in and then walk amongst them, helping them find the right information and making sure they're not looking at anything they're not supposed to.

"Ms. Daisy?" One of the girls is waving her hand in the air, looking at me expectantly. I look around for Mrs. Price and find her helping a different student; there is no way I can get out of this one.

"Yes, Caroline?" I say, trying to keep my tone even. I start racking my brain, trying to predict what her question might be and what the appropriate response is. Oh, I hope it's not about the Civil War; I can hardly remember names and dates of that one. Boy would Mrs. Price like to hear that. I bet she would have me fired instantly. I laugh inside my mind. Why would the school librarian get fired for not knowing enough about history? Silly me.

"Ms. Daisy," Caroline says, impatience covering her tone and her eyebrows peak up on her little forehead. I realize that I have been leaning next to her for a good twenty seconds without listening.

"Oh, I'm sorry Caroline. You know me, head in the clouds." I manage a weak laugh and can see the judgment in her beady little blue eyes. All the work I put in to make these kids like me and here I go messing it up. "What was it dear?" I say, trying to keep my voice level.

She leans in close and cups her hand around her mouth. "Jacob isn't working on his project," she says. I stand back up and see the dark-haired Jacob she is talking about. His tablet is in his hands and there is a group of boys scrunched around him, trying not to be seen. I put my hand on her shoulder and then walk over, trying to build up the nerve to sound angry enough that they will listen but not

so angry that they will start to hate me. I'm about to speak when one of the boys gasps and the other whispers, "Play it again."

I open my mouth to speak when I hear the tires of a car screeching and when I look over the hunched shoulders of the boys I see a black car colliding head on with a semi. I hear the crunch of metal and can feel the tightening of the seatbelt as it tries to keep the driver back. I snatch the tablet out of the boy's hands.

"That is enough!" I yell. They turn to me, their eyes big. "You are supposed to be working on your project, not watching some sick video," I continue. I can still hear the screeching tires in my mind and the tablet shakes in my hands. "Go back to your seats, boys, and as for you, Jacob, detention." He starts to protest and I can hear Mrs. Price walking towards me. "No," I say. "I don't want to hear it, shut up." My voice is trembling and I turn on my heel and rush into my office.

I pass Mrs. Price and see angry lines creasing her forehead. Maybe they were lines of concern. No, definitely anger. I just yelled at one of her students. The tablet is still playing that damn video, and even when I turn it off it continues to play inside my mind. The crunch of metal makes my body quake like when a fork scrapes across my teeth and the rubber on wet cement doesn't help my shaking hands and the unheard scream that doesn't stop causes me to wrap my hands around my head. My heart hammers like an anvil in my chest, driving too fast for my shallow breaths to keep up. I need to go back out there, I need to address the issue with Mrs. Price, but the thought of that sends me into a downward spiral of gasping breaths that rack my body with sharp convulses, my lungs trying to get enough air.

I hear my door creak open and whip my head around, feel the splash of tears on my arm before seeing Caroline and her golden curls rush back out. I can hear the conversation now: "Mrs. Price! It's Ms. Daisy. She's *cryyyyyyyyying*." And Mrs. Price and the whole class will laugh because they have successfully done what their little hearts secretly desire to do: get under the skin of the new teacher and watch her crack. Well, good job little Jacob, I have cracked. Hope you're happy now, you little shit. I slam my fist down, angry at myself for even thinking that about a student. I hear the students start packing up even though the bell won't ring for another thirteen minutes. I should go out and tell them that I'm okay, that they don't need to leave early. I'm going to. I'm going to get up out of my chair, wipe away these stupid tears and show them that I'm okay. Because I am. I am okay. Of course I'm okay. Why wouldn't I be okay?

I sit in my chair and wait for them to leave.

I hear the last pair of little feet leave my library and it's like the elephant that has been sitting on my shoulders finally decided to get up and be productive or something. I close my eyes because the

fact that I can only see through a tunnel starts to scare me. It's quiet and I realize how loudly I've been breathing. It's painful and I want to succumb to the tears again, wash away all these feelings and be able to just lie exhausted on the floor or maybe even my bed at home. I reach out and blindly grasp my journal, holding it to my chest, pretending that it is Alan or even the blue plush pillow on Dr. Wright's cream colored couch. I pretend that none of this happened and that the car crash in my head isn't still playing. I pretend that I'm in a place where this doesn't exist, where I don't have to worry about these attacks.

Breathe, two, three, four – Hold, two, three, four – Relax, two, three, four. Breathe, two, three, four – Hold, two, three, four – Relax, two, three, four. Breathe, two, three, four --- Hold, two, three, four --- Relax, two, three, four. My ears pop and my lungs decide to start working again. I can feel dried tears on my cheek and thank god that I decided to keep an extra set of makeup supplies in my office at the beginning of the year. My hands slowly become still against my chest and I slump in my chair as I let a huge sigh escape my body; let all the anxiety flow out into the room where it will dissipate into the air like wisps of smoke. Hopefully.

I open my eyes and see everything normally. I hear Dr. Wright's calm voice in my mind reminding me to lock my worries away somewhere, in a filing cabinet or a safe or a chest. That session, immediately thought of the cedar chest my mother kept at the foot of her bed. I have used that image ever since. After pushing all the emotions of the last seven minutes down and locking them away in the cedar chest, I grab my journal and write furiously in it for three minutes, trying to stay calm but smearing the ink. I slam the journal shut and toss it in my purse. I don't want to look at it for a while. After fixing my makeup, I leave my office into the now empty library. I see traces of my class and a wave of guilt washes over me. I can't think about that right now, it's too soon.

I grab the cart and start putting the books away on their respective shelves. It calms me further, the meticulous work of organizing the books and putting the library back in order. I take solace in their smells; musty, new, sometimes like Elmer's glue. The spines are comforting. My library and my books. I put things where they belong and when they get out of place I just have to put them back, simple as that. If only life were that simple.

"Ms. Daisy?" I almost drop the book I'm holding. I hadn't heard anyone come in. I turn and see Mrs. Price.

"Yes," I say, trying not to let the lock on the cedar chest break. The scene tries to replay in my head, but I smother it down, or at least try to.

"Are you alright?"

"Yes. Fine," I say and turn back to my cart of books, placing the one I almost dropped back on

the shelf. I can't look at her when I say, "I'm sorry about earlier. I don't know what came over me." I expect her to yell, expect her to grab my arm and force me to look at the anger etched on her face and the judgment in her eyes. I raise my shoulders in defense, trying to make myself as little as possible. I hear her move closer and wait for her fingers to wrap themselves around my arm.

Mrs. Price lays her hand lightly on my shoulder. "Daisy, I'm not angry with you," she says. Her voice is soft, like she is talking to a frightened puppy or one of her students. I want to resent her for that, but I'm more annoyed at myself than anything. "I would have done the same thing," she says. "Maybe not locked myself away afterward, though." She gives a feeble laugh.

