

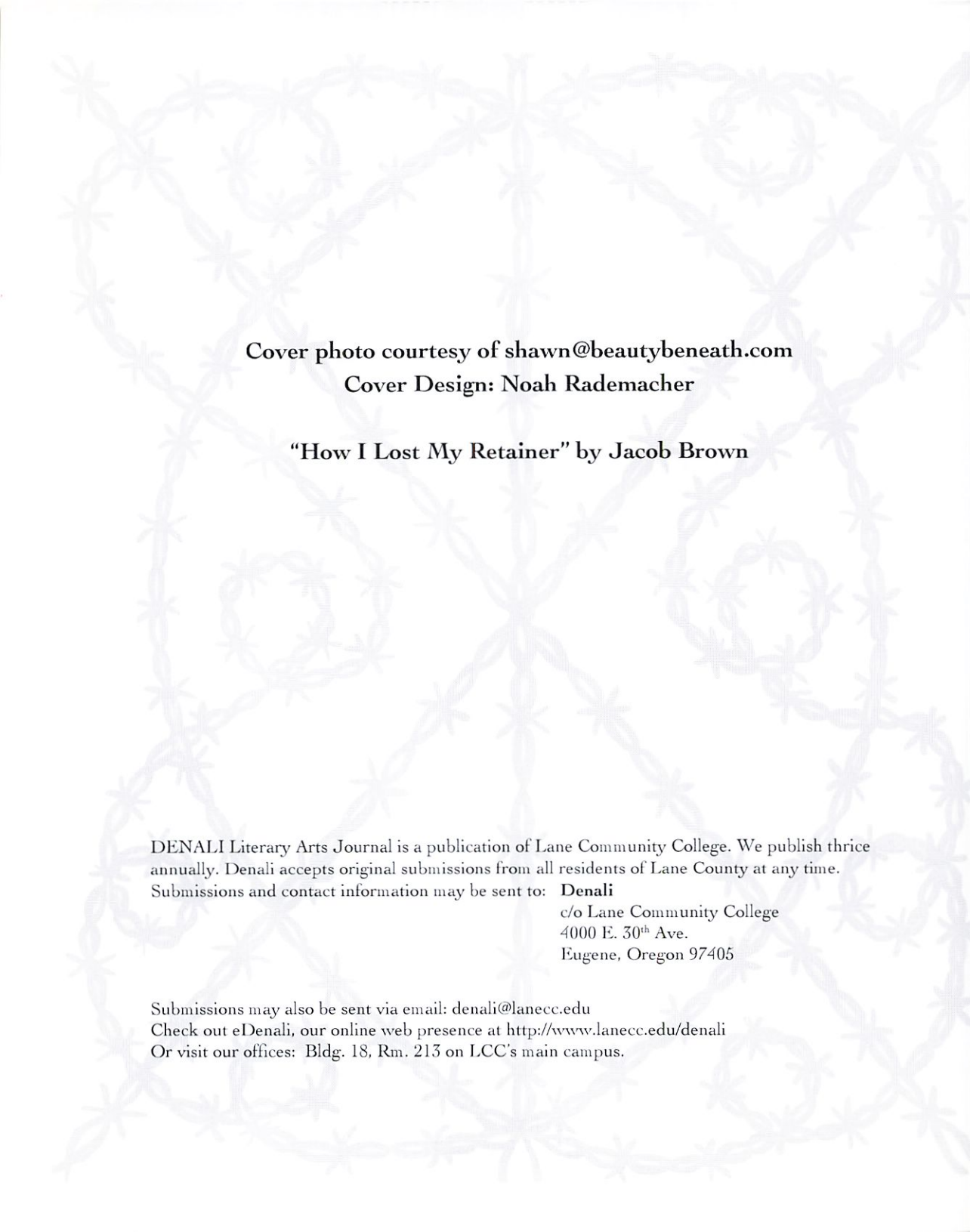


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“How I Lost My Retainer” by Jacob Brown

DENALI Literary Arts Journal is a publication of Lane Community College. We publish thrice annually. Denali accepts original submissions from all residents of Lane County at any time.

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Or visit our offices: Bldg. 18, Rm. 213 on LCC's main campus.

