

the green issue

cars unwanted causes
abstinence
dirty political money

thoreau & sherlock holmes

beauty barbados

{a rant} {a comic}

+
*the results of
english department
writing contest*

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MINT
magazine

MINT MAGAZINE

Will Sankey
Editor-in-Chief

Patrick Morgan
Senior Editor

Meghan Gleason
Managing Editor

Casey Carrigan
Joe Martin
Artists

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James Faye Wonderland
Kim Perrella
Nate Northrop
Assistant Editor

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Deborah Bertlesman
Allison Sass
Caitlin Portch
Dominick Barone
Jessica Cervini
Loren Merchan
Rachael Peskanov
Contributing Writers

Dr. Rob Doggett
Advisor

Reader,

Holy God this thing is huge! Proudly presenting our largest (and perhaps finest) magazine to date--I give you MiNT Volume Sixteen. We are finishing up a vibrant semester that has fuelled an unparalleled amount of growth for MiNT. This is in fact, our third magazine this semester. Within this edition (or rather, textbook?) you will find articles, rants, creative-nonfiction works, and poems of the highest order. Casey Carrigan has supplied an abbreviated version of a piece that he read on a Senior works platform. Also, Pat Morgan has supplied a detailed, intriguing work on Sherlock Holmes and Henry David Thoreau.

Furthermore, in this MiNT you will find the first place winners of the English Department Writing Contest--the genres that students submitted works for were: poetry, fiction, non-fiction, critical essay, African-American studies, and drama. This section presents the best works English Department has produced this year. I would highly encourage you to read through these pieces.

As this semester draws to a close we would like to celebrate the tracks of our leaving officers and writers. As was said in the last MiNT they have all played a pivotal role in MiNT and all have exceptional ability. With that said, there is more to come. Next year we are planning to unleash six magazines, three for each semester. As always I encourage anyone who would like to see the inner workings of a magazine to email us at mint@geneseo.edu. Have a fantastic summer!

Sincerely,



William Sankey
Editor-in-Chief
MiNT Magazine

mint@geneseo.edu
<http://www.geneseo.edu/~mint>



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IT'S REAL LOVE

By Allison Sass

In his hit song, “Real Love,” John Lennon spoke for many when he wrote: “Seems like all I really was doing was waiting for love.” The sheer number of musical ballads, works of art, theatrical productions and literary works dedicated to “real love” prove that the quest for love is important to virtually everyone, in one way or another. The definition of love is reinvented on a daily basis by people of all ages, races and religious backgrounds, and it can be experienced on countless levels. However, it is the love shared between romantic partners that is most commonly associated with the waiting and yearning Lennon sings about in “Real Love.”

The waiting game is no secret to the members of True Love Revolution, a student-run organization that was founded in 2006 at Harvard University. Members of True Love Revolution are dedicated to remaining abstinent and resisting the immense amounts of sexual temptation that exist in the college atmosphere. Abstinence has been practiced historically within various religions and cultures; however, True Love Revolution is unique in that

it is an entirely secular organization and is open to those of all cultural backgrounds. As is evident on the website, <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/tlr>, members of the organization are united in their beliefs that there is no truer love than that between spouses, and that only after the commitment of marriage is made should sexual intercourse take place.

Even if one does not agree with the practice of abstinence, it is easy to see that True Love Revolution, and other organizations dedicated to abstinence, have only good intentions in their beliefs and ideals. In fact, the idea of saving yourself for “one true love” almost sounds like a fairy tale when considering the increasingly vulgar “hook-up culture” that seems to dominate today’s society. However, just as the quest for love requires waiting and patience, it is also accompanied by many mistakes. In fact, it is entirely possible that the way in which we approach our quest for “real love” could be a mistake in itself.

Mistakes of the heart are highly personalized and subjective. What one person views as a complete relational mistake may be the glue that holds another individual’s perception of love together. For example, the practice of abstinence may work for

one aspiring couple, but could also be a leading factor in tearing another relationship apart. While the individual whose heart has been broken may view the decision to practice abstinence as a mistake, the happily abstinent couple would most likely have the exact opposite opinion. The elevated divorce rate existing today proves that even marriage, the ultimate form of love and commitment, does not provide a certain solution to mistakes of love. Many remarried

divorcées believe that their previous marriages were mistakes on their path to attain true love, while others instead view their previous marriages as important life experiences.

Just as the wait to attain “real love” can be littered by opinion-driven mistakes, it is also filled with countless uncertainties. In my experience, I have found that one of the most common uncertainties of love turns up after a couple has reached a comfortable point in their relationship. It is at this point when they are forced to decide if they are truly in love with one another, or in love with

the comfort that the relationship provides. Each individual must then determine if his or her wait for “real love” has ended with this person, or if he or she is simply at a stop along the journey towards finding a soul mate. There is no question that stepping out of our personal comfort zone can create even more uncertainties in determining whether or not a relationship fits into our own perception of true love.

The uncertainties, mistakes and integral life choices that occur as we wait for “real love” can be incredibly overwhelming. For this reason, most would agree that truly loving another individual not only takes great amounts of strength, but also acceptance. To love on a romantic level is to give yourself up to anticipation, to surrender yourself to the stomach wrenching, nerve racking, adrenaline-fueled excitement that eventually evolves into emotions of complete infatuation. Ultimately, real love requires patience and most would agree that it is entirely worth the wait.



CAR DREAMS: THE UNCOMPLICATED VERSION

By Casey Carrigan

I was not allowed to play with G.I. Joe as a child. I was not allowed to play with Batman, or Spiderman, or Superman or even Power Rangers. I was not allowed to make gun shapes out of Legos, sticks, or paper. I was not allowed to shoot my index finger like a gun. Making gun noises – bang, rata tat tat, pow pow – was prohibited. Violent television shows were banned. I was faintly aware of the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers, VR Troopers, Robocop, Johnny Quest, Batman, and all the rest – during recess this seemed to be what all the other boys talked about – but I was not allowed to watch them. Technically, I wasn't even allowed to be in Eugene's company, much less his back yard; he was younger than me, but had mastered such a wide variety of curse words that my mother deemed him a threat; the Mustangs were death traps, along with everything else in Eugene's yard. Due to my mother's stringent rules on violence, my options for toys were fairly limited, and my brother and I ended up with lots of puzzles, board games, Legos, Erector Set, K'nex, and finally, cars, lots and lots of toy cars.

Matchbox and Hotwheels, a side dish in most boys' childhoods, were for me the main course. Once a week my brother Corey and I would set up a length of track, propping one side on top of a bed or couch, and one by one, we'd let the cars glide to a stop. We'd measure the distances, and then crown a winner: the slickest car. In Wal-Mart we'd look at every toy car on every rack. Hotwheels were always slicker, and they generally won the races, but they were often too flashy, with strange paint jobs and oversized engines. Matchbox cars were lighter, and less slick, but they were often more realistic in their proportions, and they were more often modeled after real cars. My favorites were often Matchbox versions of obscure cars, like the Saab 9000, or the Isuzu Rodeo. Lucky for me (and my mother), a die-cast car costs the same as a candy bar. I couldn't get enough of them.

"Star light, star bright, the first star I see tonight. I wish I may, I wish I

might, have the wish I wish tonight: I wish for a Powerwheel!" I said these words in my head every time I caught a lone star in the early evening. Visits to Toys "R" Us consisted of two stages: the entering the store stage, and the looking at Powerwheels stage. I wanted a Powerwheel years after I should have outgrown them, even after I learned how to ride a bike. Was it for want of independence, or was it something stranger and more complex? I would become angry when my friends left their Powerwheels sitting in their sheds, when I could only play with tiny die-cast toys. I was bothered because they weren't nearly as fascinated as I was, they didn't appreciate them as I would have; they never used them.

Justin was my neighbor, and therefore one of my best friends, but he was an asshole. Justin was a compulsive liar; he hogged toys, cheated, argued, skipped turns, cut in line and was generally horrible company. On one occasion, after an argument, he snuck into our backyard and dismantled the tree fort we had been building. When asked about it, he claimed that he was merely "taking back his nails." When I was nine years old something happened to Justin that may have initiated my eventual rejection of God: his father – who had helped him build his enviable tree fort, had given him a trampoline, a Nintendo, and an RC car – bought him a go-cart. I was overwhelmed with several levels of envy. Needless to say, due to a combination of Justin's controlling personality and my mother's over-protectiveness I was never permitted to drive his go-cart, but the bar of my desire had been raised once again, this time to a height that seemed never could be reached.

One day, while staying at my Aunt Theresa's house after school, I was watching my cousin Matt play video games on his Sony Playstation when he turned to me, bored with his current game, and asked, "Wanna see something cool?" "Sure."

He opened the Playstation's lid and changed the disc. "You're gonna love

this." He navigated through the menu screens until he found the video. What I then witnessed changed my understanding of reality. It was only a trailer video for an upcoming video game, but I was convinced I was watching film. It was so realistic looking, it had real cars, real physics. And when it came to cars, realism, since the days of matchbox, was always most important to me. After Matt left I watched the video over and over again. I called my brother upstairs to see.

"It's called Gran Turismo." I said.

That Christmas, my brother and I put our wish lists together and asked for only one thing. The Sony Playstation game console was our first game console, and it changed the way I thought about the world, or perhaps, it let me experience the way I already thought about the world. Finally, through Gran Turismo, with its realistic physics and real cars, I could in a way own and control the vehicles. But only for a limited time.

Tight leather through tinted glass, like vivid snapshots of a distant, significant sexual encounter, that's how I recall my tryst with a bright red '84 Volkswagen Scirocco just months before my seventeenth birthday. The car satisfied me in every way. It was fuel-efficient. It was tossable, tiny, with a short-throw shifter. Its leather cockpit promised a tight, secure fit; everything about it promised precision. Trapezoidal to perfect excess, its design unintentionally counterpointed the filthy aerodynamic trends so common in automobiles two decades later. Short, low, square, clean, peppy, but probably not fast: after a couple of years subscribing to Sport Compact Car magazine, I knew exactly what I wanted. I loved the eighties, the seventies, the compact, and the obscure. I had a list of dream cars, some could be considered tuner cars and others were obscure classics: Datsun 510 or 240Z, Honda Civic CRX, BMW 2002 or any of the small Bimmers, Ford Escort RS Cosworth, Alfa Romeo GTV, and any VW from the 80s Rabbit era.

I wanted my car to be able to move quickly, but much more importantly, I wanted my car to be an accurate reflection of myself. The Scirocco added itself to my list immediately. It was more than just curve free, it was rust free, mechanically sound, and perhaps most importantly, it was almost free at \$1200.

I remember looking up from a window sticker with a list of up to date maintenance work, up from the clean darkness of the perfect interior, and back at my mother who was standing by the Caravan at the edge of the road. She wore the same tolerant smile from the days of Toys “R” Us, the days of the Powerwheel aisle. At that moment, I realized the meeting wasn’t going to be repeated, that I would never own and control this car. I knew what was going through her head: visions of the tiny Scirocco ground to pieces beneath a Suburban or Hummer, of speeding tickets, of obscure German parts failing and costing thousands of dollars to replace. I could argue every point, and of course I did, for the sake of true love I argued, but she determined what was safe for her son, and when it came time to buy a car, she would write the check.

The car I ended up with cannot be said to have lacked character. 1989 Chevrolet Caprice wagon’s with wooden paneling are packed with character, but during the three years I drove it, I cringed whenever anyone said, “Of course, you would drive that car.” No, I wouldn’t have driven that car if it hadn’t been the product of compromise. “The Woodie,” as the Caprice was affectionately dubbed by my friends, sucked down a quart of oil a week, and turned one gallon of unleaded gasoline into only 15 miles of smelly highway air. It had its positive qualities. It was

fantastic for road trips, filling all eight seats with friends proved to be an entertaining challenge, and the ride was always smooth and relaxing, like a Lay-Z-Boy recliner on a conveyor belt. But “The Woodie” connoted something I wasn’t comfortable with, a certain slackerdom is implied, a certain posturing. You’re not a car guy when you drive “The Woodie.” You’re something else. The car was a novelty, and I had grown up taking cars too seriously to settle for a novelty. My current car, an ’83 Plymouth Reliant wagon, suffers from the same problem. One day, though, my soul will not be chained down by my mommy or my money, and I will get that car. One day...

Dreaming with Eyes Open

Poetry resides in each blade of grass
Caressing my skin
Writing words of inspiration in the clouds
Raining drops of salty ocean water on a summers day
Subsiding like tears
Into a puddle of hopeful attempts
To find peace within myself and the world around me
Where simplicity becomes everything

-Rachael Peskanov



POETRY

B I G B E N

By Rachael Peskanov

It was a happy day,
A day of ribbons, laughter, and cake
A celebration of four years past
And little celeste couldn't wait

Smiles, cheering and anticipation
Filled the room
As she used her tiny hands
To rip, open and untie

A teddy from Allie, how cute
Some dolls from Jessica, how divine
And the presents kept coming
Beaded bracelets, games, and candy of every kind

But there sat Granny, warm with her big brown eyes
And from her purse she drew a little sachet
Containing a special prize
A tiny seed

At first she tried to eat it and Granny screamed no
This is not food, here let me show
So in the ground it went, with a sprinkle of water as celeste bid it goodbye
She watered him every other day
And with a little help from the sun
He grew and grew towards the sky

Big Ben she called it, and so began her innocent years of youth
Where a tire swing was hung,
and a little wooden house was built to keep all her dollies and bears
Where she'd lie dreaming under the stars on top Ben's branches without a care

He couldn't see nor hear
Heck he couldn't even talk but she didn't mind
She knew from the moment she woke till the time came to rest her tiny head
That he would be forever waiting, for her to come and play again

Time had passed
The candy had been eaten,
the beads broke
the dolls and teddies weathered
And the games outgrown

A couple days after her thirteenth birthday
Granny passed in her sleep
but stayed in Celeste's heart
In all the memories she had given
with but a single seed

BATTLING ALIENATED INTERPRETATION: HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND SHERLOCK HOLMES

By Patrick Morgan

No method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever on the alert.

– Thoreau

You see, but you do not observe.

–Sherlock Holmes

Answer me this: Where do you get your thoughts from? Why do you like the things you like? Questions like these buzz through my mind whenever I stare at a blank computer screen. How far am I willing to push my interpretations? Should I yield my thoughts to the “experts”? It is tempting to just squish these questions between your mental fingers, and repeat some worn-out mantra that carefully sidesteps the question: “Oh,” your mind sneakily snipes back, “you’re such an original thinker – I mean, who’s more thoughtful than you? – that all your thoughts are bright, ripe yellow pears dangling from dew-bedabbled branches that only you can reach.” And then, with a complacent smile plastered on your face, you quietly begin to write your essay on some topic that only you could have thought up, unaware that you barely prevented that pesky sting of truth. The sting, of course, is the knowledge that your self-proclaimed a priori yellow-pear thought is really an over-chewed bolus; our thoughts tend to be the upchucked cud of various minds, none of which are our own.

That last paragraph of mine is a case in point. I tried to be original, and I thought I could pull it off by scrutinizing every word and by creating original metaphors and images for the thought process. With regard to language, I tend to be as anal as a donkey’s ass, and that paragraph is no exception: I spent roughly two hours constructing it, choosing the words that would work well together, and suffusing it with my ideas of what constitutes good writing. I felt that I was being clever. For example, I carefully repeated and varied the insect imagery (which represents truth) with the pear imagery (which represents our biased conception of truth), and then I combined the two images using the food bolus image; I accented all of this by meticulously looking at the rhythm and assonance of my words. However, any work that relies on allusions is a derived work, and I incorporated three allusions into that paragraph: Shakespeare uses the word “dew-bedabbled,” Saint Augustine uses the pear picking imagery, and I always link the word “a priori” with Immanuel Kant. I won’t explain how these allusions work and I won’t point out any of the other tactics I used (I do not want to insult your intelligence), but the point is this: We suffer from alienated interpretation.



Alienated interpretation occurs when we do not analyze the thoughts, words, and opinions that surround us; it happens when we unknowingly adopt another person’s point of view, when we relinquish our right to make our own meaning, when we transition from “know thyself” to “know what others know.” College is empowering because it challenges you to make your own meaning; it aids you in the constant dialectical struggle between self-observation and interpretation, and other-observation and interpretation (i.e. between observing and interpreting for yourself, and relying on another person’s observations and interpretations).

It is easy to unknowingly incorporate another person’s views into your own view. Commercials tell us that young women only need the right brand of shampoo to find happiness, and that old men just have to take a little Viagra before they can prance and

sing down the street. The world – whether it be people, commercials, or unvocalized worldviews – are always telling us who *we* are (“we” being anybody who is alive). This may escalate to the point where we have to check our Facebook pages in order to see what books or what types of cheesy noodles we like best. (Ok, it probably won’t come to that, but it’s an interesting thought, isn’t it?)

I began to think about all these questions as I tried to explain why I like the books that I do. Since I first read them independently in high school, I have considered Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories to be among the best works that I have ever read. Why is that? The answer: Both Henry Thoreau and Sherlock Holmes outline a way to overcome alienated interpretation; in short, I think they espouse a philosophy that can empower people. On some level, after reading these texts, I felt empowered myself.

What could Thoreau and a fictional detective possibly have in common? There are actually many essays on this topic, and since my goal is to show these two authors in relation to alienated interpretation, and not to merely list some similarities, I’ll take a few words from “Holmes, Thoreau, and the Elusive Trout,” an essay by Richard L. Kellogg: “The two men shared a Bohemian view of society, craved periods of solitude, expressed respect

for the wonders of nature, focused on the smallest aspects of life, and distrusted government institutions such as slavery.” In other words, they are very similar people. Sherlock Holmes even seems to realize his connection with Thoreau, and this is seen when, during the “Adventure of the Noble Bachelor,” he exclaims: “Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau’s example.” (As Thoreau enthusiast Robert J. Galvin points out, a trout in the milk indicates that the farmer watered down his milk.)

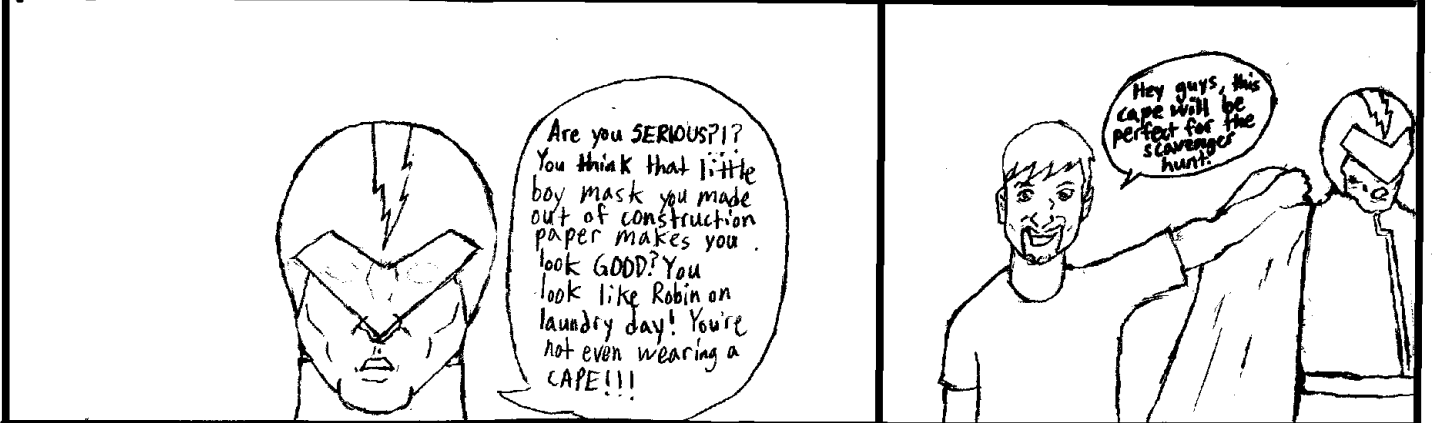
One way to counter alienated interpretation is to be aware – to the best of your ability – of what you are thinking and where your thoughts come from. Both Thoreau and Holmes carefully consider what thoughts they allow themselves to dwell upon. On 7 July 1851, Thoreau wrote in his journal that “every thought that passes through the mind helps to wear & tear it & to deepen the ruts which as in the streets of Pompeii evince how much it has been used.” In the case of the “Five Orange Pips,” a few decades after Thoreau, Holmes declares: “A man should keep his little brain attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use...” We may not be able to fully control our thoughts, but we can at least try. By understanding where our thoughts come from (i.e. who has had the same thoughts in the past), we can at least begin to differentiate between derived thoughts and thoughts that we have mulled over ourselves.