I turn to her, and her face immediately falls. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean that," she says. I want to scream at her, I want to tell her how horrible she is and how I don't want her in my library anymore, but I know she's right. I can tell that she saw all of those emotions play across my face, because she's looking at me with concern. I really need to work on my poker face.

"It's alright, Mrs. Price," I say.

"Please, call me May," she says. "Daisy, I don't know what happened today, but I've talked to Principal Reyes and he agrees that you should take the rest of the day off."

I look at her in disbelief. The day off? It's not even lunch time yet. Why would she talk to the principal about this? I mean, I'm more than capable of doing that myself. The thought of doing so make my stomach roll. I shake my head, trying to figure out what I want to say next, how I want to play the next move. Maybe I should tell May. I've been trying so hard for the past six months to keep this a secret from my coworkers. I didn't want to be the outsider because of my disorder. I didn't want their pitying eyes to fall on my face every time I walked into the teacher's lounge – not that I go there very often. But as I look at May, I see those pitying eyes and realize that even though she doesn't know about my disorder, she still pities me, and even though I didn't want to be the outsider, I have become just that.

"Thank you, May," I say. She smiles at me. "It's just... I have this...." I can't get the words out. "I'm very grateful for that," I say.

She smiles once more and pats my shoulder. "I know you're still kind of new here, but I just wanted you to know that we all really care about you and think that you are a great addition to this school." I can feel my eyes getting moist. Mrs. Price reminds me so much of my mother before she passed, always looking after the people around her. She always gave the warmest hugs. "If you need anything, my door is always open." She gives me a quick hug and leaves the library. I'm grateful that she didn't pry.

I take a deep breath and finish putting the rest of the books away. I try not to think about

anything else. Once the cart is empty and the computers are turned off, I return the cart back behind the front counter and grab my things from my office. I throw my coat on and wait for the third bell to ring so I don't have to leave while the kids are switching classes. I don't want to feel their little eyes on me right now. I want to scrawl out a thank you note for Principal Reyes, but I can't face him. He's the only one who knows. It crosses my mind that he might have told May. That's something I don't want to think about just yet, so I scribble it into my journal and leave as the tardy bell rings. I rush out to my car and make it home without crying, unlock our yellow door, and barricade myself.

Alan is going to be home soon. I've meticulously cleaned the house, even dusted the corner of the living room where a dead spider hung in its cobwebs. I scrubbed the floors in the kitchen, laundry room and bathroom, washed the shower and cleaned the toilet until my hands were dry and cracked from the chemicals. I cleaned out the closet, organized the drawers, and made boxes for the donation warehouse downtown. The old leftovers in the fridge are thrown out, the kitchen is spotless except for the mess I made on the counter making the lasagna which has been in the oven for thirty-eight minutes: Alan's favorite. I've been avoiding thinking about work and the inevitable conversation Alan and I are going to have about it tonight.

I hear his car pull into the driveway and when he's walking up the stairs I throw the door open. "Hi Sweetie!" I say.

"Daisy!" he says, throwing a hand to his heart. "What are you doing home?"

"Lasagna's in the oven," I say.

"I thought you had yoga tonight." I stare at him. Of course I would forget about yoga today of all days.

"Oh," I say. "I must've forgotten." I usher him inside, taking his briefcase and coat. I direct him to the Shock Top that is waiting for him on the table.

"You never forget yoga. Did something happen today?" he says.

I continue to the closet, put his coat inside and his briefcase at the door of his office. "No," I say, my voice raising an octave on its own will. I need to work on my lying voice, too. I turn around and Alan's staring at me. I know he knows; he always does. I know he hopes one day the 'no' will be true. I walk past him into the kitchen to take out the lasagna. The cheese is browning and bubbling across the top. It was my mom's recipe. I concentrate on dinner; grabbing plates, setting the table, grabbing the bottle of Pink Moscato and pouring myself a glass. I can feel Alan watching me, can feel his hazel eyes follow my movement, gauging my emotions. He's the only one in my family who knows. He's been my support since my first attack.

“Daisy,” he says. He comes up behind me, places his hands on mine to stop them from chopping up the lettuce. I’ve minced them into tinier pieces than I intended, caught up in my thoughts. I don’t think I would have noticed if I had chopped up a finger or two. I drop the knife and lean into him, fighting the urge to cry.

“I think I’m going to get fired,” I say. He turns me around and tilts my face up. His eyes tell me to keep going but I’m not too sure about the rest of him. “I had another, Alan. In the middle of class!” I can feel the tears building behind my eyes, pressing against them like little demon feet trying to get out. “Mrs. Price told Principal Reyes, and then I just left. I didn’t say one thing, not even on a note. I should’ve talked to him about it. Explained it. I’m sure he thinks I’m crazy, maybe incompetent. I’ve been waiting for a phone call all day.”

Alan is looking at me with the same pity I saw in Mrs. Price’s eyes. I push away, expecting him to hold me back, but he doesn’t. I want to scream. “Daisy, remember the last time this happened and you had to leave,” he says. “You weren’t fired then.”

“I know, but this time it was during class,” I say. “And I yelled at a student.”

“That’s what teachers do, Daisy.”

“But I called him a little shit!” Alan tilts his head as if to say, right, like you actually did that. “Okay, so I called him a little shit in my head, but I did tell him to shut up,” I say, feeling defeated. Alan is trying to suppress a smile. “I’m not trying to be funny,” I say under my breath.

“Daisy,” he says, exasperation blanketing his voice. “You’re not going to get fired. You’re blowing this out of proportion... Again.” He walks to the table and sits down. I realize what I’ve done and grab the lasagna, setting it in front of him and taking my seat at the other end of the table. I had been trying so hard not to go on like that around him again. I made it a week. He dishes himself up while I sip my glass of wine and pull my journal towards me, opening it to page one hundred and eleven. He looks at me, holding out the spatula, but I just shake my head.

“Come on, Daisy,” he says. “You need to eat, don’t be like this.”

“I’m fine,” I say. Alan sighs, shakes his head and starts eating the lasagna I spent two hours and twenty-seven minutes preparing. I start writing in my journal, concentrating on the sound of my pen against paper and trying to ignore the sounds of chewing and sighing. Alan gets up to get another beer and I continue writing, acutely aware that my wine has grown warm.

“Daisy,” Alan says. I don’t look up. I pretend I don’t hear. I want to leave and write in the privacy of the bedroom, but know that will do more damage than good. “Daisy.” I turn the page. “Daisy, close that damn journal right now and look at me!” he says. I finish my sentence with a shaking hand and close the journal. “Look at me,” he says.

“I’m fine,” I say. “We’re fine,” I say.

“We’re not, though,” he says, setting his beer on the table hard enough that it splashes onto the placemat. “Daisy,” he says. “Daisy, talk to me instead of writing in that goddamned journal all the time.”