# Table of Contents

2	Chris Ingram .....	Flashback .....	Prose
3	Susie Morrill.....	Untitled .....	Photography
4	Natasha Ashworth .....	Ice Pick.....	Poetry
5	Sherry Whitmore .....	A Mother Broken.....	Poetry
6	Beth Robinson.....	Fool for War.....	Mixed Media
7	Evan Thomas Way.....	Maxwell's Demon .....	Prose
11	shawn@beautybeneath.com .....		Photography
12	Christen M. Gardner .....	The Truth .....	Poetry
13	Carolyn Staub.....	Untitled .....	Photography
14	Jackson Snellings.....	Precious Moments .....	Photo Manipulation
15	Kristine Hilt.....	Cutting Smoke Rings.....	Poetry
16	Jackie Molen.....	Playground Battlefield.....	Prose
17	Tina M. Calhoun .....	Watchers .....	Acrylics
18	Aura Sperling .....	Trash.....	Poetry
19	Noah Stephens .....	disjointed people observations, lazily scribed.....	Prose
20	Anonymous.....	Conscious Unconsciousness .....	Pen & Watercolors
22	Sarah Armento .....	The Tether.....	Poetry
23	Mick Gael .....	Swallow, Choke, and Die .....	Poetry
24	Tana Gardner .....	Broken Façade .....	Photography
25	Andrea Summers.....	The Bruce Lee Kung Fu Club.....	Prose
27	Tina M. Calhoun .....	City Lights.....	Collage
28	Tana Gardner .....	Mother.....	Poetry
29	Carolyn Staub.....	Reflections.....	Photography
30	shawn@beautybeneath.com .....		Photography
31	Wendy Batson .....	February in Vancouver .....	Prose
35	Cameron Kingzett .....	Catharsis.....	Digital Art
36	Lindsay Stalone.....	For two years consumed.....	Poetry
38	Susie Morrill.....	Untitled .....	Photography
39	The End .....	Luke Good .....	Poetry
40	Lander Beauchamp .....	Hope .....	Photography



# Flashback

**Chris Ingram**

There is a moment in my daily routine, those few seconds when the sound of the alarm clock weaves itself into my dreams. I still cling to the safety of my slumber, yet there is something pulling, wrenching me away from my peace. For a few moments I am technically awake but my mind lingers in dream. I feel my eyes opening; I feel the cold plastic of the alarm clock. But for those first few moments of consciousness, I think that everything is all right, I think there is someone waking next to me, wiping the sleep from her eyes. And any moment now she is going to kiss the edge of my mouth and say "I love you." This daily illusion lasts for a brief moment, and for that moment I am glad to be awake. But every time I eventually come to

realize that I am rising from my bed alone, and have been for some time. This realization brings tears to my eyes every day. Through the rest of the day I remember bits and pieces of the dream. I remember sitting on that beach, her head upon my chest. I can smell the aroma left behind by her conditioner. I can still feel the rhythm of her breath. All the small details that make memories worthwhile. I remember these things, and I remember that I will never experience them again. I feel the tears begging me to set them free. ... All I have to look forward to every day is that moment tomorrow morning, when I think, for a split second, that someone is there. In those few moments of pathetic hope, I am content.



My overbite was comely / My bucked teeth were the rage / In truth, I looked quite homely / One tooth took center stage



**Susie Morrill**



# Ice Pick

**Natasha Ashworth**

My father decorates the aluminum Christmas tree  
in his tiny one bedroom apartment,  
mini palm trees and lava lamps light  
the shiny metal branches now being draped with  
hula-dancer ornaments,  
little clay skulls from Mexico,  
and more metal-  
brass knuckles of gold tinsel garland.

As a kid, I remember seeing an ice pick in my father's kitchen,  
noticed while he was making dinner  
smashing cloves of garlic with a cleaver;  
he picked up the pointy, wooden handled instrument,  
walking out into the cool summer evening,  
knowing I would follow.  
He dug a pivot into the lawn with his heel,  
then stood back by the rhododendron and threw the pick  
with a flick of the wrist,  
sailing the missile to its target.  
"Give it a shot."

For some reason, it was important for me to learn this.

The tree was decked and done,  
a naked Marilyn Monroe angel on top  
looking over the kitsch filling the room.  
Hawaiian print curtains,  
a black studded leather jacket draped over an antique armchair,  
velvet backed paintings of Elvis,  
scattered ceramic knick-knacks,  
"Well," he looked over at me, "What do you think?"