By far, the best way to battle alienated interpretation is to cultivate your level of awareness and not be afraid to create meaning from your observations. You will certainly have something original to say if you first see in an original way; in other words, actively attempt to notice something that you have not noticed before. Thoreau and Holmes both recognize the supreme importance of observing, being aware, and seeing from different perspectives. In his 10 April 1841 journal entry, Thoreau writes: “How much virtue there is in simply seeing – The hero has striven in vain for any preeminency when the student oversees him.” Similarly, in the “Boscombe Valley Mystery,” Holmes attributes his career to his perception: “You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles.”

Thoreau and Holmes supply many more insights on how to overcome alienated interpretation, but their two main insights are to be aware of your thoughts and to be aware of your surroundings – see something new or see in a new way every day. This is meant both literally and figuratively. Mindfulness is an empowering and challenging concept – one that takes daily practice – and the good thing is that it can always be improved; you cannot be too mindful.



VIGILANTE Part 2



MONOLOGUE FROM "DEAR SMART PEOPLE"

By Deborah Bertlesman

Humanity is in a constant and desperate search for "peace." At least, that is what it claims. Humanity is apparently searching for the Garden of Eden, Utopia, The Republic, so on and so forth. "Peace" is in fact impossible. Try as they might, human beings will NEVER be able to revert back to some kind of pre-genesis state, because even then they were in conflict.

Here lies the difficulty: you think too goddamn much. Happiness and stupidity do not necessarily go hand in hand; I am just suggesting that if you stopped trying to "create" things, you wouldn't be so pissed off all the time. I am sorry for intelligence. I thought that by evolving from primal instincts, this thing you labeled "justice" would permeate, and eventually it would bring you back. Your justice, your laws, your punishments and rewards, just caused more unbalance. "My Son!" The intent was not so you could make things, or think things, or build things, it was so you would stop fighting over the goddamn apples. I made oranges too. You could have killed some friggin' doves for all I care. Oh . . . wait. That's a symbol for something . . . peace? IF YOU KILLED THE DOVES MAYBE YOU WOULD HAVE STOPPED FIGHTING OVER THE FUCKING APPLES.

Then, "ladies and gentleman," you started giving yourselves titles. Seriously? Then, importance got in the way. I became important; apples were always important, but then doves, and doctors, and knowledge – ugh, knowledge – became im-

portant. Things like "status" crept in. Some of your concepts are way too complicated for me to even deal with. Get naked, kill a dove, eat some figs, and make snake skin boots. You need snake skin boots for Utopia. Hell, you guys are gonna need toasters, and televisions, and "money." Do not yell at me because you need money. Oranges do not need to be toasted. I would have let you eat the apples too, if the snake had not gotten involved; I told you to make boots. Why did I make a snake? Why did I create some place outside the garden? Why did I need to borrow a rib? WHO CARES? Honestly, stop thinking about it, because it really doesn't matter. You don't give a shit. If you stopped thinking, stopped labeling, stopped fighting, you would be in Paradise. Paradise IS NOT how you define it. It's an orchard, with a bunch of oranges that look like apples. Applanges . . . great, now I have to label stuff just to comprehend it.

If I make one thing different from another, you automatically have to ask, "Which one's better?" And then you pack all the oranges into giant boats and send them half way across the universe in order to maintain your "rank." I tried to fix it. It did not work. You just create more problems with the brains I give you, so that you feel like you have something to do. Sometimes there is NOTHING. Yup. NOTHING. There is nothing to fix, to fight for, to label, to find. Welcome to Eden. Sorry to disappoint.

Bus Ride Blowjobs and Hand Grenades

I've heard that the middle school tikes these days
Like bus rides with blowjobs and hand grenades.

There's the innocent boy, who's so feeble and meager,
He packs up his lunch box with guns and meat cleavers,

While the girls sneak off during fire drills
To stock up their backpacks with birth control pills.

Some watch the TV and say, "Tsk, what a shame?"
And ponder the possible source of the blame.

But with middle school tales and media rumors
What can one do but have some sense of humor?

-Dominick Barone

TAKING THE (DIRTY) MONEY OUT OF POLITICS

By Kim Perrella

People say that money talks. Unfortunately, in our government, money may talk louder than votes. It is an unavoidable reality that candidates for any position in office need money to get elected. It pays for campaign staff, office space, travel costs, websites and especially advertisements. Obviously not every citizen can afford to financially help their favorite candidates; only .25 percent of the American population donates 200 dollars or more to a political campaign. Ultimately, voters do make the choice of who wins. However, if a candidate failed to attain as much advertising money as the others, the likelihood of that particular candidate winning is slim, regardless of his or her platform. When a candidate running on private and corporate money does get into office, generally he or she is pressured to appeal to the interests of the people and corporations who funded that campaign to keep their favor, and hopefully receive future campaign donations.

This happens in all aspects of government, from the presidency and congressional positions to small local elections. While it may seem that corporate lobbying in politics affects issues that are far away, out of our control and mostly irrelevant to our personal lives, it affects everyone in every aspect of American life. Largely because they tend to be funded less, women and racial minorities are underrepresented in office; issues that relate to women and other minorities also tend to be underrepresented. Further, as college students in this country, we are all victim to the affects of campaign donations. Tuition prices have continued to increase, as have student loan companies' contributions to federal political candidates.

Groups like the national student organization Democracy Matters support the implementation of clean or fair elections – basically taking private funding out of politics. Through the intricate clean elections system, candidates have the option to run on public money rather than private money and donations. Before a candidate has the opportunity to run on public money, he or she must collect a set number of five dollar contributions (based on the desired office) from individuals in his or her district (kind of like a petition) to show that there is adequate interest in and support for the candidate. It is a voluntary system already implemented in seven states, and New York is among other states seriously considering the system. A candidate running under the clean elections system who is outspent by a candidate who is privately funded is generally given a matching grant (to a limit) so that the clean elections candidate can stay competitive.

Those who support clean elections believe that it will result in a truer democracy where politicians are accountable to the people who voted them in office, not the people who paid for them to get there. The hope (and for the most part, the reality in states where candidates run primarily on the clean election system) is that public campaign funding will open up office to more people who don't have a lot of private money or personal connections to big

businesses. Clean elections would increase opportunities for racial minorities, women and young people in politics, who are all generally less funded than older white male candidates. An increase in diversity in politics will in turn increase awareness, attention and sensitivity to issues outside of the mainstream white male experiences that dominate politics and the American consciousness. It also frees our candidates from spending massive amounts of effort and time raising money so that they can focus on their platforms and run campaigns based more on the issues.

Holding clean elections seems to be a very simple but real way to make actual change in our country. No other country that calls itself a democracy has so few (and such similar) political parties. Taking private money out of political campaigns can open up our country's democracy to accommodate the views and beliefs of the majority of our citizens, rather than to that .25 percent who, in our current system, can afford to have their views and interests catered to.

Dad

He left me with his dog
And with his protein powder too
With his photos
And his cards
With his tools that were brand new

He left me with home movies
And with his grey tackle box
The gift I made,
In tech class
And one old painted rock

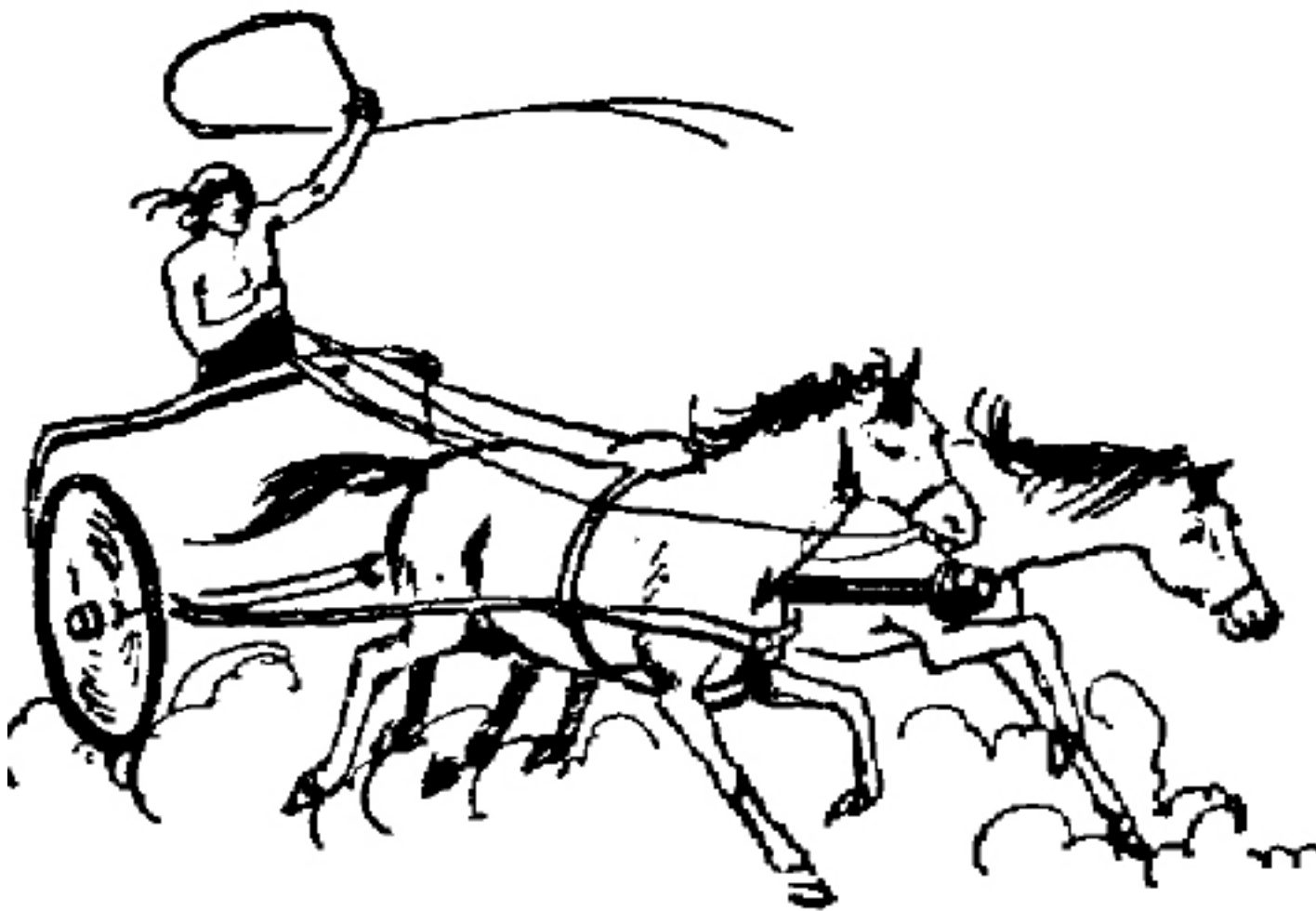
He left some glasses by the bed
He forgot to take his name
And he left,
With me, his smile
Along with a growing shame

He left the crucifix on the dresser
Next to his cufflinks in a case
And he forgot to take
The scent, of CK1,
Left on mom's lace

Loren Merchan

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT WRITING CONTEST

PRESENTING THE FIRST PLACE WINNERS IN EACH GENRE



TRANSLATING THE PAST: FRIEL'S RESPONSE TO MODERNITY AND NOSTALGIA

By Julie Nociolo

Owen: We've come to this crossroads. Come here and look at it, man! Look at it! And we call that crossroads Tobair Vree. And why do we call it Tobair Vree? I'll tell you why. Tobair means a well. But what does Vree mean? It's the corruption of Brian-[Gaelic Pronunciation] Brian-an erosion of Tobair Bhriain. Because a hundred-and-fifty years ago there used to be a well there, not at the crossroads, mind you-that would be too simple-but in a field close to the crossroads. And an old man called Brian, whose face was disfigured by an enormous growth, got it into his head that the water in that well was blessed; and every day for seven months he went there and bathe his face in it. But the growth didn't go away; and one morning Brian was found drowned in that well. And ever since that crossroads is known as Tobair Vree-even though the well has long since dried up. I know the story because my grandfather told it to me. But ask Doalty-or Maire-or Bridget-even my father-even Manus-why it's called Tobair Vree; and do you think they'll know? I know they don't know. So the question I put to you, Lieutenant, is this: what do we do with a name like that? Do we scrap Tobair Vree altogether and call it-what?-The Cross? Crossroads? Or do we keep piety with a man long dead, long forgotten, his name 'eroded' beyond recognition, whose trivial little story nobody in the parish remembers?

Yolland: Except you.

This quotation from Brian Friel's play *Translations* raises the important question of whether or not traditional language has an inherent value. It also reconsiders the language question posed by both militant and cultural nationalists: should Gaelic be revived and preserved? Many critics have explored the language issue by analyzing Friel's play in connection with its relationship with *Field Day*, a revisionist theater and literary association founded by Friel. Charles Baker argues in " 'It's the Same Me, Isn't It?' The Language Question and Brian Friel's *Translations*" that Friel transcends the nationalist movement by analyzing the complexities which intertwine language and culture. He suggests that Friel must subscribe to the post-structuralist concept of language as an arbitrary construction, as is evident through the portrayal of Hugh; however Friel still maintains that language is also important which is made clear through the confusion over Owen's name. Scott Boltwood in " 'Swapping Stories about Apollo and Cuchulainn': Brian Friel and the De-Gaelicizing of Ireland" adds to Baker's argument by proposing that Friel is not seeking to return Ireland to a romanticized Gaelic culture but instead looks to define Irish identity using something other than Gaelicism. Furthermore, Collin Meissner claims that Friel wants us to look to the past to contextualize the present ("Words Between Wor(l)ds: The Irish Language, the English Army, and the Violence of Translation in Brian Friel's *Translations*"). He warns against falling into the binary of our-language/their-language; rather, he invites us to re-analyze what language means for Ireland. Timothy O'Leary dismisses critics who sug-

gest that the mixture of art and politics is ignoble ("Putting Ireland on the Postcolonial Map: Brian Friel's *Translations*"). He looks to *Translations* to suggest the acceptance of the intersection between art and politics can reshape Irish language, culture, and identity.

Far fewer critics have analyzed Friel's *Translations* in terms of the impact of modernity upon Ireland's economic development. One critic who does is Richard Rankin Russell in " 'Something is Being Eroded': The Agrarian Epistemology of Brian Friel's *Translations*." He argues that Friel laments the decline of the rural community and believes that something is lost by the "rapid urbanization" of modernity. Additionally, Friel proposes that Ireland return to its local farming communities in order to preserve the pre-modern agrarian spirit that counters modernity's affect. Russell attempts to distinguish Friel's intent from that of Éamon deValera and cultural nationalists who idealized rural peasants. However, it appears that Russell conflates Friel's view with the cultural nationalists. If readers are to assume that Friel offers a solution, Russell's argument may be valid. However, it is clear from Eric Binnie's article "Friel and *Field Day*" that Friel is raising awareness of these issues rather than offering definitive solutions: The aims of the *Field Day* Theater Company are to create a shared context which might make possible communication across Ireland's border; to give all Irishmen an artistic "fifth province" rising above and covering the whole island, a hypothetical province which would neither accept the North/South division, nor ignore the separate traditional strength on either side. (Binnie 565) Friel, the founder of *Field Day*, was proposing a communicative exchange of ideas about Irish identity rather than an essentialist solution to the impacts of modernity.

I subscribe to Russell's economic view of Friel's *Translations*; however, I propose a nuanced approach. I will suggest that Friel wants to undercut both linear modernity and nostalgia for the agrarian past. In doing so, Friel analyzes the ways in which modernity clashes with capitalism's commodity-based society, and rather than encouraging Ireland to retreat to an idealized rural community, he suggests that Ireland develop a new space for an independent identity.

By setting this play in the early 19th century, Friel looks retrospectively at issues of Irish national identity, superimposing contemporary Irish issues onto his fictional village of Baile Beag. One such issue is that of economic development and its impact upon the people. To fully understand the uniqueness of Ireland's economic state we must look back to the initial decades after its independence. Unlike other European nations, Ireland, from the 1920s to the 1960s, was stifled by both social and economic problems where it maintained "institutional continuity rather than change, and for isolation which, by 1950, had become acute" (Breen 1). After the failure to address such issues, the State

instituted initiatives to promote industrial growth. These initiatives led the Irish to believe that they would be fully independent after their economic freedom was actualized. The slogan used to characterize this era was “the rising tide that would lift all boats,” which implied that all Irish people would benefit by the shift in Ireland’s economy from a predominately agrarian society to an industrial society. Economic researchers in *Understanding Contemporary Ireland* argue that after 1950 “...despite the promises of general prosperity, the benefits of Ireland’s belated economic development have been very unevenly distributed, leading to a growing polarization between social classes”(x). Such uneven development has brought about tension: “...sometimes [the] uneasy intermingling of elements of tradition and modernity”(xi). This conflict between tradition and modernity is explored in Friel’s *Translations* in terms of its impact upon language and identity.

The tension between tradition and modernity is exemplified when Owen returns to Baile Baeg from Dublin. He says of Baile Baeg, “I can’t believe it. I come back after six years and everything’s just as it was! Nothing’s changed! Not a thing!”(Friel 336). His condescending assessment of his native village echoes the concerns of the British imperialists. Their argument for renaming Irish placenames is to advance Ireland from its archaic rural society to a progressive industrial society. British imperialism subscribes to enlightenment epistemology that the world must function according to linear modernity in which the passage of time indicates the progress of innovation. Maire of Baile Baeg also thinks that learning English has tangible benefits. She says, “We should all be learning to speak English...That’s what Dan O’Connell said last month in Ennis...The old language is a barrier to modern progress...I want to be able to speak English because I’m going to America as soon as the harvest’s all saved”(334). Although the British claim that they are more advanced than the Irish, Friel points out that the Irish are more advanced linguistically, since the Irish villagers speak three languages whereas the British surveyors only speak one. Hugh, a teacher at the hedge-school, speaks of his encounter with the British Surveyor: “He then explained that he did not speak Irish. Latin? I asked.

None. Greek? Not a syllable. He speaks-on his own admission-only English...Indeed-English, I suggested, couldn’t really express us”(334). Hugh resists the idea that the English language will advance Ireland. The British agenda in renaming Irish place-names is not just to translate the Irish names into English so the British can understand them, but also to extend its imperial epistemology in its claim that these places belong to the British, not the Irish. The orders of English government are mild in rhetoric but indicate a presumption that the British can “know” the colonized region. Lancey reads the proclamation: “His Majesty’s government has ordered the first ever comprehensive survey of this entire country... This enormous task has been embarked on so that the military authorities will be equipped with up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire”(340). The proclamation implies that by surveying and renaming the land, the soldiers will know its people. Furthermore, capitalism is afraid of the concept of free, unregulated land, which is indicative of chaos. Both imperialism and modernity fear anarchy and therefore endorse regulation. Yolland, the sympathetic English surveyor, speaks of his father and Captain Lancey:

Lancey’s so like my father. I was watching him last night. He met every group of sappers as they reported in. He checked the field kitchens. He examined the horses. He inspected every single report-even examining the texture of the paper and commenting on the neatness of the handwriting. The perfect colonial servant: not only must the job be done-it must be done with excellence.(348)

Russell comments on the syntax that Friel uses in this excerpt: “Friel’s sentence structure here echoes the neatness and precision with which Lancey and Yolland’s father conduct their jobs. Both men orient themselves toward linearity and activity”(Russell 116). The regulation of behavior transfers to the regulation of land: according to capitalism, everything must be owned, and in order to show ownership, everything must be named. Therefore, the British surveyors extend their imperialist epistemology by renaming Irish place-names.

Russell suggests that Yolland, a British surveyor with Irish sympathies, embodies Friel’s desire to return to rural consciousness. Russell argues, “Yolland,

though associated with the Ordinance Survey, is a sympathetic character who manages to blend his native English upbringing and his adopted affinity for Irish culture... he evinces a distinct love for the local Irish culture and consciousness”(118). Russell views the implied murder of Yolland by the Donnelly twins as a destruction of the local village: “the twins are clearly figures who contribute to the destruction of the local village by killing Yolland, a hybrid character who values the premodern worldview of that community”(118). Russell fails to mention that Yolland, though sympathetic to Irish tradition, is a character to be mocked. Friel does not advocate Yolland’s worldview; Yolland represents the danger of lapsing into nostalgia for language and culture. This is evident as Yolland hyperbolically romanticizes the village of Baile Baeg:

The day I arrived in Ballybeg-no, Baile Baeg-the moment you brought me in here, I had a curious sensation. It’s difficult to describe. It was a momentary sense of discovery; no-not something I half knew instinctively; as if I had stepped...I had moved into a consciousness that wasn’t striving nor agitated, but at ease and with its own conviction and assurance. And when I heard Jimmy Jack and your father swapping stories about Apollo and Cuchulainn and Paris and Ferdia-as if they lived down the road-it was then that I thought -I knew-perhaps I could live here...(Friel 348)

Yolland’s murder indicates Friel’s rejection of the solution that Yolland represents.