I get up from the table to turn off the stove, turn off the light outside, check that the yellow door is locked. Alan is still in the dining room. I pour myself another glass of wine, grab my journal and start walking to the bedroom.

“No,” he says, ripping the journal out of my hands. I drop my glass of wine onto the freshly washed carpet in my attempt to grab it from him, afraid of what he will find inside. Afraid of having him see what the blackened scrawling really says. I don’t know when I started to cry, but tears burn their way down my cheeks.

“Give it back,” I say, feeling the weight on my shoulders and in my lungs. I reach for the journal but he pulls away. I can hear the crunch of metal and screaming tires. I can smell the gasoline and the burning cheese in the oven. Alan’s face is red.

“Talk to me,” he says. He puts the journal on the table and grabs my shoulders. He wants me to look at him, stare into his eyes so he can see all the secrets I’ve been keeping. His hands don’t feel like his hands anymore; they haven’t for a couple of months now. All I want is to curl into a tight ball, get lost beneath the covers and never cross the minds of May or Principal Reyes or little Jacob ever again. “Talk to me.”

“I can’t!” I say, the little devils feet escaping the corners of my eyes. “You’re going to leave me,” I say. I wait for him to embrace me, tell me everything will be okay, pretend that tonight didn’t happen. I wait for his hands to become his hands again, his smell to be familiar once more. His hands fall to his side and he grabs my journal, holding it to his chest like I did earlier that day. It’s a wall between us, a chasm of everything he won’t let me tell him. I’m a handful, more than he bargained for. I can tell he’s trying to hide the truth, but I’m not the only one who needs to work on their poker face.

“It’s hard,” he says. “It’s hard listening to you go on and on about the same things over and over again.” I nod, thinking he is right but not knowing how to fix it. “Please don’t cry,” he says.

“I just don’t know what to do,” I say.

“I’m not leaving,” he says. “We’re going to get through this.” I let him pull me into a hug. “I’m not leaving,” he says, but I hear the lie in his voice.

RIVERFORK SONNET

NICOLE SCHULZ

I fell headlong into the shaded grove
searching for willow, oak, the old elm trees.
Followed the trail that will not reach the road
along the turning, trickling, twisting creek.
With heavy dreams of a sweet spring chartreuse,
longing for dirty feet and grass-stain knees.
Ahead bloomed bleeding hearts and black-eyed sues
swaying, leaning, into the chiming breeze.

The dry cracked earth against shoes with worn soles
kicked dust awake and to dust we return.
It was so beautiful yet hard to see,
like the sun or the truth, which push and pull.
The forest ahead and grove behind churned
As I became found and lost became me.

FALLEN | STACIA HILL



HOW STRANGE, INNOCENCE

CLARE MENAHAN

I am only seven years old when I visit Yellowstone National Park for the first time. I race up and down the boardwalks, full of wonder and questions, the smell of sulfur and sunscreen overwhelming my senses. My sister holds my mother's hand tightly in her fist, pointing at tourists. My father watches the birds flying overhead through his binoculars. His wristwatch catches the sunlight as he moves to watch the birds, temporarily blinding me. I watch him for a moment, peering through his binoculars at the sky before turning to run down the boardwalk to the river.

I sit down on the bank, pull my socks and shoes from my sweating feet and plunge them into the river, gasping from its icy touch. As the minutes pass slowly, I lose feeling in the tips of my toes so that the water feels almost warm. The sound of it moving over the rocks fills my head, drowning out the din of tourists around me. I sit like this for several more minutes before my father finds me resting on the ground with feet submerged, toes tingling. He sits down next to me and doesn't say anything as he removes his own shoes and socks. We watch as a school of minnows swirl around both our ankles. He holds two hands out in front of him, as if to applaud, but instead he moves them underwater. When he pulls his cupped hands back, there are two minnows trapped in the pool of water cupped in his hands. I look up at him and smile.

For my eleventh birthday, my father takes my sister and I backpacking in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. His pack is old, with an external frame in hunter's orange while Kate's pack is a deep blue. I use my school pack to carry the few things that my father and sister cannot, holding a feather that I found by the side of the trail delicately in one hand. We have made our camp next to a lake that sits in a bowl, surrounded on all sides by towering mountains. I watch him from the top of a huge granite

boulder by the edge of the water, hugging my knees to my chest to warm them from the onset of cool mountain air. The lake is glacial blue and very still so that the towering mountains on the opposite shore are reflected on its smooth surface. My father fishes from the shore to my left, holding the line delicately between two fingers and clenched teeth. He balances his rod on his shoulder with the butt end resting on the earth, his fingers moving in complicated patterns tying a fly to the end of his line while my eyes strain from the effort of trying to make sense of his motions. He glances up at me and I smile and wave back.

He moves his arm right arm in great, sweeping motions, his fly rod flitting back and forth like a giant pendulum keeping time. I watch the bright green leader closely as it gently falls to the water's surface, spread out in a long, thin ribbon. I grip the rock underneath with my toes in anticipation. When he hooks a fish, I scramble from the rock and slide to the ground, cutting my hand on a sharp edge. I hold the thumb of my uninjured hand over the cut to stop the bleeding as I run the short distance to the water's edge where my father is kneeling in the water. The small fish gasps for breath, turning over in his hands. Its streamlined body is lined and dotted with intricate patterns that resemble some ancient world map. The water is clear and cool on the backs of my knees as I wade in to stand next to him.

My father cradles the fish gently between two hands underwater, moving them back and forth in an attempt to get oxygen flowing through its gills, but the fish rolls to its side every time he removes his hands. We do this for several minutes before I ask my father if the fish is going to die. He doesn't answer. We take turns holding the fish upright underwater as it opens and closes its mouth. The water makes the cut on my hand bleed more freely. My father notices and sloshes to shore, dripping water as he walks into the trees to our tent. He comes back with a cloth bandage, expertly wrapping my hand. He assures me that everything will be fine. I don't ask if, by this he means my hand will be fine or that the fish will live. When he wades back to shore to make a fire, I stay knee-deep in the lake, cradling the fish in my good hand, willing it to wriggle free. It never does.

I am fifteen and walking home from school when a green suburban swerves off the side of the road, crashing into a telephone pole. There is the sound of breaking glass accompanied by the car horn's uninterrupted wail. I sprint to the driver's side door, my heart pounding in my chest. Inside, the man's eyes stare blankly back at me, unmoving. The weight from his head resting on the steering wheel pushes the car horn in. He is bleeding from his nose and the left side of his face is mangled, spattered with brain matter.

"Oh my God," I whisper. "Oh my God." I back away, slowly, not able to look away from the

dead man's face. When I close my eyes, the image of him, lifeless in his car swims across my vision. I turn and run the six blocks to my house in a dead sprint, dropping my backpack from my shoulders in one, fluid movement.

"Dad!" I scream before I am even inside the house, tearing through the front yard and up the front steps. My legs burn from the effort.

"Dad!" I look around the front entryway wildly, relieved to see him appear at the top of the steps.