So went I through the toil / Of the stainless steel garrote / He pulled the metal coil / And a howl crept out my throat



# *A Mother Broken*

**Sherry Whitmore**

I watch her move between the kitchen and the dinning room. I've seen her walk this route a million times. But tonight her movements are slow and empty as she clears the table of its dishes. Mascara smudges black her eyes. Worry slumps her shoulders. I see in her that she's alone. There is no talking and I know not to try. As she leaves the room her face tells me that night has come; there will be no more.

As a young girl I loved playing with cars. I had a favorite little car. It was a tiny green convertible. Out behind our house was a huge, deep ditch that went forever and day after day I would spend silent hours alone building roads. And then I would drive my little convertible along these roads far away from everything I knew. I never wanted to come back. I always did.

My mother is behind a locked door and wants to be left alone. I clean her up and bandage her wrists. She sits sobbing on the edge of the tub while I clean the sink. My head is swirling like the wind. I speed away in my tiny green convertible. I never wanted to come back. I always did.

After it was over / My teeth were perfect pearls / They gave me a retainer / To secure my luck with girls

# Fool for War



Beth Robinson



# Maxwell's Demon

**Evan Thomas Way**

I hope somebody would find me if I got lost, he thought.

Arty Sheppard stood at a street corner, staring at a black and white, photocopied picture of a young girl of about nineteen that was taped to a lamp post. Her name was Brianna. She was lost. At least that is what the piece of paper said, and there was no overwhelming evidence to prove the information false. Not yet, at least.

Not yet. What if she was kidnapped? God help her. What if she didn't get lost at all? What if someone made sure she was never found. What if someone made sure she was lost forever?

Arty shivered at the mere idea. The pixilated, low-res copy of Brianna James' face was gray and lifeless. The eyes were flat, the pupils only little squares in square iris', inside sharp cornered oblongs. This was not a person. This was a shadow.

Maybe this is how memories look to computers. If computers could see the

memories that I have, would the sun look like a massive square block of fire in the sky – would it see pixels in the moon? Would the stars simply appear to be blinking cursors on a blank screen?

Grass is green = 10010100010

Grass is green and damp =  
10010100010 + 0010010

Grass turns brown and brittle =  
100101011 + 011011101

Arty turned over equations of zeros and ones, sentences and paragraphs of binary code, matrix upon matrix. Fibonacci numbers and Nested Loops. He considered Ackermanns Function – a function of parameters whose values grow so fast that eventually all mathematical notation breaks down. In essence, an equation that can only live continually in the mind. Even then, it cannot be fully grasped or completed. He wondered if computers, speaking only in these languages of logical functions and set parameters, could

understand something as intrinsically complex as even the simplest particle in the universe. Could it even understand the genetic structure of Cyanobacteria, the simplest of all life forms on the planet? Could it understand the travel of light through space? Could it understand the smell of dried lavender, or the sound of rain upon a rooftop? Could it understand experience?

A computer could never find this poor girl. It could not understand the meaning of lost, however many definitions of the word it could give you. It wouldn't understand the motivation behind her disappearance – a computer couldn't grasp the mind of the sick pervert who stole this young girl away from her family and friends, to do who knows what.

Arty scratched his head, and sighed. He looked away. The signal across the street was still a red hand, holding firm, commanding him to stay where he was. The image was created by a bunch of small red light bulbs, organized to form the shape of a hand. It was pixilated and unrealistic – much like the photo of the lost girl.

And yet here I am, standing still only because the engineered, computerized hand is telling me to. It's the only thing keeping me from crossing the street whenever I choose, and I don't question it for a second.

The mid-day traffic was sparse.

There seemed to be the sound of cars hanging in the air, more than actual cars present at the moment. The sounds of their departure and arrival clung to the dust particles in the air that the vehicles themselves created.

It was June 22nd. A Tuesday. 1:37 PM.

I'm not going back to work. I can't. Not now, not after seeing this photo. Not after seeing that face. Poor girl. Poor poor girl.

And then: Poor me. Poor poor me. I'm not going back to work. Not now. Maybe not ever. I can't ever seem to get things done there. I can't ever seem to think straight.

Arty tugged on the neck of his sky blue button-up shirt, loosening the knot of the black and white striped tie, giving his neck room to breathe. He ran his hand through his thinning, brownish gray hair, just then realizing what he looked like. He seemed to forget so often. He felt the softened wrinkles around his mouth, the furrowed lines in his forehead. He felt his sagging chin.