I do agree with Russell’s belief that Friel thinks that modernity and enlightenment corrode agrarian communities. Russell argues, “The play inveighs against the advent of the machine in rural culture...and against the concurrent Enlightenment emphasis on empiricism and the individual-all which destroy communal identity”(Russell 106). This is evident in the character of Owen, a native resident of Baile Baeg who moves to Dublin and then returns as an interpreter for the British surveyors. Owen describes his position to the residents of Baile Baeg: “My job is to translate the quaint archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King’s good English”(Friel 338). Friel does not advocate Owen’s belief that progress is worth the cost of overriding a community’s history. Friel views language as an important component of identity: for example,

when Owen fails to correct the British surveyors when they call him by the wrong name. When Manus asks Owen if he plans to correct them, Owen retorts, “Easy, man, easy. Owen-Roland-what the hell. It’s only a name. It’s the same me, isn’t it?”(342). The confusion over Owen’s name indicates the cost of individuality for the benefit of progress. Russell explains how an imperial power would argue in favor of modernity: “While industrialism diminishes humanity and the connection of humans with the natural world, it also increases the pace of our lives”(Russell 109). Russell argues against modern epistemology and claims that, while progress measured by commodities may increase, the loss to those who do not benefit creates a wide disparity and instability between people in society. Russell references Louis Rubin’s article on Agrarian tradition of the South in the United States: “...industrial progress ‘never proposes a specific goal; it initiates the infinite series...a fresh labor-saving device does not emancipate that laborers in that industry so much as it evicts them...The [overall] result is an increasing disadjustment and instability”(109). However, Owen fails to see the larger impacts of translating place-names and adopts imperial consciousness by claiming that the British “can learn to decode us”(Friel 348). While I agree with Russell’s assessment of the negative impacts of modernity on local communities, I argue that Friel equally opposes the impacts of modernity and the roman-ticization of peasant culture.

Friel acknowledges that the agrarian society did possess something intrinsically valuable that cannot be found in modern capitalist societies. This is apparent when Bridget talks about the curriculum of the British National Schools as opposed to the local hedge school ran by Hugh: “And from the first day you go, you’ll not hear one word of Irish spoken. You’ll be taught to speak English and every subject will be taught through English...”(331). Friel does not suggest that we must return to an agrarian lifestyle in order to recapture its intrinsic value; rather, he subscribes more to Hugh’s view that cultures and language are mortal. Hugh explains, “But remember that words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen-to use an image you’ll understand-it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of...fact”(351). Friel suggests that languages and facts are both important, although they are arbitrary. Hugh explains this when talking to his son Owen about Jimmy Jack, a character trapped in the Greek and Roman past.

James thinks he knows, too. I look at James, and three thoughts occur to me: A-that it is not the literal past, the ‘facts’ of history, that shape us, but the images of the past embodied in language. James has ceased to make that discrimination...B-we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do we fossilize. (373)

Friel points out that Jimmy is not concerned with the historical accuracy of the past but rather with the images in which the past is embodied. Hugh tells Jimmy that this disorder should not be criticized: “My friend, confusion is not an ignoble condition”(373). This idea of the confusion of histories informs the situation in Baile Baeg. While something is eroded by the translation of place-names, it does indicate that an entire history be forgotten, the memory is still present. Friel acknowledges this confusion and advocates that there should be a place to raise the issues independent of both the

influence of imperial consciousness and national consciousness so that the Irish can develop an independent Irish identity.

While I am informed by Russell’s unique reading of *Translations*, he argues under the assumption that Friel is looking to solve issues rather than to simply raise them. I deviate from his argument by suggesting that Friel wants only to raise issues about Irish identity. A suppressed culture has the ability to produce an independent identity. Joseph Roach’s article “Echoes in the Bone” analyzes how African slave culture emerged with a new Creole identity after French suppression with the harsh restrictions of the Code Noir. Roach states that “the law transmits effigies-constructed figures that provide templates of sanctioned behavior-across generations”(Roach 55). However, regardless of the French intention to control and suppress African slave culture, it was the French in fact who spawned a reactionary culture. This reactionary culture defied the Code Noir by adapting it so as to create culture that had both African and European elements. While the Republic of Ireland is not directly under British rule, the consciousness of imperialism is still present. Like the Africans who developed an independent identity after French suppression, Friel’s *Translations* suggests that the Irish ought to do the same. This requires that the Irish accept the influence of both traditional Irish culture and British culture, particularly the English language. Friel advocates an identity that is much more multifaceted than a simple binary construction of Gaelic/English, Catholic/Protestant, or colonized/colonizer. The Irish need to escape these limited constructions in order to simultaneously accept the opposing influences of English and Irish cultures as well as transcend the limitations of an “either/or” identity.

S **T** **O** **L** **E** **N** **A** **I** **R**

By Abby Kraai

There's a woman sitting twelve seats
away from me
and I think she's dying of a
heart attack.
There's an airport employee on a walkie-talkie
yelling for someone to
get an ambulance.
Her eyeballs roll back and forth,
red and watery and puffy,
and I don't know
if anyone is actually helping
her.

I've watched her do it a hundred times and it always makes my eyelids calm and heavy. A stainless steel spoon scrapes the blue ceramic sides, bubbles pop as wheaty goo deflates and sinks, and I can smell the sour yeast and soggy raisins.

She
can't move anything but her eyes
and a man in navy blue
is asking her questions;
her eyes keep rolling and
someone covers her with a blanket.
Her hair is white and purple,
her earrings,
little and gold. I cover my knees
with my dress and hope
I'm not in an airport when I die.

Flour dust poofs as she sets the bag down and I can see her knuckles start to get red and scratchy from the sharp gravelly dough. Sometimes we take turns kneading because her back gets tired or the counter is too low or if the phone rings. I like when we do that because then I'm the last person to touch it before it gets cut and I feel like I made it.

Will I keep sitting when it happens?
Watch her as she's lifted
onto a gurney,
the blanket pulled over her head,
just sitting, breathing
stolen air?
Will everybody
keep walking, running
with their wheely suitcases,
hugging their families and
praying for a safe flight,
drinking Dasani and coffee,
breathing
stolen air?

The kitchen gets warmer and the smells turn from sour to sweet. Three cooling racks lay on the green island, and the butter's still out, uncovered with finger marks. She's upstairs taking a bath and I'm supposed to take the loaves out when the oven beeps. I should probably wash the blue bowl too, but I like running my fingers through the dust that's collected on the bottom, pushing floury raisins back and forth.

SOMETHING MORE THAN MATHY THINGS: IMPLICATIONS OF FRACTAL GEOMETRY ON READING AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

By Katie Pearce

"It is...about coming to believe in a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm."

ELSA BARKLEY BROWN

My study of African American literature has been comprised of not only a study of short stories, plays, and poems, but also essays, speeches, narratives, and scholarly criticism. This variety of texts is necessary, for as Bernice Johnson Reagon warns, "one needs an awareness that if one looks at evidence generated in only one place, it can only result in distortion" (117). We should not read *A Raisin in the Sun* without reading *Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, just as we should not read one text from the Harlem Renaissance without reading the diverse and often divergent opinions of artists about this time. I was surprised when rifling through my formidable brown bag of books at the beginning of the semester, to discover a book entitled *African Fractals: Modern Computing and Indigenous Design*. However, it became clear after browsing *Call and Response*, with its inclusion of various and sometimes surprising texts, that perhaps a math text has something more to say than mathy things.

In his discussion of recursion and repetition and his meticulous analysis of Africa's association with the primitive and natural, Ron Eglash creates a resource which, through a seemingly unrelated medium, provides support for and even evidence of many of the claims made and issues addressed by African American writers and their texts. Eglash's discussion of recursion and repetition illuminates James Snead's analysis of the role of repetition in Black culture and supports the theories of polyrhythmic, nonlinear elements in African American culture discussed in the works of Suzan-Lori Parks and Elsa Barkley Brown. Furthermore, *Fractals* provides a lens for looking at things from a different perspective, acknowledging that "our goal is not to find the one true final framework—it does not exist—but to keep a well-stocked toolbox and know how to pick the right tool for the right job" (Eglash 191).

"But their thoughts and fancies are straight from the jungle"
VACHEL LINDSAY

Playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, in her essay "Elements of Style," stresses that "form and content are interdependent...form is not a strictly 'outside' thing while 'content' stays 'inside'" (7-8). Parks uses this relationship to challenge people's ideas of what African American plays should be like. Her concern with form is undeniably echoed in *African Fractals*. Eglash discusses how "African structural characteristics are typically described in terms of a lack—as the absence of shape distinctions rather than as the presence of scaling design theme" (55). While Eglash speaks specifically of the architecture of African homes, this idea of lack is appli-

cable to our reading of African American literature and culture as well. The polyrhythmic tradition in textiles that Brown describes in her essay "African-American Women's Quilting," is often interpreted as a lack of order, or a lack of structural design. However, as Eglash points out in his countless examples of African fractal geometric patterns, there is a conscious design. Brown explains that in African American quilts, opposing colors and "contrast[s] are] used to structure and organize" (923). Eglash and Brown thus offer a warning and actual proof against reductive claims that classify African and African American art as chaotic or lacking order and thus inferior to Western design.

Eglash stresses this conscious design by pointing out that fractals may appear unintentionally, as in a photograph in which there is "an attempt to mirror the image of a particular object" (55). This imitation becomes tricky when discussing African design, for Eglash recognizes, "the greatest danger of this book is that readers might misinterpret its meaning in terms of primitivism. The fact that African fractals are rarely the result of imitating natural forms helps remind us that they are not due to 'primitives living close to nature'" (Eglash 53). Eglash's fear is a legitimate response to poems such as "The Congo" by Vachel Lindsay which rely upon diminutive stereotypes and portray Africans as little more than savages.

"Time is a pendulum. Not a river. More akin to what goes around comes around."

ISHMAEL REED

The long-held image of Africans as savages can be attributed to the "old idea of cultural evolution as a ladder, a unilinear progression from 'primitive' to 'advanced'" (Eglash 189). Thus, notions such as Hegel's, that Africans are "still fully caught up in the natural spirit" and are "on the threshold of world history," and Jefferson's assertion that, "in memory [African Americans] are equal to white; in reason much inferior, as [he] thinks one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid," seek not only to diminish the knowledge and capabilities of Africans, but to place them at the very beginning of human "progress" (Snead 148; Jefferson). It is fitting that Jefferson attributes understanding Euclid to being civilized and rational in our discussion of African mathematical systems. Because of their use of fractal geometry over Euclidean geometry, Africans are often deemed inferior by Western culture. However, Eglash points out, "one culture's sign for 'artificial' can be another's sign for 'natural,' Euclidean versus fractal does not necessarily mean

artificial versus nature; that, too is culturally influenced” (196). Therefore, we must remember the great influence Western culture’s imposition of linear structure has on not only our interpretation of African and African American architecture and art, but also literature and culture.

We must then apply our knowledge of the linear Western tradition and its association with “haute culture” to our reading of African American literature (Snead 150). Brown, notes, “people and actions do move in multiple directions at once. If we analyze those people and actions by linear models, we will create dichotomies, ambiguities, cognitive dissonance, disorientation, and confusion where none exist” (929). Brown’s concern is echoed by Parks, when she questions the form people choose to write plays in asking, “why linear narrative at all? Why choose that shape?” (8). Parks is not denying the value of linear narrative, but instead questioning its place as the default form. This idea of linear narrative as the archetypal form seems incongruous with a culture in which “change and synthesis are... integral parts of the cultural portrait” rather than a “frozen ‘ancient tradition’ of linear progress (Eglash 216). Snead notes this incongruity, saying “a culture based on the idea of the cut, “[a seemingly unmotivated break...with a series already in progress and a willed return to a prior sense] will always suffer in a society whose dominant idea is material progress” (150). Therefore, it is Parks’ goal to liberate playwrights and readers, or at least herself, from the linear tradition that just does not fit her characters.

Not only does Parks seek to depart from the tradition of linear narrative, she also seeks to establish a new relationship or a new way of looking at the relationship between the reader and the text. She states, “the definition of possession cancels itself out. The relationship between possessor and possessed is, like ownership is, multidirectional” (Parks 3). Thus, the players possess the play as the play possesses the players. While in the Western tradition we find comfort in believing that the control of the reader is central to a text, Parks’ work breaks from this tradition. Her play, through its inclusion of epigraphs, italics, capitalized words, and side-bars that run simultaneously along the body of the text, challenge the actor/audience member/reader’s sense of control and directs her to do what it says. Snead notes the presence of these elements in Ishmael Reed’s work

as well, in which he “‘cuts’ frequently between various sub-texts in his novel (headlines, photographs, handwritten letters, italicized writing, advertisements) and the text of his main title” (192).

“It is not uncommon for a group of mathematical ideas to share many commonalities without a singular essence.”

RON EGLASH

This flip of control between reader and text is apparent in other African American literature as well, such as Ishmael Reed’s poem “Beware: Do Not Read this Poem,” in which the poem essentially consumes the reader. However, while Reed does challenge this Western tradition of reader control, he does not necessarily challenge Western linearity. His poem, “The Reactionary Poet” states “if you are a revolutionary/ Then I must be a reactionary/ For if you stand for the future/ I have no choice but to/ Be with the past” (Reed). This poem, if read as a response to Larry Neal, asserts Reed’s belief that Neal’s argument is backwards and dangerous to the progress of African Americans. He therefore seems to support the idea of cultural progress and development. This is crucial in underscoring that not all artists, simply because they are African American, oppose linearity or seek to challenge Western literary tradition. Nevertheless, the poem presents a discussion which may make some uncomfortable, for they may believe it to be embarrassing to air one’s dirty laundry by engaging in such open debate.

However, when we react to controversial or confrontational works like Neal’s, we should be conscious that we are perhaps “responding to the dissatisfaction we have with the tradition we are trained in” (McCoy). We must therefore acknowledge that Neal’s essay is a specific mode of discourse, reflecting the call and response tradition of African American literature. Snead, in his analysis of improvisation in black music says, “not only in improvisation but also the characteristic ‘call-and-response’ element in black culture (which already, in eliciting the general participation of the group at random, spontaneous ‘cuts,’ disallows any possibility of haute culture) requires an assurance of repetition” (150).

While perhaps not through random or spontaneous participation, we see evidence of call and response when Jacobs responds to Douglass’ narrative to challenge his narrative’s position as the archetypal slave experience, when Parks ques-

tions Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun* as the standard for African American drama, and we see Joyce Joyce and Henry Louis Gates Jr. engage in debate over how we should read African American literature. These discussions are not petty arguments, nor do they reveal any one right answer to this ever-debated question. Eglash’s discussion of cultural symbols (and perhaps literature can be one here) is quite fitting to just what Douglass and Jacobs, Parks and Hansberry, Joyce and Gates are engaging in. They are in a “kind of dynamic play and the ethnographer [in this case the writer] should show their turbulent expansion through layers of meaning, not the reduction to a single fixed structure” (181). Therefore, we must step back and look at these discussions not as snapshots, but as a continuum—a continuum which does not necessarily steadily progress, but constantly recurs and repeats, calls and responds.

“Poetry can reveal as much truth about the world as any science; we only need to keep in mind that it is a different way of going about it.”

RON EGLASH

Through examining African fractal geometry and applying the presence of conscious nonlinear patterns to our study of the interactions between African American writers and interactions between texts and the reader, we open up new possibilities for interpreting African American literature. For as Brown states, “a people’s cultural aesthetic is not different from their economic or political aesthetic; it is just visible to us in different form. Elements of material culture, such as quilting, are in fact illustrative of a particular way of seeing, of ordering the world” (926). Therefore, this math text does not necessarily serve as a guide to how to read African American literature, but nevertheless provides a valuable supplement and context to understanding that “repetition and revision is an integral part of the African and African-American literary and oral traditions” (Parks 10). Furthermore, by noting the presence of conscious design, using Fractals in the classroom “might help guard against an overemphasis on biological determinism” that is at the very heart of racism. Perhaps “by showing the presence of complex mathematical concepts in African American culture, we can mend some of that damage” (Eglash 224-225).

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TRAGICALLY BEAUTIFUL

By Loren Merchan

Day 6510

Christie's entire body wrenched forward.
You're an idiot.
What! Are you trying to be counter productive?
Come on, just a little more
There were always voices.
You're weak.
How could you let it get this bad?
Breath, fingers in mouth, wretch.
Stop it!
Again! Again!
Sigh, toss hair back, cry.

Day 6511

Just to clear a few things up... people with eating disorders are not stupid. They are smart, competitive, perfectionists.

FYI...Christie Ruscio was a smart, competitive, perfectionist

Oh, and one more thing...Christie Ruscio, had an eating disorder.

She let the scalding shower water drip over her eyes, nose, mouth...and watched it drop off her chin and into the large puddle forming on the bathroom floor.

Current weight: Still 8lbs too low to get her period...and ironically...8lbs too high to be happy. See the predicament?

Christie had, for almost her entire life...narrated her story: a satire, as she categorized it. Hers was a life in which she spent each day wishing for death, yet kept her voices entertained with whoops of laughter at the irony of her suffering.

By the way...Christie was not schizophrenic, she just had a few of those angels and demons people so commonly relate with cartoon characters. She was, however, a writer, dancer, disciple, daughter, sister, and student. Oh, and did I mention she had an eating disorder?

Day 6512

Christie went to the eating clinic today. They weighed her, told her that her body was deteriorating from the inside out, made her wear a paper gown...and felt her up. Apparently healthy boobs should feel like oatmeal, and during tests...they are looking for the raisins. The demons thought that was funny, Christie thought it was humiliating.

Day 6513

She was actually a very beautiful girl. In fact, she was often told she should be a model, and one boy even described her as: "exquisitely intoxicating and surreal."

Perhaps surreal is a good way to describe her. Her skin was like porcelain, no longer bronze but a ghostly pale, her lips came to a full pout and her eyes sat enchantingly on her face, green and set against the thick forest of lashes. Her stomach was toned, and actually a little concave, while her chest was flat. She was just under the acceptable standard of "thinness"...actually...no, that's a lie. She worked very hard each day to reach the "acceptable" standard. However, sometimes her angel won the battle, and she would briefly work towards her doctors' acceptable standard of health, rather than society's.

When the demon won, however, it would tend to focus on her competitive nature, magnifying the rivalry between Christie and her cousins, and even with her own mother. It was at these times when she would become bitter, and cynical. And, even though she would try to fight it, often times she would give into her insecurities and her demon would win.

Day 6520

"No, Lara, you don't understand"
"What are you talking about? I think you are misunderstanding them."

No Lara, I'm not an idiot.

"Lara, I need body fat. That is the point. If I don't have body fat, I don't produce certain hormones...and then I die."

Actually...I go through a lot of pain and die.

"But if you exercise then you can feel good about your shape and still gain weight."

"Yea, but it's all muscle, I could be a 170lb body builder and my ovaries would still be screaming 'Ah! Help me, I need estrogen!'"

And then they would shrivel up...and die too.

Time in the car: 18minutes

Minutes spent trying to explain to Lara that she is NOT a doctor: 16

It always seemed ironic to me that, unlike all other doctors (who tell you to eat right and exercise), mine wont even let me do 30 sit-ups a night, much less weight lifting or (God forbid) any form of cardio.

I do 200 sit-ups a night anyway...I figure, 200 is better than 500...like 30 sit-ups is gonna do anything...

Day 6521

Christie pressed her face into the warm towel, letting the steam condensing on her body warm her from the outside in.

I don't shower all the time because I'm OCD (although I am), and am constantly worried about germs and cleanliness, not in the physical sense of the word. I bathe all the time because I secretly hope...that one day...I will be able to scrub all my ugliness away.

It's like when you hear about a girl who got raped, and she is always taking showers. She doesn't just do that because she wants to get rid of all the crap that the jerk left behind. It is because, on

some level, she thinks that maybe she can clean her inside and purge her soul to the point where she is so clean, that it is as if her rape never happened

Day 6523

I am convinced that college will be the death of me. Not the actual college experience, but the process of deciding which to attend.

If I am not driven to insanity, then I will surely have an anxiety attack that will lead to a heart attack (because the walls of my heart have collapsed due to muscle deterioration) and if that doesn't kill me...then I will at the very least go into epileptic shock.

Day 6527

"That's a cute house."

Sigh

"Yea...I guess it is."

Christie hated her house, not because of the lovely pink dogwood out front, the cute symmetrical style, or even the quaint blue trim (although, she could have done without the obnoxious red porch lights, which had been up since Christmas. They seemed to scream "Whore House!").