"What's wrong?"

"There was an accident, a car crash, just down the street. Please, you have to do something." He moves quickly, grabbing his EMT bag, taking the steps two at a time. We leave the front door open in our wake, running down the middle of the street all arms and legs and gritted teeth.

On a Friday night, we go to the symphony. The usher, a tiny, gray-haired woman, shows us to our seats on the aisle of the second row in the balcony. I sit, sandwiched between my mother and father, reading off the program in my father's hands. When the lights dim and the curtain rises, I can see my sister seated with the violins, wearing a black dress that fits loosely on her small frame. My father settles back into his seat when the music starts, resting his elbow on his armrest, his chin in his cupped hand. His watch reflects the light from the stage every so often when he moves around in his chair. My mother turns to glare at the person behind me when they take out a piece of candy, unwrapping it noisily during the second movement. I try to roll my eyes at my father, but I don't know if he can see me in the dark.

After intermission, I find my way back to my seat, a cup of water in one hand and a program that I found on the floor in the other. I take the aisle seat this time and flip through the program. As I wait for the lights to dim, I stop to read an advertisement for a local bank. I recognize the section of river on the page, thinking about the last time my father and I fished there. I smile at the memory as the lights flash on and off, my parents taking their seats beside me. I hand my father the program, flopped open to the page.

"Do you remember this?" I ask him, grinning. He glances down at the image and, smiling warmly, looks up at me and nods back. I take a sip of water, setting my glass back to the floor as the lights go out in the theatre. I absentmindedly trace the scar on the palm of my hand as the music starts. When I look over, my father has his arm wrapped around my mother's shoulders. I am shocked to see that his face is streaked with tears. I quickly look away. I cannot shake the feeling that I have just witnessed something I was never intended see. I try not to, but I nod off at some point during a par-

ticularly slow piece, head dropping to my chest. When I wake up, I won't remember my father crying in the dark theatre until I am much older, when Kate asks me when I knew something was wrong. We drive back to our house in silence, snow falling in white sheets to the ground. I am sixteen.

I am sitting in a plastic waiting chair, reading the same bank advertisement from a year ago at the symphony when a nurse walks in. She holds a clipboard in one hand and a pen in the other. Her nails are painted red to match her lipstick. We make eye contact and her face falls slightly. She walks the length of the room in a few short strides.

"I'm sorry," she says. "We did all we could."

The magazine falls from my hands to the floor.

My legs shake from exhaustion and my chest hurts from the effort of running the last two miles at a suicidal pace. My feet pound the earth rhythmically, sending clouds of dust into the air as I pump my arms and crest the top of the hill, my breath coming in short gasps. A distant train blows its horn in one long, lonesome note as the old clock tower chimes twice. I slow to a walk and look up through the tops of houses, admiring the few stars that are not covered by clouds. I rest my hands on my hips as I walk up the middle of the street to the house, relieved to find the windows dark. The old sofa that we turned out a week ago is still sitting in the middle of the yard with a 'FREE' sign taped to one of its cushions. Milo has managed to flatten himself pancake-style along the length of one armrest, his eyes reflecting the light from a street lamp. When I sit down, he curls up in my lap, purring loudly.

"Why do good people have to die?" I ask him. He flicks his tail in response.

I am eighteen, skipping rocks from the shore off Flathead Lake. Kate sits on the dock, hugging one knee to her chest and dangling her other foot off the edge, toes skimming the water. The wind catches her hair, whipping it across her face as two birds chase each other, tumbling through the sky. She stares across the water to the mountains on the other side, not really seeing them. When she stands, she is lost in the folds of her loose clothing. I can feel her ribs through the fabric when I hold her at night, rocking her back to sleep when she wakes up screaming from nightmares of our father in his hospital bed, his mouth opening and closing, unable to form any real words. I throw the rock hard into the waves and it skips five or six times across its surface before sinking to the bottom.

As the sun begins its slow trajectory across the sky, dipping behind the mountains, I lie flat on the cold ground parallel to the shoreline and listen to the waves as they wash across the stones. I close

my eyes as my hands and feet grow numb with cold, listening to a fish rise out across the lake. I listen to Kate's crunching footsteps as she walks from our cabin down to the shore and when I turn my head and finally open my eyes, I find that her bare feet are mere inches from my face. She moves to sit next to me, by my head. Several minutes pass before we are brave enough to say anything to each other.

"Why do good people have to die?" she asks me. I move my head to look at her, but she is back to staring out over the water, searching the distant mountains for the answers to her questions. I take a very long time to respond, thinking that maybe it is because we did not love him enough.

"I don't know, Kate," I whisper. She reaches out to pick up a small stone, turning it over in her thin hands. Half a dozen pelicans float into view, their fat white bodies and the bright orange of their bills contrasting against the gray lake. The birds huddle together, turning left and right as they watch the water's surface for signs of life. One of the birds dips its head and reemerges with a fish flopping against the confines of its long neck. The bird flaps its wings as if to right itself and then resumes its silent vigil, bobbing silently on the waves. Kate holds the stone up to the vanishing sunlight.

"There are scientists," she begins, "who study those birds or even something as inanimate as this rock, but no one seems interested in studying our own species in a similar way. Doesn't that seem odd to you? I mean, doesn't it seem odd that we can explain why two bull elk lock horns and persist, often until one of them dies, but we are powerless to explain why our own species does much the same thing for what we can only assume are for different reasons?"

I study the stone in her hands. "It looks like a heart," I tell her.

"I know," she says, turning it over once more in her hands.

"I think Dad somehow knew he was running out of time," I say. "We all knew the risks, he knew working on an ambulance was dangerous." I pick up a rock from the bank and toss it into the water. The pelicans turn in unison to confront the splash but are otherwise uninterested in our presence.

I am nineteen and sandwiched between my mother on my left and my sister on my right. I hug my father's ashes between my thighs as I use my hands to focus the lens of my camera, staring into the yawning crevasse that is the Grand Canyon while the river below slowly winds through its walls on its journey to reach the ocean. I remember reading somewhere that the Colorado River hasn't actually made it to the sea in over a decade. I wonder if my own life will parallel that of the once mighty Colorado, if I am destined to lead a life full of potential and purpose, only to dry up before making anything of my life. When I turn to ask Kate if she knows how long it has been, I am surprised to see tears falling from wild eyes, softly into her lap.

We sit on the same sofa that adorned our front yard for all those years, the upholstery dirty from decades of use. I let my camera fall to my chest, hanging from the strap around my neck as I gently pass the urn to my mother. I take a folded note from my back pocket, flattening it across one armrest. In a voice I hope won't betray my true feelings, I read from the letter addressed to my deceased father.

"Dad," I say, my voice already too quiet. I start again, clearing my throat. "Dad, I wish you could've been there with me to fish the Missouri last week. I used the Adams flies we tied two summers ago on the stretch outside of Craig. I saw two herons building a nest across the river, and a Swainson's thrush when I was having lunch on the bank. It made me think of you." I pause to glance at my mother. She clutches the box containing my father's ashes to her chest. Her eyes brim with tears, nodding for me to continue.