I'm so old. Arty bent down onto one knee and began to untie the laces of his brown leather work shoes. First the right. Then the left. Once both shoes were off, he tied their laces together in a tight knot that he learned in the boy scouts when he was quite young. He couldn't believe he remembered how to tie it at all. He slowly stood up



again, and could feel his joints tighten and creak, his back straighten, one vertebrae at a time, each one more painstakingly evident to him than it ever had been before. When, finally, he stood erect, he swiftly swung his shoes (now tied together by the laces) over his head and tossed them deftly into the air. They cascaded through the sky like a bird tumbling acrobatically – left shoe over right shoe, right over left. As they flew, Arty could have sworn that the connected shoes took the form of a number 3. A perfectly symmetrical shape, representing a human idea. The shape held, froze, just long enough for Arty to witness the miracle, only to break again, landing evenly draped across each side of a telephone wire, and hanging there, motionless once again.

Arty gasped, held the breath long, then slowly released it. He sighed and shivered, as if God had just revealed the deepest of truths to him and him only. Arty looked to the sky, and stared deep into the blue void. For a moment, just a moment, he could swear he saw the lines of a grid rise from nothing and begin to appear, spread across space itself.

I see numbers reflected in life – shapes representing ideas, and ideas created to explain the shapes, and shapes created once again to represent the new ideas – I see this pattern over and over again, like a mathematical

equation -- 3.141592653589793238  
462643383279502884197169399375  
– There must be a pattern, even given  
unt0 things seemingly dev0id of  
pattern a1t0gether -- I d0 n0t believe  
in existence Outside Of pattern and  
repetiti0n.

Arty's thoughts began to drift into a spiral, falling down through his being, circling around coherency, void of origin or conclusion. He began to walk. He walked away from the telephone pole, from his shoes, from the poster advertising the tragic loss of a young woman. He stumbled – his legs began to feel heavy and mechanical. Unnatural. His black socks became covered in dirt and leaves and debris. Rocks stabbed into his feet as he made his way down the street, wandering, his physical body very closely representing the patterns of his disjointed thoughts.

It was night. Arty lay on a park bench, surrounded on all sides by a sparse ring of trees, and then a small patch of garden in which various flowers grew, each beautiful and unique, each an individually beautiful within the parameters of its species. Arty lay, face towards the sky, a single star reflecting in his eye – it looked as if there was someone lost in the dark forever inside of his eye, and the light of the star was the light of their lantern, searching for an exit or some sign of life.

Arty drew lines between the stars,

forming shapes – the hands of a child reaching for their mothers comforting arms. A teardrop. A snowflake. The face of a young girl – was it that poor girl from earlier? Was it poor Brianna, the lost girl, the disappeared girl, the stolen girl? Was she in the stars now? No one would find her there, of course! No one would ever dream to look in the stars, but that's where she is. I see her there, looking out, calling for somebody to see her, to notice her, to understand the magic that she has found.

A siren howled in the distance, signaling the moral failure of another person. Perhaps it was a just a drunk old man. Yet perhaps, perhaps it was a successful business man, grown so strung out and tired of his life that he couldn't take it any more. Maybe he robbed a 24-hour market. Maybe he ended someone's life. Maybe he hadn't really done anything at all. Maybe the cops were just bored that night.

Arty was crying. He felt hopeless, looking into the stars that were at once both a constellation and the melancholy face of a girl – a child, even! Was her disappearance just the part of a pattern? If there is no existence outside of repetition, then why should anyone bother doing anything? Arty was sick to his stomach. The stars rattled off the Fibonacci sequence, where the first two numbers of the pattern add together to equal the third, the second and third