"Very...red light district...don't you think?"

But, what she hated most, was how deceptive the pink dogwood and blue trim were.

Christie wanted out. She wanted out of her house, out of her town, and out of her life. The problem was, college was fast approaching, and she could not go away if she did not "get better." But, who was to decide what better was? If she got her period, would that be "better?" If she got to a healthy weight but not enough to please her father, was she not "better?" The thing her parent's didn't get was that, by taking away her control and leaving her to uncertainty, they only made it worse. Starving herself into illness was the only thing she knew how to control. When her body became weak, when she felt her body hurt from the inside out, when she was so used to hunger that she forgot she was feeling it...that was when she knew she was in control.

Her eighteenth birthday was coming up but she couldn't get too excited

about it. People still watched her like a child.

Day 6535

Sometimes I think I'm not afraid of the things normal people are afraid of.

I don't fear being hit by cars.

I am not afraid of guns

Or pepper spray

Or knives

Or lightning

Or being alone

I do, however, fear:

That my nose will fall off

That my entire life has actually just been a dream

That I have actually committed some great sin and am just not aware of it

That one day I will wake up and be uglier than when I went to sleep

And, that my shallowness will cause me to lose my soul forever.

But then again...no one has ever accused me of being normal.

Day 6537

"Christie, how did you..."

Silence...

"Ma?"

"How did you..."

Silence...

"How did I what?"

"How do you...uh...know that they gave everything out already?"

"Who is they?"

"How do you know that they gave everything out already?"

"Who is they?!"

It was always like this...either my mom is crazy...or she just doesn't listen, and I can't figure out which it is. My brother says that she is so crazy that it makes you think she doesn't listen. I can't totally blame her though, my dad can still be kind of a jerk (I think that constantly takes up a lot of space in her mind), even after he cheated on her, and married Lara...and now has a 2 month old...but I don't wanna talk about it.

Day 6540

I used to spend every day analyzing life, trying to cover every base, driving myself crazy as I tried to tie up loose ends, answer everything, make sense, but I couldn't do it, not all of it. So, I resorted to ignoring life, becoming cynical, comi-

cal, or (on a lazy day) sometimes bland. But, no matter how hard you try, you can't truly ignore life...it becomes more exhausting than analyzing it. You put it off for a while, let it pile up...and then one day...it all comes out...and you don't even know why anymore, you just know that everything is confusing, everything hurts...and you just wanna throw up.

Day 6553

"Don't tell anyone, but one of the things I really liked about Penn State was that my brother would wanna come visit me...because of the football team."

"That doesn't surprise me...you love your brother."

"I could even get him tickets for his birthday or Christmas...Geneseo isn't as interesting as Penn State."

"Yea, but your decision has to be for yourself, not for anyone else."

Day 6558

Socrates may claim that the unexamined life is not worth living, but the examined life is no picnic either. The examined life leads to too much thinking, my mind and spirit get overwhelmed with too much high-content information, just keep sputtering out randomness because either way I can't win. I either know too much or not enough. It's like...remember when you were little and you would grow the little plant in the Styrofoam cup, and the roots go down and the plant grows up and you never really knew how or why? Well...I know why. So much of life has lost that sense of wonder. While some believe that the world would be better if we all took a break for some cookies and milk, or naptime every afternoon, I would like to live in a world where women were allowed to take in the calories from those cookies, where a woman could be breathtaking without spending every moment working on her body, and where I could lay on my roof and gaze, awestruck, at the stars...instead of calculating how many years ago the star that I'm gazing at actually died out.

Day 6560

"Guys, I really need your help with this!"
"Dad, how am I supposed to help you, you didn't tell us what we are looking for..."
"Gems"



“Gems?”

“Yea, It’s a store”

“Does anybody have a mirror?”

Yea, Bro, I keep one in my back pocket at all times

“That’s it. I’m turning around!”

Day 6563

I think my ovaries are making up for four month’s of hibernation because there is no way that one egg could cause me this much pain.

Day 6565

“So...dad...did I tell you about the million dollar idea that I had for my birthday?”

Your what?

“No, Papi, you didn’t...”

My Birthday is tomorrow!

“Here, Dad, let me show you on the computer...”

My Eighteenth Birthday is tomorrow...

“Hey, bro...how long are you gonna be on?”

“I don’t know, Loren, I’m looking for something...”

“No offense...but your birthday isn’t for another 6 months...”

Silence

“Ok...I’m done.”

Day 6567

My father bought me a shirt for every school I got into (except for Penn State and American because they didn’t have those schools at the discount store). I think he is crazy, as if I will not get shot for wearing a Binghamton Shirt at Geneseo. That is where I’m going, by the way, Geneseo. I even signed up for this summer Adirondack adventure in order to make friends with other students before school actually starts. I have to pay for it myself, because we didn’t budget for something like that, but I don’t mind too much.

I took out a small student loan, but my dad does not know, it is just to help me live if I get a little short on cash at some point over the next few years.

Day 6569

The Marshmallow Project

“Marshmallows can be used to separate

toes when applying nail polish”

Stuff Marshmallow into mouth

“As impromptu cake frosting”

Stuff Marshmallow into mouth

Demon: do you realize that every time you stick a marshmallow into your mouth... that is 25 more calories than your gross body needs?

Angel: Stop! It’s for a school project

Demon: Shut up Fatty

“To prevent candle wax from getting on cake...”

You see, this was Mrs. Monitto’s AP Lit class. And, the only rule for the final project was to do a research presentation...that makes the class laugh...or you fail.

This was the only way I could think to make the class laugh.

It sure makes the voices laugh.

Day 6571

She smiled.

She smiled and then slowly submerged her body, her hair, her face into the water, trying to preserve the memory, trapping it in her conscious before it escaped.

It escaped anyway.

Day 6572

“I’m hungry”

That’s cuz its 11:30 and we are still waiting for Lara so we can eat breakfast...

Bite into apple

“Why don’t you eat something?”

Cuz he doesn’t wanna eat breakfast twice...

“There is nothing to eat”

“How about an apple?”

Cue Lara...

“Actually, the last apple is being eaten right now”

“Ok, so he can eat some other fruit”

“All the fruit is gone”

“No, Lara, It’s not”

“Loren, there were 4 apples”

And who are you...the apple Nazi?

“Jordan, you can have...a banana, a mango, an orange, a pineapple...”

“Gee Lara, It sure sounds like your listing a lot of fruit...”

Day 6574

How to get your 18 year old daughter to

cry in school:

1. Wait until she gets a scholarship for her excellence in journalism
2. Keep waiting until after she gets an award for her excellence in English
3. Wait some more, until after she finds out she is exempt from the Math final
4. Eat the Chilli Relleno she made you from scratch
5. Call her, in the middle of class, and tell her the following:
 - a. That you are worried about her mental state
 - b. That you watch every crumb she eats and find something wrong with it
 - c. That you actually do not believe she has gotten any better or worked very hard
 - d. That she is emaciated and disgusting
 - e. That she needs to gain more weight
 - f. That she is deceitful
 - g. That nothing short of admitting she is a failure will help the situation
 - h. Any other mean or nasty digs you can think of saying to an 18 year old girl with an eating disorder
6. Listen to her cry and do not offer comfort
7. Hang up while she is still in school, curled under a desk, in hysterics

Day 6575

He just wants me to get “better” as if me having to deal with cramps again wasn’t enough for him.

Who is he to judge this? Is he a doctor? Is he in my head? It’s like he is totally belittling all the work I have, and progress I have made.

How can I convince him? Everything I do is wrong. When I don’t eat in front of him he doubts me, when I do eat I concern him. I feel trapped. Food has become more stressful than ever. I hide what I eat and how much because I am scared that someone will pass judgment. I just can’t keep going like this.

Day 6576

The train whizzed by... a mere two feet from Christie. She had seriously considered not stopping. She had been walking home from AP Bio review, trying to burn a few more calories, when she heard the alarm that signaled the ap-



proaching train.

All the cars in the road had stopped...but her feet kept going. She had gained half a pound.

Two feet from the train, she stopped, the horn of the train shocking her back into reality and her knees locked. The train passed, she shook it off, and kept walking.

Day 6580

Christie submerged her face under the water in the tub, listening to the echo of her heart beat in the surround sound caused by the hydrogen bonds (who says you can't use AP Bio in real life?). Her hair swirled around her face, her body felt light...just the way she always wanted it to feel.

21...22...23...24

How long would it take for her to pass out? Christie always wondered...if you passed out face up in the tub...would you die? Technically you would float and then just wake up...

This time it wasn't a suicide attempt, it was an attempt at peace...silence for:

33...34...35 seconds

Suddenly her body began to tremble and, as if in a reflex action, pushed her mouth above water...gasping at the fresh air. Sometimes...it isn't always mind over matter.

Day 6585

Christie lost 3 pounds.

Day 6586

"OWWWWWWWWWWW"

Sigh

"What is he yelling about?"
"He says his stomach hurts"

Yea, sure...

"You think he is faking too?"
"He is always faking"

That seems to be the trend...

"Yea...I don't know..."
"Mom, nobody actually screams out "owe" when they are in pain."

"I think it's a psychological thing"
"I think it was a psychological thing 8 months ago, now I think it's a Jordan thing"

"MOM!"

Sigh

"MOOM!"

Mom eats Cereal

"MOOOM!"
"What, Jordan!"
"My stomach hurts..."

Day 6588

Sometimes I can see the person who used to be there...

Inside me
Inside my mother
Inside my grandmother

Beautiful, strong, wonderful women who were slowly hollowed out...defeated.

Sometimes I look and I see the strong features that were once striking, look in the mirror and see a girl whose confidence and passion used to be all it took to captivate.

Sometimes, my grandmother's eyes catch the sun just right and I can see the twinkle that must have enraptured my grandfather the same way it now does me...but then it is gone...a brief glimmer of hope...and then darkness.

Sometimes I see happiness in my mother's eyes, clouded by the bitterness, vigorously working to get through.

Sometimes

Sometimes I emanate the pure joy that I used to. The "glow," as others put it, that made people wonder...that set me apart. Not this hollow human being that I see now (if you can even call me that...a human being)

Sometimes that patience, that love surfaces...

But, sometimes...there is something pushing on my chest from the inside...a pressure so intense that I double over from the pain, so heart wrenching that I have to stop to protect it, so terrifying that I hope

it is lethal just so it can stop

Sometimes

Sometimes, when I'm weak, he gets in my head, in my heart, desperately trying to regain control. The stronger I am, the harder he pushes, the better I do...the further it is for me to fall...

Sometimes I win

Sometimes I lose

These strong, beautiful women...of generations before me...they lost. They had their own demons, and they lost.

I didn't come to lose
I just don't know if...that necessarily means I can win.

Day 6590

So, I planned a day of fun
Christie and Jordan's day of fun
A nearly \$400 day of fun
A day of fun in which a decadent Javachino is followed by a trip to the ESPN Zone in Manhattan (escorted by a 6 passenger Lincoln)
A day of fun to be remembered for a lifetime
Our last hoora

Day 6592

I have always had issues with food. I used to be totally OCD about it. I had to eat French Fries in a certain order, all geometrically shaped foods had to be eaten symmetrically, one food had to be finished before I could move to another...and if any of these rules were broken, or if someone ate a Fry that wasn't next in line...my food was tainted and thus...inconsumable. Friends used to do this to me for fun...so they could finish my fries. It sucked, because French Fries were, at the time, my favorite food.

That is probably where it started...with my food "quirks." The realization that I had control over what I ate was...somewhat empowering. It's strange how a disorder...an illness that emerges in an attempt to take control over your own life, to empower...mutates into something that controls you. No longer is it empowering when you do not eat but it is weakness when you do. It doesn't matter that you can easily see your clavicle,



rib cage, and hip bones jutting through your skin, actually bruising you from the inside, because if you gain weight...you have lost. Anyone can eat, anyone can put on weight but how much stronger are you than "anyone" when you can go 3 days without eating a thing...or a week just on watermelon. Anyone can diet, but not anyone can starve.

Sure, there are theories:

Cue the anthropological analysis: I was trying to be perfect, like the girls in the magazines, and out of guilt...I refused to eat.

Or

It's genetic. After all, my cousin had an eating disorder, my mother is always dieting, and it is no secret that... after 7 plastic surgeries...my family is somewhat obsessed with physical appearance. Not to mention the alcoholism and depression that runs rampant amongst my Aunts and Grandparents.

Or

It's an attention tactic...a right of passage for teenage girls
You can pick a theory, because...there are dozens...but the point is that...this need for control, this insecurity, this obsession with food has always been there...like a crouching animal ready to consume... hidden, waiting...finding satisfaction in lack, in the spaces between my ribs, in self denial...in being so good at something so self destructive...in sabotaging my own quest for perfection...by doing something so wrong.

Day 6594

"So, Christie, What do you want for lunch?"

This was a dangerous question. You see, whenever my mother asked "what do you want for lunch" it means she wants to eat with you...which also means that she wants to go out to eat (my mom likes to spend money on dumb things when we don't have the money to begin with). Sure, I know of a few safe choices at various restaurants but pleasing my mom and pleasing the demons...well... that was an art.

"McDonald's?"

They have a really low cal Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

"Or BK"

Again, low cal salad

"Sure, whatever"

"Which one?"

"Well...I don't really know what kinda food they have at BK"

The same kind they have at McDonald's

"Ok, so we will go to McDonald's"

"Not if you wanna go to BK"

"I'm fine with either, Mom"

"I just haven't been to BK in a while"

Yea sure

"Ok, so we will go to McDonalds"

"Whatever"

"Ok, McDonalds"

"I just don't know..."

Sigh

"Mom, Where do you wanna eat?"

"Wherever you want"

"Ok...McDonald's or BK"

"What if they don't have food I like?"

Sigh again

"Mom, they will have food you like...I can even order for you"

"So we are going to BK?"

"Is that where you wanna go?"

"I don't know if I like BK"

"Ok then...McDonald's"

"No, Christie, whatever you want"

I want to not be having this conversation

"I'm gonna wait in the car"

Day 6595

Isn't it strange how there are injuries and illnesses that moved you to tears when you were young yet...as you grew... became so much a part of your life...that you function everyday working through the...once agonizing pain?

Like a cut, a stomachache, cramps, nausea, headache...as a child these were paralyzing yet...I work through headaches every day. Is it the same with every part of life? Your internal pain becomes so much a part of you that...you would be surprised if you woke up one day and it wasn't there.

Day 6600

Dear FHS,

Most kids leave high school, take their diploma and head off to the "wonderful learning experiences" that college offers. I know that is what I plan to do. So much of the college decision process had to do with which school would offer me the best experiences, the best place to grow and to learn about myself, not just which offered the best academic education. I always thought that college would be my escape, my chance to get out of town and live my life. What I didn't realize, however, was that...I have been living my life without ever having

left.

As Senior Editor of the School Paper, I am supposed to say goodbye, but I refuse to write a goodbye letter because I am not actually leaving any part of this experience behind (even though there may be certain incidents better left unmentioned for a while!). Every single person I have encountered in this school has had an impact on me. Some taught me how to care, some how not to care, how to be embarrassed gracefully, how to take risks, how to never give up, and how to find a friend so close that every word spoken becomes an inside joke. But, no matter what the lesson, I have always greatly admired and loved the person who was teaching it

High school has granted me many experiences: my first heartbreak, the first time I broke someone's heart, peer pressure, and feeling like a small fish in a big pond. On the other hand, I also experienced my first love, my passion for literature, the first class to truly inspire me, the first teacher I wanted to be like, friendships, and accomplishments. I learned that, even though boys don't have cooties, they can still be pretty icky, you can love something you are not good at and be good at something you do not love, relationships can be rewarding (even if they don't last), and if you fight for something you really want, you can actually make it happen.

All the things teachers say about "being anything you want to be" or "doing anything you set your mind to" actually came true for me while in high school. Granted, there were some failures too (I still have not finished my book, stayed focused through an entire period of AP Economics, or gotten through all of Paradise Lost). But I did start my book, ace an AP Bio exam, and receive my acceptance letter from Cornell University. So, for those of you who are not graduating this year, don't forget that anything is possible if you work for it.

I am not leaving high school as the same insecure freshman who came in, and for that alone, I am grateful. Most people don't realize how much they have changed. Close friends of mine still ask me "Am I really that different now?" Whether we like it or not, although I personally like it, the events and opportunities that we have experienced in high school made us the people we are today: people who, through hard work, are graduating and moving on to the next chapter of life.



Each of us should be beyond proud. We all had our obstacles along the way, but when you are handed your diploma, it becomes obvious to the world that not only did the class of 2007 make it through high school, but we conquered it.

Day 6602

Family Day of Fun

1. Set up a picnic in the park
2. Lay out and try to talk to family
3. Listen to mom...act like a 5 year old

"I'm bored"

"Mom, it's ok to just relax sometimes"

"But it's not fair!"

Mom huffs

"What's not fair, Mom?"

"Every other family gets to go away this weekend"

"Yes, but we are spending time together, relaxing, and having a very nice picnic"

"But this is boring...I wanna do something fun"

I guess I can't always blame my mom though, my dad can be a real jerk too.

Day 6605

Christie missed her period again.

Day 6609

Christie's Dentist is an idiot.

She lay back and shut her eyes, in the dentist's chair... feeling the sharp needle pierce her skin... This is it, it's all numb from here

She felt the vibrations from the drill...but it was just a distant rumbling...the entire front of her face was numb.

His hands were shaking

She watched them shake

It's funny how you can be numb, and not feel a thing, and still be bleeding.

She saw her blood on his hands.

"Owe!"

He missed.

Numbness isn't really the absence of pain...it is like pain substituted by a strange tingling feeling that, in my opinion, is just as uncomfortable. Is that how life is? We just substitute pain. Substitute after substitute...often with things that

hurt just as much?

"Owe!"

He missed again.

He injected another shot.

This time, even her ear was numb.

Sometimes I wonder if it's worse to be numb or in pain? Because, not only can you never feel good but, pain will inevitably find a way in, pain always does. And, then it always seems to hurt so much more.

"Christie, you need to eat."

"Mom, my jaw hurts so bad...I can't even open my mouth"

Pain is a funny thing.

Day 6615

I burnt myself today. It wasn't on purpose though...I was just...standing in the shower, I just really needed to shower and I was standing there but the water just wouldn't get hot enough...it was up all the way but it wouldn't get hot enough. I saw the steam, but I didn't feel anything...nothing. I was in the shower for a half hour...but it wasn't hot enough. My chest is burnt, and my lower back...it hurts to touch...but I don't really mind. Indifference, that is my curse, I don't care one way or another.

Day 6618

You look at people, people you grew up with, people you had sleep overs with and played Barbie, who you only fought with when you both wanted the same dress... you look at them...and you wonder... when things went wrong, at what point did they start to hurt, when you were playing dolls and wearing pink dresses...did anyone know, could someone have figured it out, stopped it? God must have known, known you would let Satan win this one. And, you wanna trust him...trust his plan...know he has great things in store for you...but you still gotta wonder... why? Why me, why the hurt, why the plans?

You gotta wonder...when you still had enough strength to stop it...and at exactly what point you let go.

Day 6622

My heart hurts...I know that is a very figurative thing to say...and figuratively

speaking...its true...but that isn't all. When I say my heart hurts, I am speaking literally...

I've been getting these chest pains

When I get them...I think "this is what a heart attack must feel like." When I don't eat for three days, and run four miles anyway I think about what kind of irreparable damage I am doing

It is almost like a form of self mutilation, your not happy unless your in pain.

I wonder how long it will take for me to destroy myself...

And then I wonder...why I don't care.

Day 6660

Did you know that anorexia lends itself to creativity? It's like a creative writing major's dream, the ultimate cure for writer's block. If I'm stuck...just don't eat for a few days...and BAM inspiration. Talk about sacrificing for your art...

Day 6667

I stood on the tips of my toes...like in dance class...shut my eyes...and just let the water wash over me.

It was hot, too hot...but it didn't matter

It was just like in dance...the motions... the falling...the rhythm...the...drop... drop...drop

The breathing...drop...inhale...drop... exhale..

My hair was sticking to the sides of my face, my hands over my heart...and I couldn't move.

It was freedom, there on my toes...my heart dancing to the beat of the water.

It was like the rain.

I pretended it was rain.

I was dancing in the rain.

I couldn't care that it was too hot.

Nothing else was important.

Just the water.



Mixing with my salty tears.

Just the water.

I just need to be clean.

Day 6668

Did you ever notice how it is in our instinct to shield our chests? It's like, when we are being attacked, our body naturally curls itself around our center, protecting our core. Our body knows how important our heart is, it knows that our heart is our life force. It pumps our blood and houses our passions and desires. Even the Bible commands, in Proverbs, "above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life." But I wonder if that is really what drives that natural impulse. I wonder if our bodies guard our chests so steadfastly because they are trying to protect our hopes and dreams or if they just do it because they know...that our heart is where we feel the greatest pain.