"I really miss you, Dad. I miss the sound of your voice and your hugs. I feel like I'm starting to forget you because I can't remember certain things, like the sound of your laugh and whether you liked cheesecake or apple pie better. I want to introduce you to my friends; I want you to embarrass me in front of them. I miss playing music with you outside our house in the yard on the sofa you and Mom bought with the house. I like to listen to the tapes we made together every few months, just to hear your voice." At this, hot tears fill my eyes and run down my face, blurring the words on the page.

"I won't get another chance to surprise you on your birthday or wish you Merry Christmas or tell you that I love you, but I can still be proud of you when people talk about what a great man you were and how you were always there for them when they needed help. You can still inspire me with your selflessness. You left people with so many good memories of you. They always mention how you made them laugh, always listened, how you always helped whomever you could with whatever you could. It gives me so much joy to hear these things about you and inspires me to be the kind of daughter you'd be proud of.

"The universe works in strange ways. I will never understand why bad things happen to good people or why bad people aren't always held accountable. I don't remember if I told you I loved you before you went to work the day of the accident. I know I told you before, I know that you knew I loved you, but I don't think I told you enough. I don't think we ever tell the people in our lives that mean the most to us how much we appreciate them. I make a point, now, to tell my friends and Kate and mom how much I care about them and how much of a difference they have made in my life. I try not to forget, and thinking about you helps me to remember.

"When I was growing up, I thought you were the most wonderful person in the world because you taught me how to skim stones and whistle. It makes me so sad now knowing that I won't ever get

to do those things with you again. I take comfort knowing that you had a good life and that you died making a difference in the world. I also know that this sadness will change into something different in the years to come, that the pain won't ever go away, but one day I won't feel quite so raw and hollow. I miss you so much, Dad. No amount of consolatory words will ever change that. Please know that you are never far from my thoughts."

I wipe the tears from my eyes on the back of the worn leather band of my father's wristwatch, its face gleaming in the setting sun. My mother stands from the sofa, a fistful of my father in her slender hands. In one fluid motion, she moves her arm to release my father's ashes on the breeze over the Colorado River. I smile, knowing he will one day reach the sea.

AN OLD CAT

STACIA HILL

gray bones sprawled out
under sunlight that tastes of bronze
squinting eyes, drowsy gaze –
ears made of suede

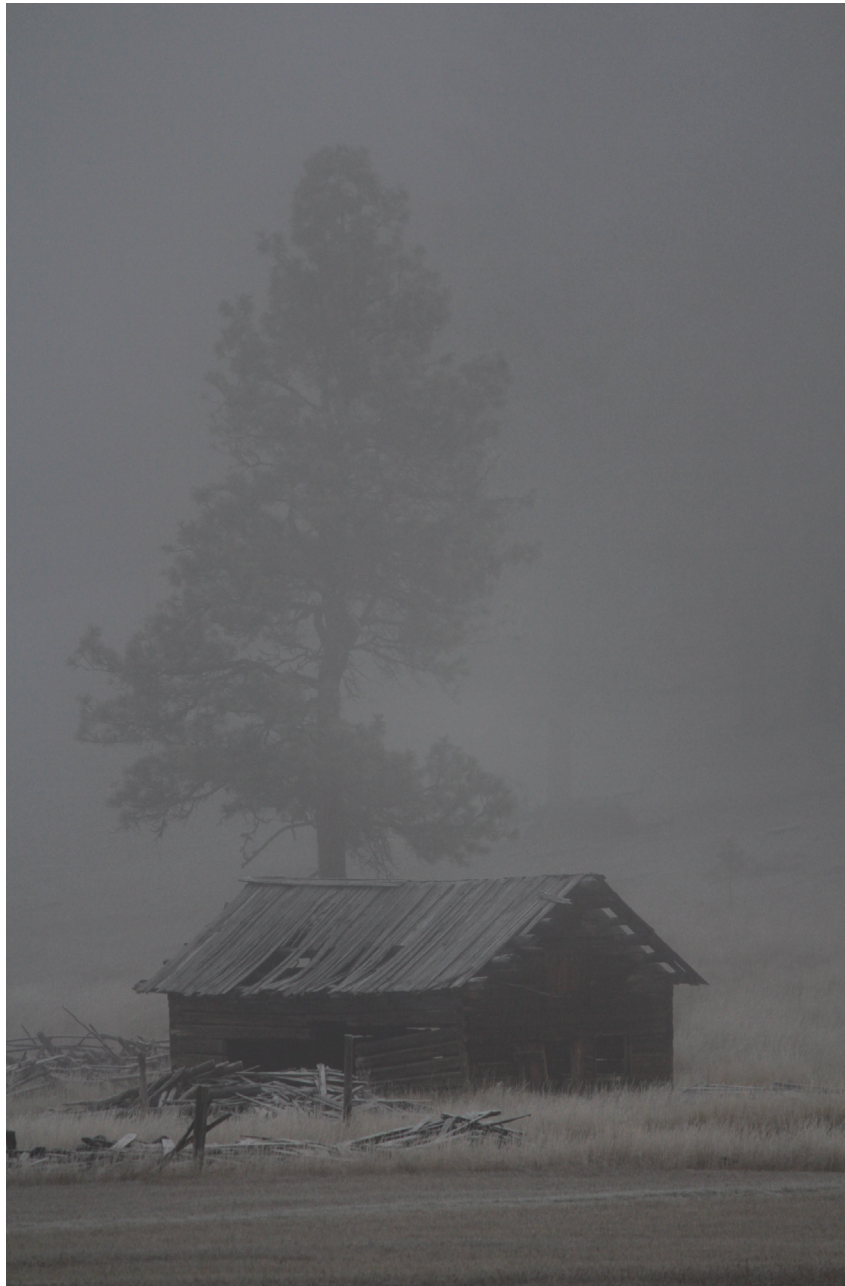
he pads along dirt trail, the same path each day
through bushes and tall grass
loose fur collects on the ends of snagging twigs

his whiskers are kinked, some too short
to be of much use. his nose, a dry gray
river-worn pebble. his chalk bones press
themselves against a thin gray hide.

he watches cars driving past his yard,
the tip of his tail twitches once
every few minutes, until it grows still.
he lays his chin against the sun
parched grass, lemondrop eyes blink

closed, never to open again. he sleeps
under warm august sun.