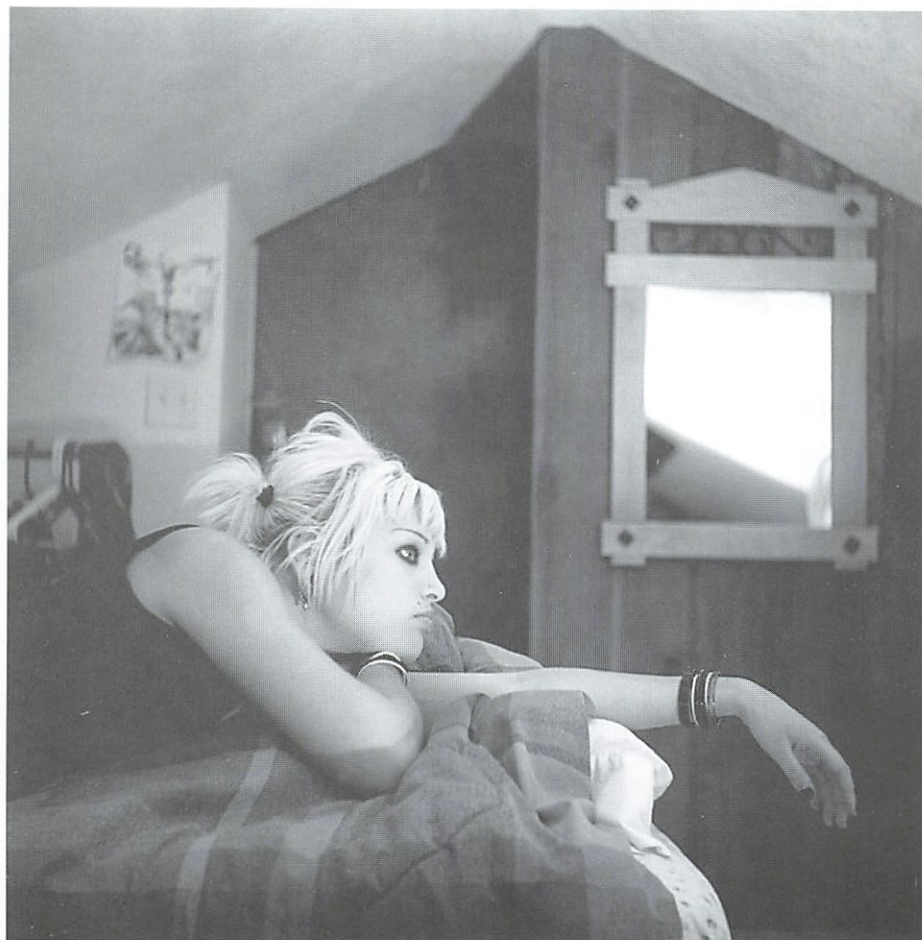
added together equal the fourth, and so on and so on, forever.

Is this life just a piece of that pattern, or is that pattern just a reflection of life? Perhaps both are true – for our small minds can't understand the duality of this universe we live in. Perhaps both are true, yes. The world can be equal parts logic and emotion, equal parts fact and opinion, truth and relativity. There must be equilibrium, otherwise all things fail. Just like Maxwell's Demon – without equilibrium, eventually one side will overtake the other in all ways, and all things will become either one or the other. Either searing heat or freezing cold. Either eternal truth or endless opinion. The body must have equality between thoughts and feelings, the heart and brain must work equally and vigilantly, forever and ever, otherwise the scales will tip, and we'll all keel over the edge.

As the sun rose, the stars began to fade, and so the face in the stars faded as well. Arty wiped the tears from his eyes, choked down a final sob. He held his hand out, upraised towards the sky, a final farewell to a girl he never knew. His eyes were closed tight, because he could not stand to see the girl disappear again.

God, Arty thought. I sure hope somebody will find me when I get lost. I sure hope so.





**shawn@beautybeneath.com**



I lost my top retainer / Which fell upon the floor / Its requisite container / I'd lost some years before

”

# *The Truth*

**Christen M. Gardner**

A thread of truth woven from the hand of lies  
Into the expectations of many  
A patch will tell the story  
Of the ones who manufacture this quilt  
Worm in our beds  
Our dreams corrupted  
Responsibilities of existence  
No longer assembles life  
Inventing enough sheep  
For wool to use in  
Production of truth



'Twas bound to meet my druthers / As complacency made seem / A night like all the others / To sleep, perchance to dream