Day 6669

Fingernails are really counterproductive when it comes to making yourself throw up. You see, the first problem is that they scratch your throat which, in some ways, helps with the gag reflex but just adds more discomfort to an uncomfortable situation. I have actually found that wiggling your fingers while they are shoved down your throat works better. Second, vomit gets stuck under your nails and then, no matter how hard you try, you smell like puke all day. I think this is the worst part because...not only does puke stink but then you are reminded all day of what you did. You are ashamed, guilty, embarrassed. But mostly you just hate yourself because you can't win. When you eat you feel guilty and fat and you hate yourself. When you don't eat you still feel guilty and fat and you hate yourself. And, when you puke...you feel weak and guilty and fat...and you hate yourself.

Day 6673

I pulled a clump of my hair out today...I was in the shower, soaking in the steam, face to the rain and I ran the shampoo through my hair...and it just came out...in clumps...long strands of my frail, dying hair. I thought I was doing better, I thought I was eating more...but there it was, on the floor of the shower...a piece of me. I am a living example of entropy.



And just then, in that moment, the wall that I had been building, the battle I had been fighting, came crashing and the hurt came flooding back in. All the progress I had been making dissolved and gave way to the water, the pangs of worthlessness, hopelessness. No matter what I did or how hard I tried I would still be fat and my hair would still fall out and I would still curl up into a ball and let the water fill around me

Flooding me

Drowning me

Falling against my skin

My back

My neck

My hair

And I would cry

Letting the water mix with my tears

So no one would ever know I was crying at all.

Day 6675

Laxatives don't have the same effect on me that they used to...I find myself having to take more and more to empty out my system...and then I get these awful...doubling over in pain cramps. But I have to take them! The fruit I eat makes me so bloated that I have to dump my stomach or I basically look pregnant! Last night they kept me up all night, I had to keep jumping out of bed and running to the bathroom cuz the cramps made me so sure that I had to go. I'd like to say that I'm never going to do that again, but I know it's a lie...in fact...I plan on getting more today when I go to the store.

Day 6677

Have you ever heard someone WISH they had the stomach flu? I know...its sick right? My mom has it right now and I'm SOOO jealous of her. She is dropping pounds like nobody's business. I keep thinking of that scene in The Devil Wears Prada where Emily, the skinny fashion obsessed girl, tells Ann Hathaway that she is "just one stomach flu away from [her] goal weight." (Don't ask...we don't have a lot of movies in my suite) And...I can just totally relate...I keep trying to think of really good ways to get myself sick...but alas...nothing. My stomach seems to be the only part of my body that stays in good health. While my joints hurt and I'm physically exhausted...my heart palpitates and it hurts to breath...my stomach is a warrior...virtually indestructible...

even immune to laxatives. I'm a freak of nature.

Day 6680

It's all so stupid when you talk about it. It actually makes me laugh sometimes. You know it doesn't make any sense, you know you are being irrational...and obsessive...you know that when other people miss a workout they don't immediately gain 5lbs or when your roommate eats a piece of cake they don't blow up like a balloon. But it doesn't feel so silly when you are living it. When you know you are 25calories over your daily allotment, or you had to cut your workout 10 minutes short...you KNOW people can see how fat you are...can see the weight you gained...think that you are nothing more than the average, obese American. But, here is the thing, I am not ok with being average. I want to make heads turn. I want to be everything to someone...so they will never have to look for something I lack in someone else. I do not wanna be the average woman, I do not want to be my mom.

Day 6684

The scalding water hit her face. What a bad dream...a bad...bad dream. The water ran over her body...forming little rivers down her arms, back, thighs, face...and dripping off at her elbows, her toes, her nose. She didn't remember when the church song got stuck in her head...at some point between waking up terrified and grabbing her robe but something compelled her to sing it...something told her to open her mouth...here in this safe haven, and sing into the water...even if it was just a whisper...something told her to be clean.

"Tell me whose side are you fightin on?"

I'm fightin on the Lord's side

Whose side are you fightin on?

I'm fightin on the Lord's side

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin on the Lord's side

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin

I'm fightin on the Lord's side"

Day 6689

My nutritionist says that an eating disorder is like having one of those little cartoon

devils on one shoulder and an angel on the other. And, not only is it a constant struggle...but every time you give into one...you inevitably weaken the other. I feel like this is so analogous to spiritual warfare that it is impossible for me to ignore. There are demons in this world...picking at my soul, weakening my spirit and every time I give into temptation, give into sin, I move farther away from God...and as I move farther from God...I move deeper into sin...where it hurts more. The Bible tells me not to give Satan a foothold...that is all he needs ya know? To drag you down...to rip you apart...just a tiny moment of weakness and he is ready to pounce...to grab you. He is a lion on the prowl...desiring nothing better than to consume my soul. Ephesians 6:12 is a scripture I live by...it says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and authorities of this dark world...and the spiritual forces of the heavenly realms. Can you imagine that? Right now...this very second...there is a demon in this room...and he wants my soul...and then there is this angel...this beautiful messenger of light...sent by God...and they are both ready to fight, to struggle, to plot, to use every possible way to come out victorious. Satan is ruthless. He uses his demons to watch us...to find our weaknesses, to manipulate and wound all the Good that God has put in this world. But the problem with Satan is...that he can't win. Eventually...God will swoop in, in all his glory...and save us. He will take away this pain, these lies, these demons, this war. He will be victorious. In the end...Satan will be struck down...and God will be victorious. So why would I give in to him? Why don't I just keep fighting? Honestly? It is because I don't know how long God will take.

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COMPLETE DEGENERATES

By Eleanor Bryon

Once upon a time, my best friend Erin Harvey punched a guy in the face for trying to worm his hand up her shirt at a party. It was great. She must have caught his nose at just the right angle or something, because even though Erin wasn't all that strong, there was this disgusting *crunnnch* and blood got all over everything. Erin's hand hurt like hell, but she still managed to get out a cool one-liner before we walked out of the party, heads high. I can't remember that one-liner anymore, but the details aren't important. What I can remember is getting out onto the sidewalk on that cold January night and collapsing into hysterical giggles as soon as we rounded the corner. I can remember winding home in the snow and packing Lean Cuisines onto Erin's hand, because it hurt and we were in college and that was all we had that was frozen. I remember us falling asleep on my bed and waking up to the smells of defrosted chicken and fake cheese-product at two in the afternoon.

But this story isn't about that.

I'm laying on the floor in the living room of the really small apartment that I share with my really bitchy roommate Cherise, and I'm trying to find my cell-phone. I know it has to be around here somewhere because I just had it in my hand, but that was before I threw it. I can hear it vibrating from the depths of my sofa, but its location is proving to be a little bit harder than I previously thought.

My hand closes around something small and plastic. The caller ID confirms what I had already assumed, and I contemplate doing something drastic. Putting my phone down the disposal, maybe, or throwing it out the window into inner-city traffic. Then I remember how poor I am and how I cannot afford to buy another phone this month, not after Garrett broke the last one by throwing me into a bathtub with my clothes on and my phone in my back pocket.

Plus, my curiosity has gotten the better of me.

I flip the phone open and hold it to my ear, but I don't say anything. It's so typical of me. It's completely passive-aggressive, and I can hear Erin's frustration on the other line before she even says anything.

"Thanks for hanging up on me."

"Whatever."

Erin exhales loudly, and I think that if I close my eyes, maybe I can imagine what she must look like right now. I can just picture that cross look on her face, like she used to get every finals week for six days straight. I can imagine her pale brown bangs fluttering as she lets out a frustrated breath. But wait. Does she even wear bangs anymore? She probably doesn't.

"You're not being very good about this."

"I'm sorry."

"No," she says, "you're not."

"I'm sorry I'm not sorry."

"You know, Anna," she says, "you're not being very adult right now."

"Well, what do you want me to say?" I say. I make a conscious effort to loosen my grip on the phone, because I have suddenly become aware that my knuckles are draining of color. "Congratulations?"

Erin snorts with mirthless laughter. "That's the most common response, yeah. You're my best friend. I thought you would be excited."

I flop backwards onto the couch with little grace. "Congratulations."

Erin huffs at me. "Right. I don't have time to nurse you out of one of your moods. Do you want to be my maid of honor or not?"

I bite my tongue to keep myself from saying something I am going to regret. I bite my tongue for a long time and concentrate on taking deep breaths. My mouth suddenly tastes like old pennies, so I stop biting my tongue. I spit into the dying potted plant that I never remember to water and remember all the times that I have thrown up and Erin has held my hair.

"Yes," I say. It's not an answer that I like, but it's really the only option.

When I get out of the cab in front of Erin's new building, the first thing I notice is that there is a plant in every window. The second thing I notice is that none of these plants are dead.

The first thing I notice when the door to Erin's new apartment opens is that Brady, her boyfriend (fiancé) is wearing one of those Gore-Tex fleeces that zip halfway down, and nothing on his feet. The shirt annoys me because it has always annoyed me when people who are not Lance Armstrong and who do not climb mountains or rappel down cliffs or hunt yetis wear very high-tech activewear. The bare feet thing just annoys because I have never liked Brady.

"Anna!" he says, pleasantly. He holds out his arms as if expecting me to rush into them, but I just look at him in as bratty a way as I can manage. I even go so far as lifting one of my eyebrows. Erin and I spent a lot of time in college trying to teach ourselves to do that.

Brady's cheerful grin wavers a little bit when he sees that I am not about to plunge into his friendly embrace, so he steps forward and folds me into his chest. He smells like very expensive cologne and I find myself hating him more than usual.

When he finally lets me go, he takes a step back with the pretense of putting his hands on my shoulders to admire me from

a distance.

“God, you look gorgeous!” he says. “Come on in, Erin’s around somewhere and I know she’s dying to see you.”

I haven’t said a single word since I got here, but at the rate things are going, I think Brady could ignore my desire not to talk to him to the extent that he might have a conversation with himself.

I shuffle in after him, silently. I came over all prepped to be civil and mature for the sake of my best friend, but Brady and his fucking Gore-Tex have set off something in me, and now any hope of being adult has gone out the totally streak-free window.

The apartment is spacious and well-lit, and even though I am wearing a pair of clean jeans and one of my less ratty sweaters, I instantly feel out of place. There are curtains at the window. Green ones. With fringe.

Erin is sitting on the couch, sewing a patch onto her favorite pair of old jeans. This makes me smile, because those are the same jeans she used to wear all the time in college. I feel a little more like I can remember why we are friends.

“Hi!” She springs off the couch and comes over to hug me and I can’t help but to notice that I was right. She doesn’t wear her bangs long and in her eyes anymore. She’s growing them out, and she has a thin headband in her hair. She looks like Marcia fucking Brady, but I don’t tell her that.

“Sit down,” she says. I flop down next to her on the couch from Ikea and watch her thread the needle. “Is this the first time you’ve seen the new apartment?”

Yes, because you’ve been too busy cooking dinner for your boyfriend and the rest of your ‘couple-friends’ to remember that I exist.

“Yes,” I say. “It’s . . . nice.” Totally freaking frightening.

She beams. Her cheeks have color in them. Her shirt is completely stain-free. I can feel sweat breaking out on my forehead. I don’t know how long I can handle being in here. Their kitchen smells deliciously of garlic instead of cheap takeout, and for some reason I feel claustrophobic.

“Do you want to see what I have planned for your dress?” Erin is practically bouncing on the couch cushions, so I try to put the sick feeling out of my mind.

“Definitely!” I sound a little overly enthusiastic, but she doesn’t notice and she pulls a big three-ring binder out of the end table caddy. She flips through the pages and shows me cakes, garters, veils, and finally comes to a page with a million pretty dresses on it. Erin has always had good taste, except when it comes to Brady. I lean my head on her shoulder and shift a little closer to her on the couch, warmed by the fact that she is not going to make me wear a terrible, puffy monstrosity.

She rests her head on top of mine. “Do you like this one?” She points at it. It’s knee length and not horrible, but the particulars are lost on me because I am so relieved that I have my best friend back for right now.

We sit and we breathe and we look at bridesmaid’s dresses and I remember the time junior year when she got food poisoning and I drove her to the hospital. We sat there for hours, and I sang her songs and stroked her hair and bought her food from the vending machines, which probably wasn’t a good idea because she just threw it all up anyway.

“Hey,” I say. “I love you, alright? I’m not happy that you’re getting married, but I still love you.”

“Duh,” says Erin. “You have to love me. I’m your best friend.” She leans over to give me an impromptu hug and I relax for a second into her shoulder, but then Brady comes in wearing his stupid fleece-thing and clears his throat.

“Erin?” he says. “Sorry, babe, but we’re going to be late for ballroom.”

“Shit! That’s tonight?” Erin springs straight up and stuffs the bride binder back under the end table. “I totally forgot! Thanks so much!” She is off and running, stuffing her feet into shoes, gathering her keys from the hook on the wall. Her keys have their own hook?

“Ballroom?” I say, instead of asking her when her life became run by a label-maker.

“Dance. Lessons. Ballroom dance lessons. For the wedding.” Erin’s beautiful face looks harried. “Brady thought we should learn how, so we can look like we know what we’re doing at the reception.”

“And we’re late,” says Brady. His face looks neutral, faintly pleasant, but there is a distinct bite of impatience in his voice.

Erin hurries by, her hair falling in her eyes a little bit as she rushes. “I’m so

sorry, Anna, I completely forgot. I’ll show you your dress some other time, I promise. I just feel like I can’t remember anything anymore.” Her face looks more frazzled than mournful. “Hey, do you want to come along and watch, or something? You can see me do the foxtrot. It’s funny.”

I think if I watch my best friend do anything that even remotely resembles the foxtrot, I will throw up all over Brady’s bare feet. I shake my head in a silent ‘no.’

“You sure?” says Brady, because Erin is too busy running around, trying to find her coat to notice my response. “It would be fun.” His eyes are saying different things.

“I’m so sure,” I say.

“Alright, then,” says Erin, scampering back into the room with one arm in her coat sleeve. “If you’re sure.” She drops an absentminded kiss on my temple and lets Brady shoo her out the door without a backward glance.

They turn off the lights behind them. Erin doesn’t even say goodbye.

I look around at this clean, empty space, and I wonder what went wrong.

“So she’s seriously getting married?”

Garrett is sprawled across my bed because it’s the only place to sit in my room. My sheets are bunched up in a corner, so his scruffy, dark hair stands out against the bare mattress.

“Yeah,” I say. “Insane, right? She’s making me wear a pink dress and I have to plan her shower.”

Garrett cracks a lazy grin and sucks on the end of his cigarette. “Pink dress,” he says. “Hot. Is it flowered, too? Made of that puffy stuff?”

“It’s called ‘tulle’. And I hate you.”

“You love me.”

“No,” I say. “I don’t.”

Garrett lights a new cigarette with the butt of his old one and blows the smoke in my face. “You keep telling yourself that.”

I scowl at him but I can’t put my whole heart into it. Garrett is that guy. He’s totally terrible and I despise him and I love him and it’s one huge mess, but I’m not sure if we know how to be any other way.

Garrett smiles his poison smile and gets up onto his ripped knees and crawls towards me, sitting on the end of

the bed.

“Baby,” he croons, inching closer to my face, “don’t be mad.”

“I’m not.”

“I was just kidding.” He reaches out a hand to play with my hair and I can feel myself melting against my will. “I’m sure you’re gonna be the hottest bridesmaid I have ever seen.” He presses his weight against me and tips me back against the mattress.

“Stop making fun of me,” I pout. “This is a big deal. My best friend is marrying a guy I can’t stand and she has a spice rack in her kitchen.” I’m trying to focus here, to get my thoughts to stay in a straight line, but that’s always so hard to do when his face is this close to mine.

“So?” He toys with the bottom of my shirt and I chew the inside of my cheek.

“So, since when has she owned a spice rack?”

“Since when have you cared?” says Garrett, totally missing the point.

“You’re totally missing the point,” I say.

“Last time I checked, you weren’t marrying him, she was,” says Garrett.

“You aren’t listening!” I say, but then I don’t say anything else because in one quick move he flips me over and has me pinned against the unmade bed, holding my wrists in his hand.

“Stop being a bitch,” he says, and then he kisses me.

The smoke from his cigarette mixes in our lungs and I close my eyes and I can’t help but smile against his animal grin.

“You want to go to the wedding with me?”

“He isn’t coming.”

Brady is basically glaring at me from across the kitchen table. I feel like throwing the pink rosettes I’m hot gluing to his fucking ‘sample wedding invitations’ at his face, but I decide it would be a waste of effort.

Instead, I stare at him blankly, not saying anything.

“Anna, seriously,” Brady says when I don’t reply. “He really can’t come.”

“Why not?” I finally say. “I’m the maid of honor. I can bring whoever I want.”

Brady pauses, like he’s trying to collect himself, which makes me angry. I wish he would just yell at me, once and for all, like I’ve always known he wants to. Then I could prove to Erin that he’s a total shithead. Instead, he goes through all these motions of being calm and collected, chewing over his words like a senior citizen. What an asshole.

“Anna,” he finally says, “what I think we have to consider here is that it’s Erin’s day. We have to consider what she would want.”

“Don’t ‘we’ me,” I snap. “I don’t think like you think. And definitely do not presume to tell me that you know what Erin wants more than I do. She’s my best friend. You’re just the guy marrying her.”

“God, are you always so immature?” snarls Brady. This is a side of him I always knew was there, but it’s the first time I’ve actually seen it. It gives me a perverse thrill to know that my theories were true, but it pisses me off at the same time.

“What’s wrong with Garrett?” I challenge him. I’m holding the hot glue gun at my side like a pistol. Ready to shoot.

Brady takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. He mas-

sages his forehead. I can tell he’s annoyed that he’s let his good-guy exterior slip. “Anna,” he says, coaxingly, “you can bring anyone you want to our wedding. Just not Garrett, okay?”

“Why?”

He snaps again. “Because we don’t want him there! Why would we? He doesn’t even have a real job, and when was the last time he shaved? We don’t want him smelling up the church or coming in dirty sneakers. I don’t. Erin doesn’t. Neither of us do.”

“Don’t tell me what Erin wants!” I say. “Erin would never tell me that I can’t bring my boyfriend to her wedding.”

“God, would you listen to yourself?” says Brady. “He’s not your boyfriend, he’s just using you. I’ve only been out with you guys twice and even I can tell that.”

I suck in a deep breath. Anger is making my spine hot, and before I know what I’m doing, I take the hand that doesn’t have the glue gun in it and I slap Brady’s stupid asshole face. I feel like crying, but I won’t give him the satisfaction.

“What the hell is going on here?” shouts Erin, charging into the room. She stops in the doorway, and I can only imagine what it must look like to her. Her best friend pointing a glue gun at her fiancé, who is wearing a look like a kicked puppy and holding his hand to his cheek. I would laugh if I weren’t busy wishing my gun held bullets instead of glue.

“Your fiancé,” I spit. “Is a complete degenerate. If you marry him, you’re crazy.”

Erin grabs my hands and pulls me out of the apartment. It feels like she’s trying to pull my arm off.

“What is wrong with you?” she says to me, angrily. We’re on the street and she is walking very fast, as if she’s trying to get away from me. “Ever since I got engaged you’ve been so fucking difficult about the whole thing. If you were going to cause problems, if it bothers you so much, why did you agree to be my maid of honor?”

“I had to. You’re my best friend,” I say.

“Well you’re not acting like it,” she fumes.

“I’m not?” I say. “Are you kidding me? If anyone is acting like your best friend, it’s me! I’m the only one who is trying to get you to see that this is a huge mistake!”

Erin whips her head around and faces me. A wisp of her carefully pinned-back bangs is falling in her eyes. “How is it a mistake?” she demands. “How? How is it a mistake to marry the man I love, to settle down and become an adult?”

The answer is so obvious to me that at first I can’t think of how to phrase it. “You have a spice rack.” It’s all I can get out. “You’re a mutant.”

Erin’s pretty blue eyes narrow into slits, but I’m not afraid of her.

“I’m a grown-up, unlike you,” she says.

“You’re twenty-three,” I say.

“You can’t live your entire life in a shitty apartment listening to Pink Floyd and eating Easy Mac.”

“Why not?” I challenge her. “Why can’t you do that?”

She stares at me. “You really don’t get it.”

I try a different track. “Why Brady then? He’s exactly the kind of guy you used to hate. He drives an SUV! Do you know he told me I can’t take Garrett to the wedding?”

“Well, good,” says Erin. “Garrett’s a total jerk, Anna. We’ve talked about this a million times. He’s a loser.”