ABANDONED GROWTH | COURTNEY CATHERS



GUERNEVILLE, CA

ERIKA TIBBETTS

There's a town off the coast of California where I grew up, but I've never lived. It's a small place, a place with one grocery store, two coffee shops, three gas stations, and a lot of hippies. There's only one street light, and in the summer when the flatlanders come up from the Bay, cars pile up all the way to Old River Road, on their way to Armstrong Woods, or Johnson's Beach and fifty cent snow cones. Come Memorial Day, Friday through Sunday, people pack the beaches, the resorts, and the Safeway parking lot. I am not one of the summer people. I've never hiked through the Redwoods in Armstrong Woods, and the one time I went to Johnson's Beach I lost three layers of skin to first degree sunburn. No, after Labor Day, when the flatlanders pack up and head back to their cities, that is when the little river town of Guerneville is at its best. The warm days are cooled down by salty ocean fog that blows in at sunset, and settles just below the mountain tops.

California Redwood trees, also known as Coastal Redwood trees, or *Sequoia sempervirens* if you're into that kind of thing, are the tallest trees on earth. They are found mostly along the Pacific Coast, many between 300-700 years old, but are able to live over 2,000. In the San Francisco area, one group of Redwoods descends from a group of trees that existed 160 million years ago.

Five miles outside of town, off a gravel road that will knock your kidneys loose if you don't have good shocks, is my Guerneville – the Guerneville I know best. It's called Sweetwater, for no other reason I know besides being off of Sweetwater Springs Road. Before I was born, Dad worked on a construction crew building a three story retreat house on Sweetwater's hundred and eighty acres. When the house was finished my parents were hired by the owner, a Catholic priest who ran a publish-

ing company, as care-takers to make sure there was food for the sheep and the cats, that the carport was always stocked with firewood, and that the house was still standing when groups left after retreats. It wasn't a guarantee that it would be when some groups left. When I was young I would help my parents, sometimes sweeping the dry autumn leaves off the deck that piled up under the wisteria arbors, or folding fresh towels to put in the bathrooms when a big group was coming, but usually I just played with the cats. I grew up there, raised under the shade of the redwood trees, getting their soggy, rotten leaves caked to the soles of my shoes while I hauled firewood, or ran away from llamas. Of all of the places I have known, Guerneville has been the most constant. But it's never been my home.

While most redwoods grow along the Pacific coastline and in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, there is another type, the Dawn Redwood, which grows in the Sichuan-Hubei region of China. The tree was discovered in the early 1940s, and in 1995, North Carolina established the Crescent Ridge Dawn Redwoods Preserve, where hundreds of Dawn Redwoods were planted in order for people to experience the trees outside of their native China.

I was born in Santa Rosa, California, the youngest of three. I lived with my brother, sister, parents, grandma, and uncle in an old stucco house in a neighborhood with no other kids, which worked out great when everyone wanted their leaves raked, but wasn't as fun when you were sick of only having your brother and sister to play with. My favorite thing about the Santa Rosa house was the fort in the backyard that Dad built. It was on pillars in the middle of a sandbox that we never played in. All the stray cats in the neighborhood used it as a litter box. My brother, being the oldest and thoroughly obsessed with all things Ninja Turtles, painted the fort green and named it the Turtle House. Then, when my sister and I came along, the Turtle House got flowered curtains. I liked it well enough, living in Santa Rosa. Mom didn't drive, but the public library and Barnes and Noble were only a ten minute walk away, and there was an ice cream stand across the street that made dipped cones. I liked it well enough until my aunt, uncle, and cousin moved in, bringing Bertha, their evil Chihuahua with them. After that, I tried to convince Mom and Dad to buy a farm in North Dakota. Eventually, when my brother was in college and my sister started telling boys she loved them after only a week, we moved. Not to North Dakota, but to Lake County, a place that people from the Bay and the Los Angeles Times liked to call Methland, but I always thought the sign on Highway 29 reading, Now Entering Flake County, was more accurate. The moving process was a slow one, not without its blood, sweat, and tears. Mom and Dad decided we were going to build the new house ourselves. It was January when we started pouring the foundation. I remember because my gloves were too big for my hands, and the

water from the hose kept getting in them. My fingers had never been so frozen, and my eleven year old self kept counting the days until spring.

The reason the Redwood tree grows so well along the Pacific Coast is due to the mild, cool climate. Redwoods need temperate weather, large amounts of rain, summer fog, and rich soil in order to live so long and grow so tall. Their root systems, growing fifty feet from their trunks, entwine with the roots of other redwoods, helping them withstand the more harsh California weather.

Lake County only lasted eight years. After Dad's doctor told him he was in the stages of pre-colon cancer, it was only a matter of time before my parents had to choose between paying the mortgage and paying for surgeries. When they told me the bank was taking the house, I was somewhere between my second community college and the University of Montana. I was tying steel—cutting eighteen foot pieces of rebar and tying them into foundation cages—my muscles burning from being bent at a ninety degree angle for two days. I tried not to cry into the hot red dirt at my feet. I didn't want Dad to feel like it was his fault somehow. But I did cry, for the loss of another house, for the loss of the familiar, and for the loss of my bedroom. The steel I was tying was for our new house, a cabin at Sweetwater where my parents would be permanent care-takers. But no matter how many times they said it was ours, it wasn't. Once I packed up my old room, my boxes never got unpacked. Like me, they had no place to go. Everything Montana-bound went behind the couch in the loft I slept in, while the rest went forgotten in storage. I made the rounds from my parent's loft, to my sister's guest room, even to my brother's couch in Oakland, drifting around until the semester started at University of Montana. Once my feet hit the Pantzer parking lot, and I pushed that squeaky wheeled cart piled with what was left of home into the lobby for check-in, I was no longer a Californian. It only took fall semester for my family to decide I was from Montana now, that my room was not in California, but in the dorms. That's something I wish I'd known before I left, that when everyone went home for winter and summer break, I would go to California to visit.

The title of *Tallest Tree* is one that constantly changes due to logging and changing weather conditions. Today, the tallest living Redwood, named Hyperion, is found in the far north of California, in the Redwood Creek watershed. At 379.3 feet tall, it stands higher than the Statue of Liberty, Big Ben, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the White House, and a Boeing 747.

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Logically, calling Guerneville my home should be easy. I have more memories there than anywhere else in California; it shouldn't be as hard as this. I should feel at home in a place where I use to spend weekends with my cousins. Where our favorite thing to do was take mattresses off of the third floor beds and slide down the staircase, a California kind of sled. We were so small back then, we could fit all six of us on a mattress at once, our little hands using the railing spindles to pick up speed, shrieking as we slid into the second floor living room. Once, when the power was out, we played laser tag for what felt like hours while our parents went to Safeway for food and flashlights. When the power came back on, we turned off all the light and kept playing. I learned how to drive at Sweetwater, just like my brother, just like my sister, but no matter how many memories I dig up, I always feel like a visitor, like I've become one of the summer people. I come on Memorial Day, and leave on Labor Day, floating from couch to couch and living out of suitcases.

Back in the day, building codes in San Francisco required builders to use only Redwood lumber in new foundation structures due to the wood's natural durability. The tannin in the wood makes it resistant to fire, while also protecting it against insects, fungus, and disease. There is no tougher wood.