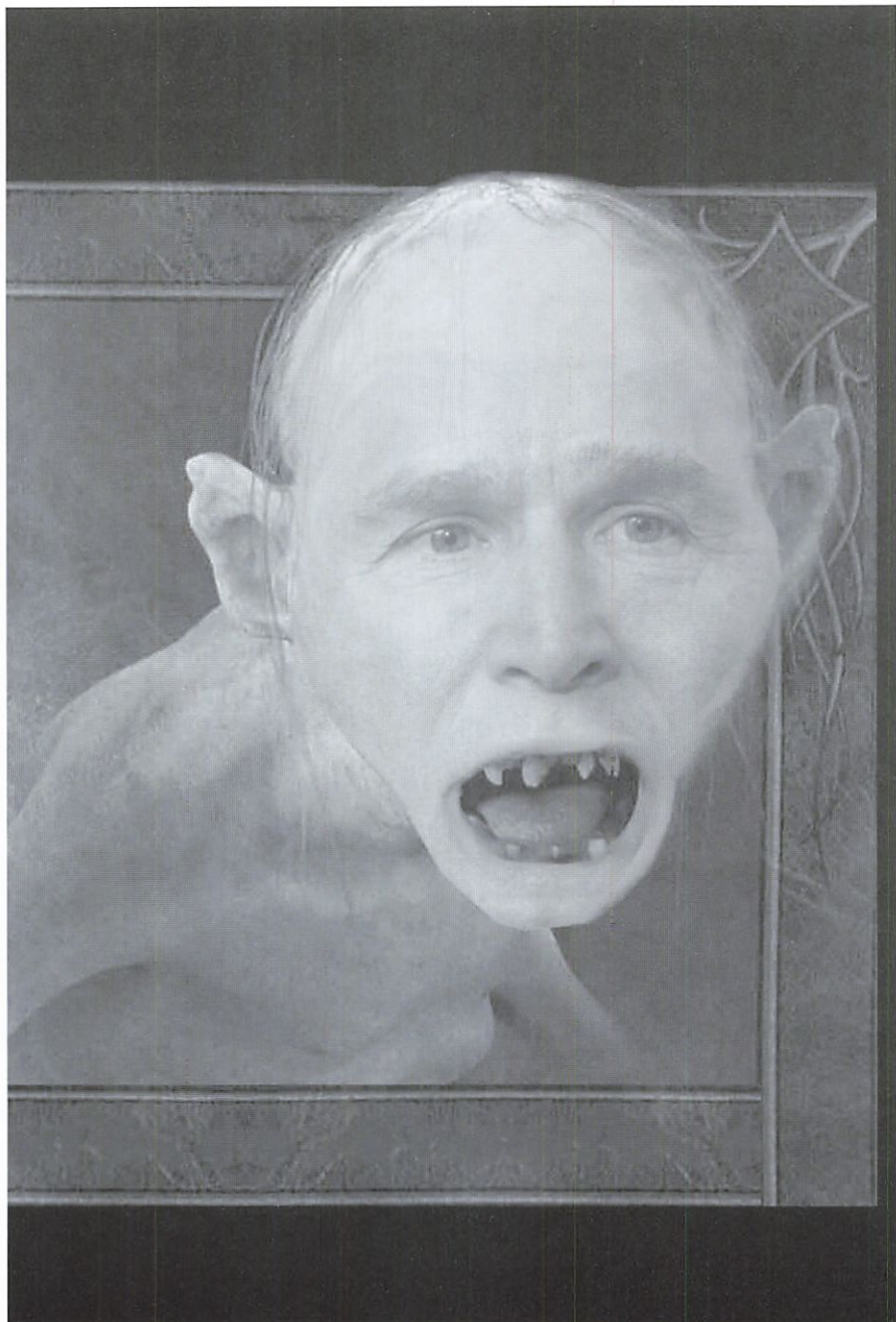
# Untitled

**Carolyn Staub**



# *Precious Moments*

So slept I gently dreaming / Of my peerless set of teeth / Held perfect by a bracing / Seldom worn but once a week





# Cutting Smoke Rings

**Kristine Hilt**

With tales my mind was teeming / Of Mother Goose and Grimm / I took to lucid dreaming / So I changed them on a whim

My ex-lover is a cigarette.  
Softly grasped between my stiff fingers  
Fumbling for a light.  
I reassure myself I can live without them,  
But I starve; I taste a memory to be so good.  
I watch the flame reach for the end to burn and ignite.  
Pain masked with pleasure, a satisfaction veiled  
I yearn to feel once again.  
I need it, I want to remember what I can't let go of.  
And with each drag I breathe out myself.  
But it never lasts.  
For every breath of satisfaction, I endure  
Guilt and jealousy choking me.  
Should I turn my anger to my intentions  
or to you?  
Are you killing me or am I?  
The satisfaction is now  
gone.

I pray this is the last cigarette.

# Playground Battlefield

Jackie Molen

The playground looked like a tiny metropolis, its skyline twisting and bending. Children were swarming in the area playing kickball, swinging, and tag, but not Donny. He was playing in the grass with a giant bucket of army men. His shiny brown hair was hanging just above his eyes as he looked down at the plastic figures.