“He’s an artist!”

“He’s using you!” Erin yells.

“What does he do with his life? He plays guitar and pisses off his landlord. Why do you put up with him, Anna? I don’t like him and I don’t want him at my wedding.”

“He’s an artist,” I say, again, because it’s all I can think to say. Garrett was the kind of guy we both found fascinating when we were younger. Bright-eyed activists, musicians, weird guys who would sculpt our ears in musty warehouse studios. We would talk to these guys for hours over coffee, go on a million double dates, and discuss Israel and Palestine like we actually lived there. We were young and we were in love with the world and we thought that we could do anything.

But then we got older and things got different. Erin quit her job at the club and became someone’s secretary. She met Brady at work and she started wearing earrings and sewing up the holes in all her socks. Earlier this year she moved out, and she was drifting farther and farther away from the girl who used to scare creepy guys away from me in the subway station.

“When is he going to get a job with a real paycheck, Anna? When is he going to really move in with you, pay his half of the rent, get a haircut? When are you going to meet his parents? He’s not a boyfriend. He’s a joke.”

“This isn’t about Garrett,” I say. “This is about you.”

“Yeah,” says Erin. Her face is an angry mask and I wonder if the world is about to be covered in blood again. “And I have a boyfriend. A real one. One who wants to make some money and raise a couple of kids and do everything the right way.”

“Who says his way is the right way?” I counter.

“He’s a grown-up, Anna,” says Erin. Her anger fades a little and her face looks sad. “I’m a grown-up. I think that’s the part you aren’t getting.”

She turns and walks away from me, and I can’t get myself to move in order to say anything to her or chase her down the street. A white crumble blows against my leg, and I bend down to pick it up. It’s the wedding invitation that Erin had been holding, white card with engraving and fake pink rosettes. It is so obviously a representation of an idea of what a wedding invitation is supposed to be that I want to cry.

So I do.

Garrett comes and finds me later when I am sitting on a bench in the park. It’s cold, but I can’t look away from the playground. There’s a million families with a million kids and it makes me sick. It’s obvious that no one wants to be there. Dads are pushing little girls on the swings and looking at their watches. Nannies take the place of mothers. Everyone is bitter and no one is happy and everyone is connected to their cell-phone instead of the people they are with. They’re all so young, and they’re all so angry, and I feel like I might be sick.

“Hey,” says Garrett. He sits down next to me. “What’re you doing?”

“Nothing,” I say.

He passes me the cigarette he’s smoking, holding it to my lips when I push it away.

“I gave up, remember?” I say.

“It’ll make you feel better,” he says, so I take a puff and I let the familiar acrid feeling invade my lungs. It’s not clean or pretty, but it’s real so I embrace it for now. I finish the rest of Garrett’s cigarette. He lights himself a new one.

“Didn’t go well, huh?” he says finally.

I shake my head, eyes still trained on the horrorscape before me.

“Fuck it,” he says. “Why bother, if she’s going to be a bitch?”

I don’t say anything, just watch the families in their pretty dance of everything-is-fine. I try as hard as I can to see why Erin would want to be a part of this world, why she would sign herself up for years and years of trying so hard to get it right that in the end, you forget what it was you wanted in the first place. I stare at the swing sets until it gets dark and the last family leaves.

Garrett hooks a finger through my belt-loop and tugs to get my attention. I turn to look at him, and his fevered eyes glow at me in the semi-dark.

“It’s cold,” he says. “Let’s go back to yours, okay? And then we can fuck all night long until you feel better.”

I choke out a hollow laugh and let him pull me to my feet. I slide my arm around his waist as we walk away, lean my head on his shoulder. He doesn’t return either of my gestures, but he is real and he isn’t pretending, so that is good enough for me.

“Rent.”

I groan and push my face farther into my pillow. “Not now, Cherise. I just had the shittiest day imaginable.”

My really bitchy roommate Cherise walks across the room in her pointy stiletto boots and pulls the pillow off of my face. She thrusts her hand into my line of vision.

“Rent. Now. I mean it.”

I grab my pillow back. “Tomorrow.”

She takes it from me again.

“Now!”

“Fine!” I swing my feet off the edge of the bed and root around in my dresser drawer for my wallet. When it doesn’t show up there, I get down on my hands and knees and check under the bed, then in the pockets of the jeans still lying crumpled on my floor.

Cherise stands in the middle of my room and looks around. “Jesus. It smells like a fucking ashtray in here. I thought you quit?”

“Garrett,” I grunt from my position under the bed. I locate my wallet in the back corner with some dust balls. I have no idea how it got there.

“Oh, he still smokes around you? That’s nice of him. What a gem.”

I open my wallet and squint at the inside. I blink. Maybe next time I open my eyes, there’ll be some more money inside. “Shut up,” I say. I sigh and pull out my checkbook. “Same amount as always?”

“And he takes all your cash so you only pay me in useless checks. I want fifty more,” Cherise says, sticking her hand on her hip. “I’ve been buying toilet paper for the past six months. And air freshener. And I paid for the rat poison that time.”

“There is no way I am giving you an extra fifty,” I say. I write the check.

“Then you can come up with some other way to wipe your ass,” says Cherise. “This check better not bounce like last time.”

“It won’t.” It might.

Cherise takes the check but then hovers in the doorway. “So, bad day, huh?” She’s not my favorite person, but she’s not Brady and she didn’t just storm away from me in the street, so I’ll take it.

“Something like that.” I flop down on the bed melodramatically.

“Erin’s getting married.”

“Your friend? Really? That’s so

great! Tell her I said congratulations. She's marrying that bank guy, right?"

I shrug. It occurs to me that I don't really know what Brady does for a living. I've been too occupied with hating him to notice trivial things like that. "I'm not sure. How do you know him?"

Cherise shrugs, too. She's holding the check delicately between the first two fingers of her right hand. "I work with his sister. He brought her flowers for her birthday last month. I went out for dinner with them. Big crowd. I like your friend Erin. She seems nice."

"She is," I say.

"They seem very happy."

"They're not," I say.

Chrise raises one eyebrow at me. "Coulda fooled me."

"He's all wrong for her," I say, getting frustrated. No one is on my side! "And he's a dick."

"Why?"

"He just is," I say. I am more than aware that I sound like a twelve-year-old, but I could care less right now. "Trust me. You don't know them like I do."

"Seems to me," Cherise says, "that any man who brings his little sister flowers on her birthday can't be that bad."

"He told me I can't bring Garrett to the wedding," I say petulantly. Doesn't anybody understand? "He treats me like I'm seven. Like he's talking to a baby."

"Well imagine that," says Cherise silkily. She rests her hand on the doorway. "If it was me, I'd be happy my friend found someone who doesn't burn holes in her carpet or use all her money to buy cigarettes. And who probably pays his rent on time and buys toilet paper once in a while."

"Get out!"

"You should be happy."

"Leave!" I throw a shoe in her general vicinity and it bounces off the doorframe.

"I'm leaving, I'm leaving," she says. She takes a few steps out the door before turning around and looking over her shoulder at me, sprawled on the bed. "Don't you have work in ten minutes?"

Shit.

"Does it make me look fat?"

I look up from my National Geographic as six different women coo a chorus of 'no's and 'my god's and 'are you kidding me it looks gorgeous's. These are the people that she drinks wine with on nights when she used to cook curry with me.

"Yes," I say. It's not the truth. Erin can never look fat, but this particular dress has a big puffy skirt and cap sleeves, so I figure I'm doing her a favor.

Erin scowls at me as she goes back into the dressing room. Things between us haven't been particularly great since the fight we had on the sidewalk. Actually, she hasn't spoken to me at all. I've managed to show up at all of her important fittings and arrangements and teas, but I never really say anything to her. I wouldn't even know what to say if the occasion arose, but it hasn't. Sometimes I wonder if I'm even the maid of honor anymore. She's probably replaced me with someone whose boyfriend works at an investment bank, and as much as I try to pretend that I don't care, I kind of do.

The room is crowded with women in blazers and knock-

off Chanel purses. I stuff another handful of Tic-Tacs into my mouth and wonder when I can leave. I'm not sure why I even still come to these things, but whenever I see Erin, I remember all the stupid shit we've done together, and I know I have to stay. I don't know if she's the same girl I used to love, but the past has to count for something, right?

Someone clears their throat. I look up, and Erin is standing right in front of me. The dress she has on is atrocious. It has a train. And a veil. And elbow gloves.

But that isn't important because she is standing right next to me, and for the first time in weeks she is looking me in the eye. Her chin is wobbling, but I can't tell if it's from sadness or a desire to hit me across the mouth. The bridge of her nose is turning red, and I have a strong desire to rescue her from this place. I want to drag her to our old apartment and make her some instant coffee and curl up together on the couch and sleep until we cannot remember anything about dresses or invitations or seating arrangements. I want to rescue her and turn her into my best friend again, except that I know I can't.

Her dress is a dress from a fairy tale and she is trying very hard to be the princess, and I am not her fairy godmother. I can't make things different for her, but I can do the next best thing.

I take a deep breath and I smile. I can do this.

"Do you like it?" she says. Her voice is a question, but I don't hear the words.

"You look beautiful," I say. "You look beautiful."

D R A M A

TRUTH THERAPY

By Anastasia Stumpf

TRUTH THERAPY

(Without pausing for an answer)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Would you attribute your emotional excess to the stories you fabricate day in and day out?

MISS PERKINS. Early twenties, delusional, grand.

How does it feel when you lie?

DOCTOR A . Power hungry, early fifties.

Is it a cut to your skin?

DOCTOR B. Early twenties, eager, gives sympathy easily

Maybe a bit like an orgasm?

YOUNG MAN. Late teens, gangly.

Does it make your mouth taste like metal?

THE PLACE

Or chalk?

A hospital for the insane.

Metal or chalk, metal or chalk?

THE TIME

Perhaps it is best compared to milk from your mother's breast?

Winter, the present...or the past...or the future.

Aha! You were not breast-fed!

TRUTH THERAPY

(Mock melodrama)

How tragic!

ACT ONE

So unfair!

Scene One

(A beat)

Maybe this issue is somehow in relation to the father rather than the mother?

SETTING: A Stark cold room. Harsh "sterile" lighting. An examination table and complicated medical equipment are in the room. A table with what appears to be a polygraph machine sits opposite the exam table. Everything appears torturous. A huge wooden tub of water sits in the center of the stage.

Was your father what they call...assertive?

No, no! He must have been emasculated.

AT RISE: DOCTORS A and B sit on either side of MISS PERKINS who is anxiously perched on the edge of the examination table. DOCTORS A and B speak the following lines in no particular order. They begin sitting, interrogating MISS PERKINS but as they speak their movements become violent as do the tones of their voices.

Yes! Must have been emasculated!

(A beat)

Castrated?

Maybe this is gender related? A desire for yourself to become masculine? Or feminine?

Miss Perkins is it?

The questions are becoming faster and MISS PERKINS is drawing herself into a ball. She begins rocking back and forth.

Twenty years old?

Do you prefer wearing pants or skirts?

MISS PERKINS nods

When did you first begin lying?

Funny, we have eighteen here.

When did your mother start hating you?

Yes, well, on a scale of one to ten how would you rate your stress level currently?

When did you begin hating your mother?

MISS PERKINS covers her ears

What time were you sent to bed as a child?

What time did you brush your teeth?

When did you tell your first lie?

What was it?

Was it fun?

Was it scary?

Was it all you wanted in the world?

When did you first begin to believe these malignant thoughts?

What will you do?

Do you believe that what you have is curable?

What is your opinion?

How do you see yourself? Are you a sinner? Are you a saint?

Do you believe in God?

Where does that put you?

MISS PERKINS screams and begins to sob, overwhelmed.

DOCTORS both begin to laugh. Black out.

Scene Two

MISS PERKINS and DOCTOR A sit facing one another.

DOCTOR B sits silently behind A taking notes. DOCTOR A occasionally makes a note on his clipboard.

DOCTOR A

I am assuming, Miss Perkins, you of course know why you've been sent to us today.

MISS PERKINS

Mother.

DOCTOR A

Yes, it was your mother who brought you to me-er, us, but do you understand why?

MISS PERKINS

Because I told her...I said...

DOCTOR A

Told her what, Miss Perkins??

MISS PERKINS

(Sitting up straight, with false courage)
I don't find that to be any of your business!

DOCTOR A

On the contrary, Miss Perkins! I find it to be nothing but my business!

MISS PERKINS

What does it matter? Anything I've ever said has put me in this chair. You, doctor, tell me, am I an uncontrollable liar? Incurable almost?

DOCTOR A

Now let's not get carried away, or pretend that I am not so fabulous at what I do that even the most hopeless of cases is beyond my reach.

MISS PERKINS

Well, I'm not a liar. My mother is. She just wants to get me out of her way. God only knows why. Probably has a boyfriend. Ha. No, really. It's probably just a matter of-

DOCTOR A

Miss Perkins, why did your mother bring you to us, really? What did you tell her?

MISS PERKINS

(Pause)

I told her I was in love. And that someone was in love with me.

DOCTOR A

And? That couldn't possibly be what has caused such a panic-

MISS PERKINS

Well, I'm getting married. Soon.
(Hurriedly)

And we are moving. To Paris. I'll even have a maid! Well, he has one already. Svetlana. I love her dearly, she is so perfect and friendly and sweet. Such a lovely maid, such a lovely friend.

DOCTOR A

I see. So why would this news cause your mother to...panic?

MISS PERKINS

I expect that she just can't handle...well...

DOCTOR A

What can't she handle?

MISS PERKINS

(Laughing)

Taxes. Grocery Shopping. Suburban driving. Spills on the living room carpet. A whole number of things really.

(A beat)

I work so hard for her, you know. And she is so ungrateful. If only I could somehow find a maid.

DOCTOR A

(Smugly)

Well, you said you would soon have... Svetlana, I believe was her name.

MISS PERKINS

(Pause)

Svetlana? I don't know what you are talking about! A maid would be impossible for us to afford. You are really quite offensive.

DOCTOR A

Miss Perkins let me lay down the bottom line for you. You are a liar. I'm not sure you understand this but we-
(pointing to B)

will keep you here to be studied and treated until you are ready to admit you're a liar and endeavor to tell us the truth. Having given our solemn vow to cure you to your poor, poor Mother, we will go to whatever lengths necessary.

(Pause, he looks at her assessing)

Know this, Miss Perkins. This is completely and totally in your hands. Not mine.

MISS PERKINS

I...you-

DOCTOR B

(Softly)

How did you feel telling us that...lie... about the maid?

MISS PERKINS

(Matching B's tone)

It wasn't a lie. But, when I told you my story- my true story- I suppose I felt... alive.

BLACK OUT

Scene Three

DOCTOR A and B sit across from one another.

DOCTOR A

I hope you too understood the magnitude of this problem this unfortunate young woman...Miss...um...Miss Perkins has presented us with.

DOCTOR B

(Timidly)

Surely sir, she is perhaps beyond saving? I mean, she doesn't even know- she doesn't understand that a change is necessary.

DOCTOR A

(Haughtily)

It's our job to...make such an impression upon her. We have been sworn to an ancient code of duty. We've known that trying in even the most futile of cases would be one of our most horrible responsibilities since the day we first put on these coats. When I completed my residency and the Alabama State- well, I digress. Back to the matter at hand.

(Clears throat)

It is quite clear that this Miss Perkins is a pathological liar, or, is at least suffering from some severe sort of confabulation.

DOCTOR B

Absolutely. Perhaps we should first get to the um...root, of the problem.

DOCTOR A

I would agree with you.

(Happily)

You're learning so quickly under my tutelage!

DOCTOR B

(Pause while DOCTOR A gazes fondly at DOCTOR B)

Er...yes. Should we-

DOCTOR A

We'll press her to divulge true facts about her life. Start out small and soon hopefully the habit will catch. We'll work our way up to drag out a confession pertaining to this love and marriage nonsense. It struck me as perhaps monumental.

(Pause)

We have a sick, sick girl on our hands.

One who may indeed pose a serious threat to society. Think of the chaos such a liar could wreak on our world should she be turned loose by careless keepers of the unwashed and insane! But, again, I digress ever so slightly. Yes, the sooner we discover her root and expose the truth to her, the sooner we can force her to admit her

wrongs and cure her. Agreed?

DOCTOR B

(Pause)

Agreed.

DOCTOR A

Whole-heartedly?

DOCTOR B

Yes, sir.

DOCTOR A

Well good, I concur!

(Pause)

So I suppose the question then becomes, how do we proceed with treatment?

DOCTOR B

By any means necessary?

DOCTOR A

(Laughing haughtily)

You are indeed a quick study. By any means necessary. Remember my dear colleague, glory and recognition will only come to the most ruthless, especially in this case...imagine, we could be revered-creating a cure for lying! Starting with perhaps, the world's worst.

(Pause, dreamily)

A marketing gold mine...

(Snapping out of it)

Yes...well, we are doing the world a service! We can't have people running about and outright lying about things! Especially if they believe them to be true. We cannot and WILL NOT tolerate such confabulation. You get to the root, I'll get to the confession.

Scene Four

Sitting on examination table.

MISS PERKINS

I know why I'm here. It's because she's jealous. Envious. Green. I can't just sit here and rot. Not because some fifty-five year old bat is crying over her lumpy belly and loveless life.

(Pause)

She knows he loves me. She knows that the minute I convince these brainless schmucks that she's the liar, he'll be here to pick me up. Take me away. To Bora Bora and then, to Rome. Never have to see her again.

(Pause)

I don't understand why they are so in-

terested to know him. Why would I tell? They'd never believe in love for someone so-
(disdainfully)
sick. No...they won't know him.
(Pause)

I wonder how long he'll wait...I could tell them anything else they want to hear. Although they're saying I've told too many tall tales. They were never even that tall! More like...three foot nine. Never hurt anybody.

(Pause)

Well, no matter. They'll hear what they want. Except about him. Won't get me to utter a word...it would break his heart. I'll act the part they ask for...he always said I was born to act, so did Svetlana.

DOCTOR B enters. MISS PERKINS quickly lies down.

DOCTOR B

Hello, Miss Perkins. I was hoping today we would simply discuss some of your childhood?

MISS PERKINS

To be honest, Doctor, I would much rather go home.

DOCTOR B

In due course, Miss Perkins. Now, I've brought an...er...mechanical aid at the insistence of some of my colleagues to... help...with this discussion.

MISS PERKINS

The goal of this discussion being...?

DOCTOR B

Why too help discover your root!

MISS PERKINS

My what?

DOCTOR B

The cause of your ly- exaggeration issue. Now if you will just all me to attach these electrodes-
(attaches equipment from a machine on a cart he has wheeled around from the back of the tub).

Right, now, we'll discuss specific events suspected to be interfering with your ability to speak truthfully. I have, of course, already discussed these events with your mother but it is your...uh...reactions

which will help to uncover any root. Please, Miss Perkins, I urge you to tell me the truth. Should I detect a lie- (he taps his clipboard) or suspect a lie, you'll be issued a ... (winces slightly) physical discouragement from further lying. (Attempting to brighten the mood) I mean, it'll be pretty hard for me to sift through your mind if you keep fibbing to me, now won't it?? DOCTOR B sits down at the machine, he turns a large round dial and clicks it once loudly. He pulls out his clipboard. MISS PERKINS appears very nervous.

DOCTOR B Cont.
So, I suppose we should start with your earliest records. Second grade. What can you tell me about that year? (Pause) Anything at all...anything significant...

MISS PERKINS
Absolutely nothing. Can't remember a thing.

DOCTOR B pushes a large black button and MISS PERKINS is issued a small jolt of energy.

MISS PERKINS Cont.
What the hell!

DOCTOR B
I know. Aversion therapy, Miss Perkins. Now shall we try again? Second grade. Significant event?

MISS PERKINS
(Glaring)
Jimmy Mulberry.

SHOCK

Jimmy Millbrook, Millbrook.
DOCTOR B clicks dial twice, increasing the shock intensity.

DOCTOR B
And what about Jimmy Millbrook?

MISS PERKINS
If you already know the story why are you asking?! (Long pause) He pushed me down on the walk home one day. Skinned my knee, so I... I didn't do anything, I just sat there and cried.

SHOCK

(Pained)
He pushed me down and I...tripped him, broke his left arm.

SHOCK

Damn it! Why is this memory even important?? Your notes must be wrong-

SHOCK

DOCTOR B
You were pushed down and how did you retaliate?

MISS PERKINS
(Ashamed)
I fed the class gerbil ant spray. I was upset and...I...I told everyone that Jimmy...I blamed it on Jimmy.

DOCTOR B
Was that really so bad? Let's move on shall well?

DOCTOR B gives the dial three clicks.