After what feels like five years, I have a room at home again. I have four walls, a roof, and a door. I have shelves for all my five hundred books, an armoire to hang my cloths, and a bed to sleep in. I forgot I owned so many things: my great grandfather's typewriter, grandma's tea set with the purple flowers, my Berenstain Bear books. It's overwhelming seeing so much of me in one place, but in truth, it's not home yet. While the walls are filled with the many parts of me, there is nothing of me now, me today, the girl that moved away to Montana to figure out where she belonged. Home is still the smell of ocean air, the feel of salt on my skin as it blows in the wind. It's campfires, ham and cheese rolls, pumpkin candles, and Mom's perfume, the spicy Estee Lauder perfume that lingers after she's left the room. It's the prickly scratch of Dad's beard when he hugs me. Home is still all of the things I didn't leave behind, going from house to house, and city to city.

ALLUVIUM

STACIA HILL

I brumate with thin sheets draped
over, yet never seize movement below –

always winding, wandering bleary across
the earth. I grab handfuls of loose soil

and stones to take with me. I carry heavy logs
across my back. Stirring under sun, I tickle the feet

of just hatched ducklings, feel the slip
of *Salvelinus confluentus* move through me.

Warm emerald current, I drift below small boats
and the people on them. A grandfather sits

in the back of an aluminum canoe,
his granddaughter in the bow seat rowing

fist sized vortexes into my streaming surface.
He acts as the rudder with his paddle hanging

alongside the stern deck, slicing
one long slipstream wake into my skin. Smiling –

watching her swing from right to left again and again
downstream. I grow shallow, evaporation

is drowsy and vacant in heat. I collect ochre
leaves falling all around me, take them with

to the alluvium of sticks and foliage. Watch
as the world slowly dies, goes to sleep, and wait

to be covered once again by thin sheets
of bubbled ice.

LOST HIGHLAND HOUSE | ERIKA TIBBETTS



GRANDFATHER IS IN

EMMA JACOBSEN

I. My Father Says

Colorado is a safe place for my family. It is the native ground. Though I can't recall it, Steamboat's importance remains without my memories. He is gone, and now Colorado revives its hearty importance. My grandfather had that effect on most everything. He made being a Rutledge feel like being a Rockefeller. I hated it.

There are these family photographs in my father's office. My grandfather's smile stands out, his long arms holding us close, leaning and pushing us together, up in the Colorado air. Set on a mile-high deck, the photograph is centered square on our gathered family, with the Colorado wilderness dropping away from our smiles. The blue of the mountainous distance matched my dress, which was originally coordinated to my eyes. *My eyes*, they are so unclouded in the photograph, highlighted by the surroundings and by my dress chosen by my mother. It looks right. I wish that I could have that memory for myself, but it is only a photograph.

My dad likes to visit those photographs too; they lived on the wall in his office for a reason. He was so proud of them. My grandfather was so proud of them. With a big cheesy grin that could almost burn through his face, my dad would ask me "Are you excited to go see *Cow-lo-rad-ie* some day dear?"

I think my father loved him the most, which only made things more problematic for me.

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II. To Kauai

We were always being told that my grandparent's Hali'ki'pa house was an undeniable treat. Japan perfumed the walls, but the pristine 60's leather sofa and chair set complimented that aura because of whose house it was. It was the home of American Royalty.

Golden cherry blossom screens stood and spiteful twin dachshunds wiggled within the chair legs. Rooster calls before dawn were there to remind one where they just woke up. Over the years, hurricanes had set the chickens free on the island. Free to scuttle and arrange beneath the palms, only to trip through the sand following trails of white hands dragging silver packages of food. There was a surprising harmony to the heat and hypocrisy. Kauai, with all its peculiarities, is a place where the domestic American goes to be wild. The chickens were just following in suit.

Regardless of the rowdy tourists, I think my grandparents would rather have believed that Kauai was a placid paradise. It was respect that ran the Kauai house and I sometimes think that respect had earned its place there. I always found it incredible for an island so cultured and chaotic. Passing time in that structure also may have been the worst part about vacation, but every Rutledge was expected to like it there. The sponge of grass that the tropical rain bounced off every afternoon, the smoky asphalt and sliding doors, it was a thirsty suburb. I gave in at times because Kauai is such a rich place, volcanic and Jurassic. As the years passed, I adjusted somewhat and my grandparents and their stiff home didn't feel entirely out of place there. I think if you asked my dad he would say it was because of the upmarket bamboo floors and the humidity. You had no choice but to float, I actually think the presence of the house commanded it. As you might expect though, vacation never fully lived up to the expectations. But as I backtrack through the memories, I think more and more that my own unhappiness may have been self caused in this case.

III. Christmas or Rutledge Spirit

Christmases were spent often in the Kauai house. And so were my first experiences with alcohol. Sneaking it, stealing it, loitering with it. So it is being a third generation Rutledge, and being the middle cousin out of eight.

Peach daiquiris are a Christmas morning tradition. I think, now that I am older, I understand their purpose better. The drink lessened the guilt of spending an adulterated amount of money on gifts. Eggnog doesn't cut it.

Always receiving more than we deserved, I generally embodied some element of shame after

the Christmas morning carnage. The evergreen tree felt out of place, decorated by someone decades out of date. Aunt Luna, drunk before noon. My brother, weeping over some gift gone wrong. So, feeling in the Rutledge spirit, I asked for the child sort of a daiquiri.

My grandfather, architect of the Rutledge spirit, handed me a stemmed crystal glass and pulled the blender from its base. I hope you might expect there to be a virgin version of the peachy drink, and there was. But not for me.

I was kid-drunk before brunch. Grandma's, out of a can, culinary genius, be damned.

IV. Margery and the Dragon Dogs

He died and left my grandmother to deal with the "tour-ons" infesting the island, a large and now empty island house, along with no knowledge of how to pay her own bills. She used to be so talented that I wore her corduroy concoctions for Christmas and Easter. They might even be in a box somewhere in my parent's house. She has become a brackish lady over the years I have known her. No longer nimble enough to sew, no longer patient and doting and unthinkably lonely with only two rotten little dogs to bark with.

Molly and Lizzie, the dachshund pair, are little yellow puddle creators, and the more accurately named royalty in the house. My grandmother never swears more than when she hushes under her breath at those beady-eyed beasts. They never got walked because she was always finding more important things to do inside, like watch Fox News or dust grandfather's office.

When we were on vacation my sister and I would volunteer to take the little sausage dogs out for exercise. Looping the Napoo'oo ka'la cul-de-sac, we would race them like thoroughbreds on the scalding asphalt oval. From a lawn chair, Dad would be announcing the track with his booming voice and a beer in hand.

V. Sundowners

At this time of day my face would be bonded sideways to leather, my cheek adhered to the green couch. My brother might be nagging Grandpa about the TV, Mom and the aunties are tittering over recipes and plants; it was time for a drink. The men of the house would realize the time, and the ladies would put in their drink orders as they moved out onto the lanai.