We move now to the sixth grade, first day of school. A significant incident occurred that day as well.

MISS PERKINS
No.

SHOCK. MISS PERKINS jerks violently once and grimaces. She bites down a scream and her eyes water.

DOCTOR B
(Smiling)
You'll find them getting a bit more painful.

MISS PERKINS
I got into an argument.

DOCTOR B
With who?

MISS PERKINS
Don't recall.

SHOCK

DOCTOR B
Try again, Miss Perkins.

MISS PERKINS
English Teacher. Mrs. Roberts.

DOCTOR B
Over what?

MISS PERKINS
A story...I wrote.

DOCTOR B
About...?

MISS PERKINS
A dog.

SHOCK

A cat	MISS PERKINS	No.
SHOCK	I want to know my treatment plan. Now. I want to know- you don't have any soap... and I can bathe myself, thank you.	DOCTOR A Fine.
My Mother.	DOCTOR A	He pushes her head under the water.
SHOCK	This is to cleanse you of your lies, not filth. Well... filth of a different sort I suppose. Do you know how much dirt the average human being retains daily- I'm sorry, I digress once more. Let me address your question of treatment, shall I? (Pause)	1, 2, 3, 4.
HIM! About him.	You will spend your afternoons with me and your mornings with my distinguished colleague. Family therapy on the week-ends. Now if you wouldn't mind- stand up.	MISS PERKINS comes up, sputtering for air.
DOCTOR B Who is, him?	(Pause)	MISS PERKINS What do you want to hear?
MISS PERKINS A man.	DOCTOR B	DOCTOR A Admit you're a liar. Admit all your little fibs. Let's start with the mystery man your mother informed us of.
DOC- TOR B Obviously, a name please.	MISS PERKINS No.	MISS PERKINS He's not a lie. I. do. not. lie.
MISS PERKINS I will not give it. He's not for you to know.	DOCTOR A Do not make me move you, please.	DOCTOR A pushes her under again.
SHOCK	MISS PERKINS stands after an uncomfortably long silence.	DOCTOR A 1,2,3,4,5.
I didn't lie, I didn't, I-	DOCTOR A cont. To the tub... and step in.	He lets MISS PERKINS back up.
DOCTOR B I know, Miss Perkins. That was persuasion.	MISS PERKINS does as he asks reluctantly. DOCTOR A, places towel on chair and approaches the side of the tub.	DOCTOR A cont. Anything now? Any desire to discuss your problem?
MISS PERKINS (Crying) Go ahead. You have another one, I'm sure. I'm not telling you about him.	DOCTOR A Now, please repeat after me: I am a liar.	MISS PERKINS (Losing control) He is not a problem! You are, you all are! You wouldn-
DOCTOR B turns dial up. SHOCK. MISS PERKINS screams and falls to the floor.	MISS PERKINS No.	She notices DOCTOR A's smug looking smile and turns her face to stone.
DOCTOR B Remember where we are right now. We'll pick up here tomorrow. I've already wasted enough time.	DOCTOR A Now the sooner you admit this, the sooner we can heal you. We have significant evidence against you- you told your mother about a man... please admit the lie, well, lies. We know you've told many but this last one... running away from your mother to this... "man."	DOCTOR A You were saying?
DOCTOR B exits.	MISS PERKINS looks at him blankly. It is obvious that keeping the blank look is difficult.	She does not respond
BLACK OUT	DOCTOR A cont. Now, like I said, the sooner you admit, the sooner you'll be cured! You could go home, Miss Perkins. Now, please...	Fine.
Scene Five	MISS PERKINS	He pushes her violently under the water. She struggles.
DOCTOR A enters carrying a bath towel. MISS PERKINS is covered against the exam table.	DOCTOR A cont. Now, like I said, the sooner you admit, the sooner you'll be cured! You could go home, Miss Perkins. Now, please...	1,2,3,4,5,6,7.
DOCTOR A Up, up Miss Perkins! I've come to talk with you a bit. I believe a bath is in order as well.	MISS PERKINS	She pushes herself up and grabs hold of the side of the tub coughing, sputtering and crying.

MISS PERKINS

You sick son-of-a-bitch. What the f-

DOCTOR A

(Stepping away from the side of the tub)

That will do for today, Miss Perkins. Tomorrow then. Your homework is to consider the ridiculousness of your claims... who could love you?

DOCTOR A throws the bath towel at her and exits.

Scene Six

MISS PERKINS sits soaked and alone. She has wrapped herself in the towel.

MISS PERKINS

(Slapping herself)

Stupid, stupid. Don't admit he exists. Let them think what they want. You have to protect him or he won't come for you.

(Pause)

Maybe they're right. No one could love me like that. Love is clean.

(Pause)

No no no no no no no no say that and he won't come. He'll be hurt. So sensitive for a man.

She gets up and goes to the tub. She drags her hand gently through her reflection.

I haven't seen myself in a month. Mother took out all the mirrors because she suspects I am vain. No mirrors here, suicide risk. But, I'm not a cutter.

She looks again at the water.

I wouldn't ask to see myself, I'd rather not ask for anything at all. I'm not even sure I like what I see but I just had to...had to check. Blue eyes. Blue. I wasn't feeling that way before. Before I had to hide. Blue...they feel green.

(Pause)

Why don't they ask me the easy questions?

(Mock Doctor voice)

Now, Miss Perkins, tell me about a past birthday...say your fifth.

What did you do, on your fifth birthday?

(Serious deadpan)

I rode a pony and ate pink cake.

(Mock Doctor voice)

That is correct! Here's a cookie.

She mimes catching a cookie in her mouth.

(Mock Doctor voice again)

And how old will you be this year?

(Dead pan and taking a deep breath)

Twenty. And...my mother's name is Caroline Holland. She kept her maiden...it was tasteful. She is forty-two years old. we live at Eight Sweet Briarcliff lane. We grocery shop on Monday nights. I work at Hammond books. I tell people I enjoy books I've never read. My father died when I was twelve. Elliot Perkins aged

thirty-eight. He drowned.

(Mock Doctor voice)

And what is your roof?

Goddamn it, leave me alone

Tell me!

Tell me-leave me alone!

She begins to cry. She sits back against the tub and slams her hand into the water.

I can pretend if I want to, that's mine.

BLACK OUT

Scene Seven

Both A and B enter. MISS PERKINS is sitting dangling her hands into the tub, playing in the water. The DOCTORS approach her, look at one another and each lift her up by an arm. They carry her to the exam table. She is frightened.

MISS PERKINS

Don't, please. Don't ...I won't please.

DOCTOR A

Miss Perkins, we have business to discuss.

MISS PERKINS

I don't want to talk.

DOCTOR A

Yes, well, that's all well and good but today you don't need to speak.

(To B)

Doctor, bring in the slides.

DOCTOR B

Yes, sir.

DOCTOR B leaves the room and returns with a rolling cart, on top of which is a projector. He turns it on and shines the photograph on the white wall behind MISS PERKINS. The photograph is of a middle-aged man. He is balding, pudgy and has blotchy skin.

DOCTOR A

Yes or no, is this your boyfriend?

MISS PERKINS

(Suspiciously)

No. What is this? What do you think you're-

DOCTOR B

Your mother provided these images...possible options...you know, prove to us you're telling the truth.

DOCTOR A

Next slide please, Doctor.

The next slide is a skinny man, long hair, baggy clothing.

DOCTOR A cont.
Yes or no?

MISS PERKINS
N-n-no.

Next slide comes up.

DOCTOR A
Anything?

MISS PERKINS
No.

DOCTOR A
Well, let's try another then. Next slide!

Next slide comes up.

MISS PERKINS
No.

DOCTOR A
(Sarcastically)
Hm...No?

Next slide.

No?

Next slide.

No?

Next slide?
No?

DOCTOR B flicks through many slides.
The pictures all reflect on MISS PERKINS' face. She is visibly uncomfortable, the light making her feel ill.

MISS PERKINS
Stop it, please...just stop.

DOCTOR A
Not until you point out which one is your boyfriend. Go ahead, point him out. Of course...if he's not there, I guess that brings us one step closer to you admitting you are lying.

MISS PERKINS
I'm not lying!

The slides continue flipping now. MISS PERKINS struggles to keep her nerve and finally

yells.

MISS PERKINS cont.
Him! him.

The slide stops on the last picture. She studies the picture forlornly.

DOCTOR B
We'll see, won't we?

MISS PERKINS
(Murmuring and rocking back and forth)
Don't bring him back here, don't bring him back.

BLACK OUT

Scene Eight

MISS PERKINS is sitting on the edge of the exam table.

MISS PERKINS
Why did I bother? Shocked, drowned, interrogated and that's how they find him. He's gonna be so mad. At all of us. They'll be sorry they brought him here... but so will I. He'll be angry. I didn't protect him. I couldn't. He'll send me back to Mother and oh won't she go on and on about that. Her lying daughter, her little sickly with nowhere else to go. I'm not just the ugly, dumb, going-nowhere daughter but now I'm sick too. What'll have me when he turns his back?

(Pause)

Maybe...no, there's no way he'll marry me now...no way in hell. Maybe he'll think I'm sick too...leave me here. In this cell.

(Pause)

I was hoping, secretly hoping and...dreading they'd find that picture. So beautiful. The minute I saw that face...how could I deny it? I suppose...they'll torture me from the outside but I've already been flayed from within.

BLACK OUT

Scene Nine

DOCTOR B
Miss Perkins, how are we feeling today?

MISS PERKINS
How do we think?

DOCTOR B

No need to be snarky.

MISS PERKINS

No, I suppose you would hear something dramatically false to go along with this little lying theory we have going on here-something like-

(grandly)

how am I doing?! Well, fabulous actually. I was telling my friend Katherine Hepburn that I unfortunately cannot come over for tea tomorrow afternoon as I am spending the entire day with my friend and employee Svetlana, now a patient at the Betty Ford Clinic. I love Svetly so dearly you see, I just couldn't bear to watch her suffer at the hands of such a horrid addiction. We all have our little hooks, well with me it's non-fat mocha lattes but with Svetly, oxycodine won out. Really, how common must you be to succumb to a drug addiction? Luckily for her I'm such a loving and benevolent...benefactress. No amount of money could be spared for my Svetly. Such a lovely friend. Such a lovely maid. (Short pause)

Is that satisfactory? Or should I respond a little more dramatically? Shall I tell you I feel that my soul was sucked from my body during the night? Or perhaps, that I've booked a flight to Paris to visit my dying, wealthy Aunt Sylvia? Who, may I mention, is a part of the mafia. No? Too dramatic for you? Then think about it, how do you think I am doing today?

DOCTOR B

I think I'm really looking forward to exposing your root, Miss Perkins.

BLACK OUT

Scene Ten

A and B sit across from one another.

DOCTOR B

She's beginning to unravel which is a good sign. We may be nearer-

DOCTOR A

(Distracted)

Yes, but still no admission to the root. Physical persuasion is not working and the pictures...she only latched on...used them. We may be in a tighter spot than we thought.

DOCTOR B

Well yes, I agree but at least there was a reaction. Before it was simply stubborn deadpan. She's at least sensitive to us now, ask her a question, it's like rubbing salt in the wound.

DOCTOR A

Yes, maybe, but I'm not comforted by the lack of progress. Achieving our goals here...

DOCTOR B

Don't worry sir, I'm sure we'll think of a way...perhaps the root will uncover itself once we can get her to admit...

DOCTOR A

(Defensively)

And I suppose you have an idea of how to do my job? May I remind you, doctor, I delegated you the task of finding a root. The admission is mine.

DOCTOR B

Yes, sir and I'll keep that in mind as I offer you this...idea for the taking. She claims that picture...

(refers to clipboard)

nineteen is the lover we have been attempting to prove non-existent. According to her mother's notes, photograph nineteen was nothing but a snapshot of a bagboy at the local supermarket. Miss Perkins can't possibly even know his name. Her mother assured me she has monitored her comings and goings since, well, since she was a small child. Now, Sir, if we bring him here...he will surely deny her, and probably be even more bewildered than we are. She'll have to face it then.

DOCTOR A

Interesting.

DOCTOR B

Well I'm only building off of what you-

DOCTOR A

Yes, I'm glad we are working in such close collaboration. It's only natural I would inspire new ideas in so young a student. Yes, this is great. I can see you are learning so quickly here.

DOCTOR B

Yes, well, I can't say that I'm not annoyed by this case. The insolence...I didn't spend half of my studying to...well, I'm sure you know sir.

DOCTOR A

Yes, sickening, isn't it?

BLACK OUT

Scene Eleven

Both DOCTORS enter. MISS PERKINS is sitting in a chair, knees drawn up to her chin, staring at the floor.

DOCTOR A

(Smiling)

Miss Perkins, you have a visitor today

MISS PERKINS looks at DOCTORS, just realizing they've entered the room.

MISS PERKINS

Tell her to leave. I don't want to see her. This is all her fault.

DOCTOR B

Now, now, don't be hasty. Who ever said it was a woman. You'll want to see this visitor! After all, you've made him seem so...enigmatic...mysteriously desirable. I'd love to finally meet him myself.

MISS PERKINS

(Staring)

Who? Who's- He's here! How did- what did-oh, he'll be so angry with the two of you. He knows. He knows how long I've tried to protect him. You're both gonna get it. I know-he'll know it's all your fault.

DOCTOR A

Yes, well, let's not keep him waiting! Doctor, show in our young man, please.

MISS PERKINS

(Gleefully)

He'll rip you two to shreds. Yes Doctor, show him in please.

DOCTOR B exits. DOCTOR A drags a chair across the room for MISS PERKINS. He sits down eagerly as if about to watch a long anticipated performance. After a few minutes DOCTOR B returns with a pale young man. He appears nervous.

YOUNG MAN

I don't like these kinda places. Smell awful, ya know? Mrs. Perkins said it was urgent though and my boss...he kinds likes her, been givin' us business for like twenty years or something.' I don't know her too well, I've only been working there for like three weeks but-

DOCTOR B

Yes, well Miss Perkins, here you are. We'll just- you know, we're not even here.

He takes a seat next to DOCTOR A. They watch gleefully. MISS PERKINS runs quickly to YOUNG MAN. He has remained in the doorway, horrified by the ghastly equipment in the room.

MISS PERKINS

I'm so sorry they've made you come. I knew you'd be upset but...I'm...I'm so happy to see you!

She hugs him tightly. It is clear he is uncomfortable and that he does not know her.

MISS PERKINS

I've had the most awful time here. Please tell me you know I tried...they had to nearly kill me to get me to tell them about us.

Asked me so many questions and tried to drown me...they kept insisting that I've made it all up, that you don't love me at all, but here you are. As real as me and as them.

YOUNG MAN
Miss, I think you've made a-

MISS PERKINS
(Not listening)
I mean that's so absolutely ridiculous! You're taking me with you, just not home to Mother. I'm absolutely furious with her. Sending me here-
(Lowering her voice)
I know what to tell them. I'll just tell them to shove-

YOUNG MAN
Now, Miss, I just think you may have to ad-

MISS PERKINS
(Still not listening)
You know I wouldn't put it past Mother to try to stick me back in here again. Maybe we should, you know-
(lowering voice again)
take care of that. Cyanide would be best but I think she would find that far too common.
(laughing)
I'm sure we can arrange for her to...ya know...go out with a BANG.

YOUNG MAN
LADY! I don't know you!

MISS PERKINS
What're you-What? This is silly-

DOCTOR A
I think that's enough now. Thank you for your assistance, young man. Doctor, kindly show him out.

MISS PERKINS
(Crying and clinging to YOUNG MAN)
Why are you doing this? What've I done? Please, don't. Tell them you know me. Tell them!

DOCTOR B is moving him to door. MISS PERKINS begins to scream at him.

MISS PERKINS cont.
TELL THEM. PLEASE. I PROTECTED YOU.

He exits. She continues screaming, DOCTOR A sits calmly.

WHAT'RE YOU DOING? COME BACK. PLEASE...please...please!

She sobs uncontrollably for several minutes. She moves to the tub and looks at her reflection.

That wasn't him.
(Pause)
That wasn't-oh god...I...one million pieces into one billion pieces.
(Pause)
I told a lie.

BLACK OUT

Scene Twelve

MISS PERKINS sits on the ground, staring in one spot and rocking back and forth. She mumbles to herself. DOCTOR B sits in a chair across from her.

MISS PERKINS
Lied lies lying lied lied lies lies lying lied lying lied liar liar liar liar liar-

DOCTOR B
Now how are we feeling today, Miss Perkins? Perhaps we will discuss-

MISS PERKINS
Lies lied lies liar lying lies liar liar liar lied lied lies-

DOCTOR B
Causal factors...um...let's begin with grade five?

MISS PERKINS
Liar lies lied lying lying lying lying liar lied liar lied liar-

DOCTOR B
Alright, grade six? Let's try to focus here, Miss Perkins.

MISS PERKINS
Lied liar lied lied liar lying lie lie lie lie lie lie-

DOCTOR B
You're trying my patience. I know you can

hear me.

MISS PERKINS
Liar liar liar liar lying lying-

DOCTOR B
Oh get off it, who could love you?

MISS PERKINS stops and stares at him.

BLACK OUT

Scene Thirteen

The lines from scene one are heard as a chanted whisper and we see the outline of MISS PERKINS. She stands before the tub and has dragged the electroshock machine beside her. She gets into the tub and wheels the machine towards herself and the edge of the tub. She faces the audience, breathes heavily and balls up her fists at her sides. The chanting stops. She tips the machine into the tub. A splash and resulting sizzle are heard. A flash of violent blue light erupts.

BLACK OUT

CONGRATULATIONS
TO OUR
FINALISTS

And thank you all who participated!

African American Studies

- 1st “Something More Than Mathy Things,” by Katie Pearce
- 2nd “American Dream Deferred,” by Sara May
- 3rd “Literary Critics and Literary Tricksters,” by Patrick Morgan

Creative Nonfiction

- 1st “Tragically Beautiful,” by Loren Merchan
- 2nd “Dream Cars,” by Casey Carrigan
- 3rd “Maybe, Maybe Not,” by Jillian Capewell

Poetry

- 1st “Stolen Air,” by Abby Kraai
- 2nd “Constellations,” by Anastasia Stumpf
- 3rd “Her Attempt,” by Jacob Flaitz

Fiction

- 1st “Complete Degenerates,” by Eleanor Bryan
- 2nd “Sophie,” by Abby Kraai
- 3rd “Racing the Devil,” by Matt Bukowski

Drama

- 1st “Truth Therapy,” by Anastasia Stumpf

Critical Essay

- 1st “Translating the Past: Friel’s Response to Modernity and Nostalgia,” by Julie Niciolo

PRISON RAPE AND UGLY ANIMALS

By William Sankey

What do prison rape and ugly animals have in common? They are both related to causes that need solving, and yet they are pushed out of societal utterance, and out of our collective consciousness. Jokes made for the purpose of a guiltless laugh, like Nazi jokes, often find their way into behind closed door conversations. Laughs derived from the suffering of people we shall never see are acceptable given that the offended party is not around to rebuff us. This is a jump start into unwanted causes, the ones that are not cute, that are not meant to have a sticker or a clever acronym for their name—and there are plenty of them that need attention. “Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses”—give me your damned.

“Don’t drop the soap!” has made its way into our vocabulary as a gaff—the ending of that line is: “or you’ll get raped.” And yet, what is it about prison rape that allows us to throw away any sense of moral outrage, and become lighthearted? Rationalization is fairly easy, beginning and ending at the simple assumption that everyone who is in prison deserves it. And by “deserves” I am trying to use a single word for a difficult concept that deals primarily with Karma. We allow it in prison because of a sick sense of justice that allows us to push the thought away from our conscious. Perhaps “deserves” can be better understood with an analogy: my high-school teacher described imaginary numbers by saying that they just are—it works out that way, and thus we let it be.

I don’t wish to champion any particular causes here. I intend to take a broad sampling of our collective consciousness and investigate the apathetic psyche. I am interested in the degree to which we can become apathetic about a subject once that subject has been lampooned, never mind any shoddy logic. March 30th saw the publication of an article in the LA Times titled, “There’s Nothing Funny about Prison Rape,” and the author, Ezra Klein, writes:

Prison rape occupies a fairly odd space in our culture. It is, all at once, a cherished source of humor; a tacitly accepted form of punishment and a broadly understood human rights abuse. We pass legislation called the Prison Rape Elimination Act at the same time that we produce films meant to explore the funny side of inmate sexual brutality.

The author expounds upon the psychology of an entirely destructive process of harassment. Having gone through the system, and having therefore witnessed the worst of humanity, ex-convicts come out even more desensitized than when they entered, and are sometimes willing to inflict similar atrocities upon people. True rehabilitation of our nation’s criminals would not include allowing them to rape one another. Further, allowing these sorts of crimes to continue merely reinforces the stereotype that we truly do not want rehabilitation, but prefer cold vengeance. The article ends with other appalling statistics:

We, as a society, endure the consequences -- both because it leads ex-cons to commit more crime on the streets and because more of

them end up back to jail. A recent report released by the Pew Center on the States revealed that more than one in 100 Americans is now behind bars. California alone spends \$8.8 billion a year on its imprisoned population -- a 216% increase over what it paid 20 years ago, even after adjusting for inflation.

This is just one example of how society glosses over a dire problem. We shroud that problem in mystery and game, laugh and smirk at jokes about shower stalls and soap, while in the end it is we who suffer.

Another story you probably haven’t heard much talk of lately is the the plight fo the Aye-aye. Halfway around the world lives the Aye-aye of Madagascar, one of the most endangered animals on the planet, and one of the least publicized. This is because the Aye-aye also happens to be one of the ugliest animals on the planet. They have been described by some people as “sort of a cross between a wolverine, a koala, and a raccoon with big ears; yellowish, gremlinlike eyes; and a giant bushy tail.” Having seen photos and videos of Aye-ayes, I find that I can sympathize with the Madagascar tribes who consider the small mammal to be a demon and a bad omen, with the only way of stopping the spread of the bad juju being to kill it outright. I’m not too sure I wouldn’t kill it myself.

Aye-ayes are intriguing animals because they force us to contend with the fact that Pandas do not get most of the endangered species money because of their plight. Pandas, along with Polar Bears, get most of our attention because of how they look in a photo-shoot. The same is true when comparing distressed celebrities with distressed Iraqi vets. We just don’t give a damn about something that is ugly; we cannot sympathize with its plight nor commiserate with its suffering. Fortunately for Aye-ayes, there is still marketing power left in the disgusting, as one website reports:

Endangered wildlife t-shirts—the ones painted with blue whales underwater or gray wolves in the snow—went out of fashion by 1990...But can’t you picture the aye-aye (or the golden-rumped elephant shrew or the hairy-eared dwarf lemur) becoming an icon emblazoned on ironic t-shirts to raise funds for their conservation? And not just for hipsters. The scrawny, bug-eyed Chihuahua mascot was fast food industry’s most effective ad campaign in decades; Americans bought 13 million stuffed ones from Taco Bell and far too many more dashboard bobble-heads.

Unfortunately for people, for those who wallow in penury or decay, I’m not sure how effective revulsion will be to alleviate their pain. I can imagine an aye-aye t-shirt, and I can imagine an aye-aye shirt that would be immensely appealing—as a social rebellion to the hip, a new category of hip itself. I can imagine that, and it would probably be quite popular.

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A CHANGE OF SEASON

By Jessica Cervini



For as long as I can remember, I have always been looked up to. I always felt something special within me, almost like I had more than everyone else. Throughout life, change is inevitable, but who can actually say that they have leaves that change colors, and fall due to the seasons? Who can say their bark is tearing off because of all the kids who attempt to climb them? Above all, who can say that a little girl used to sit upon their branches late at night wishing on shooting stars and sharing her dreams?

Ever since she was little, this little girl would sit beneath me with a notebook, and a pencil. She would stare up at me and talk for endless hours. I was her only friend in the world. She told me she honored my strength for being able to remain standing so tall and strong when the fierce wind blew. The comfort in my branches assured her that she too could stand tall and strong.

As she grew older, not only did her frequent visits continue, but she began to climb me. Each day she was a branch higher than the last. She would disclose every aspect of her day and confess her deepest, darkest secrets. The little girl shared with me the way she desired the world to be and how different she felt from everyone else. Although she thought negatively of her differences, I felt that they were the most positive things she possessed, and I like to believe that, somehow, she knew that too.

I never minded listening to her. Listening to her was actually quite comforting. She taught me that people in this world may not be as terrible as they seem. I always wished I could talk to her. If I could, I'd assure her everything would be okay. Despite my inability to talk to her, I know I soothed her in a way that no one else ever could.

The more that time passed, her visits were less frequent. Eventually, her visits came to a complete stop. As much as I miss her, I embrace the time we spent together. I understand there is no longer a place for me in her life. And I accept that.

I do, however, watch over her. I watch her smile grow bigger each day. I watch her as she walks up the driveway with friends – real friends. I watch her as she stands up for herself and what she believes in. And I watch her as she laughs hysterically, rolling around in my leaves.



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WISHING FOR BARBADOS

By Jayme Faye Wonderland

“What are you doing in there?” Katie, Liz’s mother, knocked on the door for the third time. Liz had entered the bathroom five minutes prior.

“Writing a short story for my class.” It wasn’t a complete lie; she did have her laptop and she was attempting to write. But something about the pink floral wallpaper was suffocating and she couldn’t concentrate. Or maybe it was the feeling of claustrophobia that always accompanied these visits home.

“In the bathroom?” Katie’s concern was evident in the uncertain way she said ‘bathroom,’ but Liz hardly noticed; Katie was always concerned, whether she had reason or not. She was concerned that Liz would get in a car accident every time she knew Liz was behind the wheel. She couldn’t sleep at night when Liz was back from school until she came home for the night and was in bed. Forget that Liz stayed out all hours at school and Katie could sleep just fine then.

“I find it inspiring.” The wall color wouldn’t be so bad, she thought, if it were brighter, more exotic, like flowers on a tropical island. There was nothing exotic or tropical in her mother’s decorating scheme; it was a pasty pink, dull, like years of dust were mixed in with the paint, and the flowers in the foreground looked dead to Liz, just like everything else in her childhood home.

“Where’s Toby?”

The pudgy golden retriever raised his head at the sound of his name. Liz smiled at her easily excitable pup, curled up next to the door like a watch dog. “He’s in here with me.”

There was a pause and Liz heard the shifting of feet as Katie tried to figure out a response. “Why?”

“He’s inspiring too.” More like comforting. Liz leaned against the shower door as she heard her mother’s footsteps move away, finally leaving her in peace. She looked at Toby licking his balls; at least someone was enjoying spring break.

Turning back to her lap top, Liz stared at the blank screen. She thought writing would help her to collect her thoughts, help her to figure out her options, but she couldn’t seem to type anything. Looking at the clock on her screen she sighed. Ten more minutes.

Liz shifted her gaze back to the wallpaper. Katie loved to decorate in pink. She even tried to paint Liz’s room pink when she was five. Liz hated the color. Pink was for girls who wore dresses just for the hell of it, slept in canopy beds and liked lace curtains. Liz slept in a canopy bed but that was not her choice; Katie had insisted upon it – it was her bed when she had been a little girl, just like Liz’s dresser had been Katie’s, and her desk. And Liz learned piano just like Katie and played the clarinet in the band just like Katie and went to the same damn sleep away camp as Katie when she was younger. She touched everything in Liz’s life.

“Liz?” Katie’s voice came from the other side of the door. “What do you want for dinner?”

“Food will do.”

“Could you be more specific? Ziti? Chicken? I could

make steak and green bean casserole.”

Liz felt her stomach heave. “Something light would be good. Whatever you and Dad want.”

“How’s the writing coming?”

“Fine.”

“Can I read it?”

“Maybe, if I get anything done.” They both knew it was a lie; Liz never showed her mother her writing, it would only bring more questions: What is this supposed to mean? Did this really happen? Are you depressed? It was infuriating. Liz tried to explain to her mother that quite often writing was a dissociative process and, though real events may have given the young authoress an idea, her writing was not necessarily a comment on her home life, or a reflection of anyone’s failings. Katie didn’t get it.

“Well...let me know if you need anything.”

As Katie padded away, Toby yawned and lifted himself up. Wasting no time, he took advantage of her position on the floor and began assaulting Liz’s face. She laughed and nudged his head away lightly. Taking his nose in her hand, she looked him sternly in the eyes.

“Baby, I’ve told you, it’s rude to lick someone’s face after licking your balls.” The tip of his tongue poked out of his mouth and Liz smiled, kissing the top of his head. She reached for the sink’s countertop for a handy-wipe to clean off her face, pushing Toby away as he tried for a second round. She twisted her fingers behind his ear, making him stop and lean into her touch. “Promise me Toby, that you’ll never let me dress my daughter in pink ribbons.” He emitted a growl deep within his throat more akin to a moan as she continued scratching his ear. “It wouldn’t be that bad would it? I graduate in two months anyway. I’d have to put off grad school for a couple years, won’t get to travel or go someplace like Barbados, but Jacob’s got a good job, we could probably manage, though we never talked about kids, we don’t talk about anything anymore really Six minutes.”

Toby cocked his head as though he were really listening. Liz opened her arms wide and he leapt at her. He buried his head in her neck, grunting with pleasure as she scratched his butt.

“You’re my favorite. You know that don’t you?” Nose to nose they gazed into each other’s eyes. Liz could feel her eyes begin to water, but fought with all her might, she would not blink first.

He sneezed, backing up and pawing at his face.

Liz grabbed another wipe and ran it over her cheek. “That was gross, Toby. It’s bad form to sneeze on someone, especially when she’s telling you she loves you.”

He ignored her, sniffing the air as though looking for the source of his episode. Giving up, he spun slowly three times around, landing curled up against Liz’s thigh. She closed her laptop, resigning herself to the idea that she would not be able to relieve the tension by scribbling on a page. Instead, she leaned over Toby, holding him close as she buried her face in his coat. Jacob

would never let her be so clingy, and no way could he wait with her like this. He liked to know the facts straight out so he could act, patience was not one of his gifts.

“Do you want to go see a movie?” Katie called.

Liz lifted her head, startled for a moment, wishing she were back at school, anonymous in her dorm. No one would care if she sat in the bathroom watching a clock for fifteen minutes; no one would disturb her thoughts. Her roommate probably wouldn't even register her absence. “What?”

“After dinner let's go see a movie. You and me.”

“Can we talk about it later?” Liz could feel Katie's pout; she didn't need to see it. Usually it made her feel guilty – Katie meant well. Liz was only home for a week and she was the baby of the family. She knew that her mother just wanted some quality time with her kids before they left her, but right then her mother's presence weighed down on her like a premonition.

As Katie stomped away without a word Liz wondered what would have happened if her parents had a couple post-graduate years before her brother was born. Maybe Katie would have gone for her masters like she had planned. A B.A. in Psych hadn't been that profitable. Maybe she wouldn't have even settled down with Liz's father; who knows where a few extra years would have taken them. Katie had wanted to travel, she still spoke of it, but there was never time, there was never money. Maybe after graduation she would have flown to the Caribbean and fallen in love with some beautiful man with bronzed shoulders.

It wasn't that Jacob wouldn't be supportive. He loved fixing problems and taking care of her. He'd make a list, they'd get married, get an apartment, there'd be a baptism; they would be a family. She wasn't sure that he'd be excited, really, but who could expect that of him at this point? It was an accident, but he'd stand up and deal with it with the same diligence with which he approached everything else, and perhaps a little resentment. He would know exactly what to do, but he had lived three more years than Liz. He had a steady job at the bank, a life he was proud of. What did Liz have? An almost degree in math and a couple creative writing courses? She didn't know what she wanted to come

next. She had wanted to maybe travel. She'd never even been to Barbados; she'd never been anywhere.

Toby lifted his head, ears back, and looked at Liz with a 'wanting' expression. She ran her hand over his head, burying her fingers in his silky fur. She kissed the indent between his eyes and closed her own as she leaned against him. “Toby what will I do if it's positive?” He responded by licking her nose. Two minutes.

There was a knock on the door. “Did I ever show you the short stories that I wrote in college?” Katie's voice came through the door.

Liz ground her teeth for a moment, waiting for the impulse to scream to abate. “No.”

“Maybe I'll go get them out. There was this one where I wrote from the perspective of a penguin...”

Liz had heard the story before. The penguin had little penguins, they grew up and left and they never came back, they wanted freedom and the momma penguin was stuck all alone. Katie had always wanted to be a mother, writing was something she had dabbled in, but she had never cared about.

“...my professor felt it was quite inspired.”

“It sounds that way, Mom.”

“So what movie do you want to see?”

“Whatever you want is fine.”

Times up.

“Oh, well I don't know what's playing, let me get the paper...”

Liz rose cautiously, forgetting Katie's presence just outside the door. Toby cried in resentment at being moved, but quickly readjusted himself. Liz swallowed deeply as she picked the stick up off the counter top. Toby rose and sniffed at her hand, sliding under it so that it rested on top of his head. She gathered a tuft of golden fur in her fist as she closed her eyes, trying to breathe. Toby barked at her questioningly.

It's funny what you think of at the pivotal moments in your life. As Liz slid to the floor, pulling her hair back as she turned and vomited in the toilet, all she could think was that Barbados would have to wait.



Continued from 22

However, I can't picture the popularity of a t-shirt displaying Iraqi vets or the homeless of Louisiana. Some causes can be reconciled with clever campaign methods, even the aye-aye may have its day—others causes though, ones that represent real humanity may never be assuaged by market forces. The pain is too real and too human to be marketable. And that is not what we want or need anyway. As Chesterton said, “To love means loving the unlovable. To forgive means pardoning the unpardonable. Faith means believing the unbelievable. Hope means hoping when everything seems hopeless.” Real causes requiring real devotion aren't the ones that can sell, aren't the ones that are in the limelight, they are hidden in plain sight and require some leap of self-will to achieve resolution. From Prison Rape to Ugly-Animals the “inconvenient truths” of our time, the ones that desperately need attention, won't be the ones that we can slap a sticker on and market as cute. They are real and they are dirty and will require us to become more than what we thought we were.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-op-klein30mar30,0,2240882.story>

http://www.motherjones.com/blue_marble_blog/archives/2007/03/3737_survival_of_the.html

THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

By Loren Merchan

Beauty.

There, I said it. So, what are you thinking? Rainbows? Butterflies? Sunsets? Pondering some Wordsworth? How about scantily clad super models? Beauty is a concept that men and women have questioned for centuries on end. Is it that thing that gives you a tingly feeling inside? Or perhaps it is something so rare you can only classify it as beautiful. It could just be a representation of what is valued in society, or something that speaks against the ordinary. Whatever the definition, the attempt to attain, perfect, or offer what is “beautiful” is a quest whose unattainable goal has always plagued humanity.

Specifically, this has been largely a feminine quest, and a largely impossible one at that, since the known “ideal” of beauty seems to constantly be changing. Think about it: would you be caught dead in the perm your mother used to have? What about go-go boots? I didn’t think so. Beauty is not only unattainable because it changes through time, it also changes through space (and I am not saying that they have different fashions on the Death Star than they do on Naboo). I am saying that what is considered beautiful in the United States is not in China. We have all seen it, those tribal women who wear rings around their necks because length is defined as beautiful, or women who subject their young girls to Chinese foot binding because mothers want their daughters to find a man. We sit here in the United States and watch them on the Discovery Channel and think about these poor women who have yet to discover the freedom of feminism, who are so obsessed with pleasing the ideal of beauty, as defined by their society, that they sacrifice their bodies to attain it. However, according to Fatima Mernissi, this is not the case. In an article written by Mernissi entitled “Size 6: The Western Women’s Harem,” she asserts:

The violence embodied in the Western harem is less visible than in the Eastern harem because aging is not attacked directly, but rather masked as an aesthetic choice... By putting the spotlight on the prepubescent female, the Western man veils the older, more mature woman, wrapping her in shrouds of ugliness. This idea gives me the chills because it tattoos the invisible harem directly onto a woman’s skin. Chinese foot-binding worked the same way: Men declared beautiful only those women who had small, childlike feet. Chinese men did not force women to bandage their feet to keep them from developing normally -- all they did was to define the beauty ideal. In feudal China, a beautiful woman was the one who voluntarily sacrificed her right to unhindered physical movement by mutilating her own feet, and thereby proving that her main goal in life was to please men. Similarly, in the Western world, women are expected to shrink.

Feminists may feel sorry for those tribal women with neck rings, and the Chinese women who bind their feet but, according to Mernissi, we are no better. We are trapped in the same culture of satisfying society’s ideal of beauty at any cost. Sure, we may exercise our right to free speech, but what about our right to eat? Mernissi says that creating an ideal of an emaciated woman as beautiful effectively silences women as a whole. She says “I can’t think if I’m hungry.” So, are men using the ideal of beauty as a way to dominate women?



I’d listen up, men, because this is a pretty strong accusation. You see, guys, there is something that critics like Carolyn Korsmeyer call “the male gaze,” the power over someone that a person has when they look upon and judge that person.

In art, the person who is gazing upon the artwork exercises the ability to deem it beautiful or ugly, worthy or unworthy, or more or less important than other works of art. So what does this say? Does it say that the man who holds a woman in his gaze renders her powerless? Now, I am sure the guys reading this are thinking, “Oh sure, this is just another way for women to blame men for their insecurity and inability.” But what if it isn’t? What if our ancient quest for beauty is actually a byproduct, an excuse for our patriarchal system? What if it is a way to get women to police themselves, to be so fearful of the gaze or, worse, so intent on fulfilling it that they effectively become silenced by, or subservient to, men? After all, how many naked female bodies are placed under scrutiny amongst the “great works of art?” How many old films shoot women in a sepia gaze, hazy effect, or even nearly naked and running through the streets...being chased by some masculine figure? If you open your mind to it, this idea of repression through beauty or through art may not seem so far-fetched. A Roman Slave Market, a painting by Jeon-Leon Gerome, depicts a naked woman standing in front of a large group of men and covering her face in shame. She is experiencing the pain of the gaze, the pain of judgment, not just from the painted men but from you. Yes, you. Are you not also gazing upon this naked woman when you look at the painting? The perspective of the viewer is represented within the painting by the male onlookers. Korsmeyer says that the “direction of the eyes of the depicted figures bidding on the girl up for auction are particularly unobvious examples of rapacious scrutiny. The hoard of staring men see the girl in her most exposed state...she feels herself being seen. She shields her face, unable to return their gaze. Her vulnerable pale skin stands out against the shadowed crowd, which in con-

trast appears dark and predatory.” Korsmeyer accuses the viewer of finding pleasure in the unprotected beauty of the girl and her distress over having erotic value among men. To Korsmeyer, “the male gaze” is not only an “indication of sexual and social power,” but its replication in art is a glorification of a patriarchal system.

People find things beautiful when these things replicate our view of traditional male and female roles. In this way beauty is not universal, but a male construction; the male ideal regulates beauty and the gaze of the man who judges beauty, who holds the beautiful object in his sight, is a display and affirmation of power. “What has been articulated about vision and the gaze is suggestive about the structure of aesthetic appreciation itself...Aesthetic



objects are assigned the passive role of being looked at rather than active looking; they are objects presented for the tasteful scrutiny of the perceiver,” explains Korsmeyer.

Plato says that beauty “names the quality possessed by all such objects and in virtue of which they are beautiful.” This definition makes beauty mysterious and hard to accurately pinpoint because it strives for an objective criterion. While some critics claim that beauty is subjective,

others express beauty as something that resides within the object itself and not something dependent on the response of a perceiver for its existence. If this is true, however, then why is it so difficult to define beauty, or even find a common perception of beauty across different areas of the world or different times of existence? Many philosophers argue that beautiful things do not share a specific property but, instead share the capacity to evoke a response. Empiricists have yet another thought on beauty. They argue that value is best understood as an idea compounded by the perception of sensible qualities from objects in addition to feelings and pleasure. An example of this would be a “beautiful” sunset. This sunset does not simply exist, it involves the perception of intense reds, radiating beams, and a contrast with the dark horizon. These elements arguably evoke feelings of pleasure.

However, this still does not explain how or why beauty and pleasure are so subjective. I believe that pleasure and beauty are satisfied when a desire is satisfied. In the case of society, I believe this desire is found in the patriarchal structure. When a painting depicts a woman under “the male gaze” or a model gives in to a male’s ideal of beauty through excessive dieting, I believe the desire for domination within a male is satisfied. Thus, the desire a female has to satisfy, to fulfill “the male gaze,” is satisfied as well.

Edmund Burk draws a connection between aesthetic pleasure and erotic desire. This connection may explain why women feel the need to conform to the male-defined ideal of beauty, to fulfill the male erotic desire. Immanuel Kant also speculates that the origin of aesthetic pleasure was found in erotic attraction, and it is no secret that women aim to please. However, no woman can please if the definition of beauty is always changing. To those who do not understand the root of beauty, found in submission and replication of a patriarchal society, then the discrepancy over whether perms are more beautiful than a pixie cut could drive a woman mad. In truth, it is not about the hair or the clothes, the weight, or the bone structure. If it was about these things fashion would not drop out of style before it was officially in style. Beauty is more than what is on the surface; it is a new title for the class of slaves in our world’s current caste system.





Thank you for reading.