Now the Sundowner is a special South African ritual, most completely, an evening drinking ritual, adopted into the Rutledge family sometime before I was born. I guess that there was something

cathartic about drinking with the sunset; we liked watching the day end on the tiny island. Welcoming the night reminded us that there was another island day tomorrow, building the anticipation was a great family specialty.

I always thought that we were especially lucky when a malka shower would bust through during the sundowner. We could see the first major ridge of the Na’Pali Coast while we sat pleasantly on the covered porch. As a shower would pass through, the deluge would set the water escape system of the island into motion. Spitting, my grandmother would dismiss the little deluge as a disruption to the evening ritual and rush to the kitchen. But I never had any trouble with it, and I would watch in wonder, as new waterfalls would magically appear on the distant green mountains.

VI. I’ve Had Plenty

Attempting to help my grandmother in the kitchen was kind of like helping her with anything. It’s usually better not to ask. I never got to do more than set the table, pour milk for the kids, and plop mayonnaise on to canned peaches for what she considered “the dinner salad.” I learned to set the table before she had time to tell me to stop. In the end, I’m not sure if I was helping her get dinner ready or just making her more compulsive about getting dinner ready. It seemed more frustrating, and I couldn’t figure out if I was doing it for her or so I wouldn’t get in trouble. If she was in a particularly convincing mood I would get uncomfortable enough to drag my mom into it. That generally ended with me losing dessert or dinner all together.

Whatever.

Dinner itself, when I was present, was usually spiced up by my brother’s expertise. I had my own instruments of torture, but my brother’s ability to look ungrateful with each forced bite of food, that took grandma for all the cake she baked. Unable to get a word in, properly, she often left the scolding to my father who never understood where David’s spiteful streak came from. I think my brother took a quote, or 20, from the dachshunds. I know I don’t blame him. Plus, I think he was the only one who didn’t feel self-conscious being dragged out of the dining room by his ears.

One down.

If I was feeling crafty by this point I usually brought up my horses, or my humanitarian streak. Nothing quieted that table faster. I liked the bottom of the totem pole. The totem pole consisted of Grandfather Rutledge at the top and me with my compassion somewhere ten feet underground. It was from this position that I could ruin dinner. I didn’t even have to be upset. Or raise my voice. Or forfeit dessert.

The only person who ended up looking like shit was Grandpa.

“I’ve had plenty Grandma, thank you.” That was how each of us politely ended dinner. It wasn’t so bad, especially when we had the beach to look forward to.

VII. Legacy

My grandfather produced a son of controversy and prosperity, a virtuous pair of a younger brother and older sister, and a baby of love and guilt. Each of the four children grew to his strict measurements besides the youngest. The guilty baby fell a little short of surprising, becoming a small-scale organic farmer and losing the love of his wife. The controversial eldest had to learn to live with the consequences of his actions but was such a successful businessman that he could be pardoned. My father and his sister, they were planted right in the center of the range “disappointing to embarrassing.” Over the years they each have accepted and fallen into these roles, my father and aunt taking on the task of being not the best nor the worst.

I’ve learned that the only manner in which to embrace the Rutledge way was to realize that I am not one. I have the name; I have the blue eyes and that resounding belligerent nature when it comes to work. But I never would accept that I was better than anyone else, that I deserved more or even that I deserved that damn last name.

I was always feeling guilty for nothing, is what my grandfather said.

VII. No Salt

Life for my Richard “Jake” Rutledge began in Australia, sometime in the 30’s. When Richard was near nine years old, Great Grandfather Rutledge died and World War II beached Australian shores. Grandpa’s father left quite a family behind when he did that. But they were already Rutledge strong even then. That headless family, with one mother and many uncountable children swam across the Pacific Ocean to a bustling America. Littleton.

Colorado was waiting.

My grandfather began to throw newspapers on square lawns and work at a one Piggly Wiggly’s grocery store to sustain his large family throughout high school. This new country had many new challenges. Australia though, had strengthened his adventurous and devious soul when he was a child. It was often that he would have been sent to challenge glossy black vipers with machetes in the bottom of the bush house. He collected horrendous spiders in the closet and bedded them in dusty linens to

frighten anyone who wanted clean towels. He was talented at capturing singing parrots that he brought to live between the stilts of their airy home; they filled the air with music and painted the house when they molted. There may have also been a half wild dog, which howled across the mountains with jackals and ate from young Richard's feet when he felt like it.

Colorado though, would be where he grew into a Rutledge father. No longer was the challenge spooking his siblings with spiders or taming the wildlife, he had an entire family to live for since his mother couldn't provide.

He worked hard.

He came out of college with a degree, a drive for business and a woman named Margery who was as smooth as butter. No salt.

Persistent and intelligent my grandfather worked his way up the ranks of a massive telecom company. And even in status he was kind, diligent, and genuine. He said he used to eat lunch in the mailroom. Nothing less than lovely things could be said; he was a brilliant people person. Just not with me.

VIII. The Big Time

They lived together in Colorado, grown up Jake and Marge did, with a station wagon and a nice house. Those five kids happened. They took that family-wagon all over Colorado. To pass the drive, wobbly-kneed football games were held in the back of the traveling family-mobile. There were no seatbelts of course, and punishment for complaining about anything was mitigated with a swift sealing of the windows while the happy couple chain-smoked. It was re-named the rolling coffin.

With a bounty of dachshunds and children, Littleton is where they lived before they retired to the Hali'ki'pa house in the middle of the Pacific. Their own personal Midway Island. But, Colorado wasn't to be forgotten. It was the land of plenty, and a house was had in Steamboat. I'll be there soon, in less than a year actually, to revisit the ghost of my grandfather's smiles, hollow hugs and "Big Time" success.

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Thankfully though, Grandma is ready to leave the island now; Grandpa left her with more than she could handle. Her life is hers for the first time in five decades; I wonder what she will do with it. Our family is ours, for the first time in five decades; I wonder what we will do with it. I realize now that I am grandfather-less for the first time in my life, and I am wondering if I should do anything with it.

ESCAPE TO THE WOODS | COURTNEY CATHERS



FREEDOM
MADISON HINRICHS

Falling,
 into an abyss,
 an abyss
 of my own making.
I am falling,
 down
 down
 down
like an autumn
 leaf.
 Or like the
 light,
bright,
 white,
snow.
 Perhaps
 I am falling
 like the cotton
in the wind,
 without direction,
 without purpose,
 without structure.
Falling.

I am falling
down
down
down
my soul
plunges
onward,
freely
soaring,
dancing
on the edge
of nothingness,
threatening the bounds
of existence.
Falling
I am finally
free.

COVER ART: WATERCOLOR
STACIA HILL

LAYOUT & DESIGN
LAUREN KORN
WITH
BRENDAN JORDAN
VANESSA MATTFELDT

TITLE FONT: TRAJAN PRO 3
BODY FONT: GARAMOND

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