As Jessie was swinging, he saw someone playing in the distance. Dragging his feet on the wood chips, he stopped to gaze. It was Donny, who sat behind him in class. What is he doing out there, Jessie thought as he ran over to investigate. Coming closer, Jessie saw what Donny was playing with. "Whoa, where did you get all those army men?" Jessie said. The bucket was full of soldiers, every one in a different position, and they even had guns.

"My dad gave them to me," said Donny, "but they're not army men." He then started pointing at each soldier and said, "This is the mom, this is the dad, and these are their two kids. They're having a picnic."

"Then why do they have guns?" said Jessie.

Donny stared at the ground thoughtfully and bit his lower lip. He waited a long time before replying, "I don't know," and

resumed playing.

The boys started building a town from the ground up. "Hey Donny!" Jessie said, "This rock is their house, and over there is where they go to school." They continued building until the bell was about to ring. An elaborate city rose from the dirt and an entire community of army men were cast to the various roles of teacher, nurse, and friends.

The two boys were just finishing the last touches of their town when they saw Paul running as fast as he could toward them. Paul's crooked smile bounced above his striped shirt. His hands and face were sticky from candy, soda, and dirt. The boys looked at each other and remembered what their others had told them about being nice to others.

Before they could even greet Paul, he screamed, "Incoming," as he ran his fist through their town.

"Stop," yelled Jessie.

"What are you doing?" said Donny. Paul laughed and started running away.

"Who's going to clean this up?" asked Donny as he looked at his town in shambles.

Paul glanced over his shoulder and said, "Let God sort them out."





*Watchers*

# Trash

**Aura Sperling**

Police took my father, finally, while I pretended to sleep in my room.

I heard him through the door, arguing with mom again.

They screamed. He had cashed her food stamps for beer, and she had picked at her face in the mirror for hours—when he wanted be making love.

Chairs smashed into windows. A guitar was broken over the desk. Sirens howled like wolves after a kill. Silence followed the footsteps up the stairs and remained.

Sometimes I would knock on strangers' doors, to talk and visit, but my favorite exploration was dumpster-diving in the alley by our apartment. There would always be treasures. I found a shoebox with pictures of a cat and single mismatched earrings. I was careful not to be seen.

My mother and I were warring nations. She would hide in her schoolwork and lie to me about a better future. I would cry and throw our dishes against the wall. She stood in a line for a food box at Christmas and gave me gifts donated by strangers. When it snowed we took a walk and saw garbage behind the specialty gift shop. We found bags of slightly irregular or broken ornaments with hundred dollar price tags, and a musical porcelain Santa Clause with it's broken pieces in a box. We took as much as we could carry and stayed on the lookout for witnesses. Later that night we sat on the floor and glued the small pieces back together, joyful that we had been so fortunate.



*disjointed people observations, lazily scribed*

**Noah Stephens**

—Burger King, 7:35 pm on a February Thursday: Obvious queen, Little Richard-looking man, small frame, steps from public bathroom and strides quick to the exit feeling blasé—his expression, it momentarily locking with mine, informs me—about whatever just happened inside. He is one of countless many here each day, but especially night, whose very presence proclaims ‘this is the Village.’

—Woman: At the table almost directly across from mine, overweight, eating (masticating long each mouthful the slow-piston jaws) while talking in Spanish to her equally obese counterpart, she sits looking at certain moments uncannily similar to a chow dog.

—There are others still. Thirteen counting myself and three at the counter contemplating the bright menu. Some are strikingly unstriking. The kind you don’t really choose to take in but do just because you were looking when they came in. The type is the last person you would ever remember, those you would never venture much into describing.

—One man newly arrived sticks his head forward always, is rat-like, and somehow has the air of an invalid, though he functions. I can see the sweat in drops where his nose falls off its ridge, just below the glasses, when he passes close.

But without feeling transition, the only one now present I can think about, though listlessly, is an Oriental woman, young (probably beginning twenties), in a long jean skirt.

Her face is inexplicably very appealing and in one moment I found myself answering ‘yes’ to some question about whether I would like to kiss her lips and just once bed-fuck her (sure, more) from the moment before.

So...it was decided then.

Her boots were high and black.

Up at the mouth again she dislodged some food, maybe a sesame seed, from between teeth with her tongue.

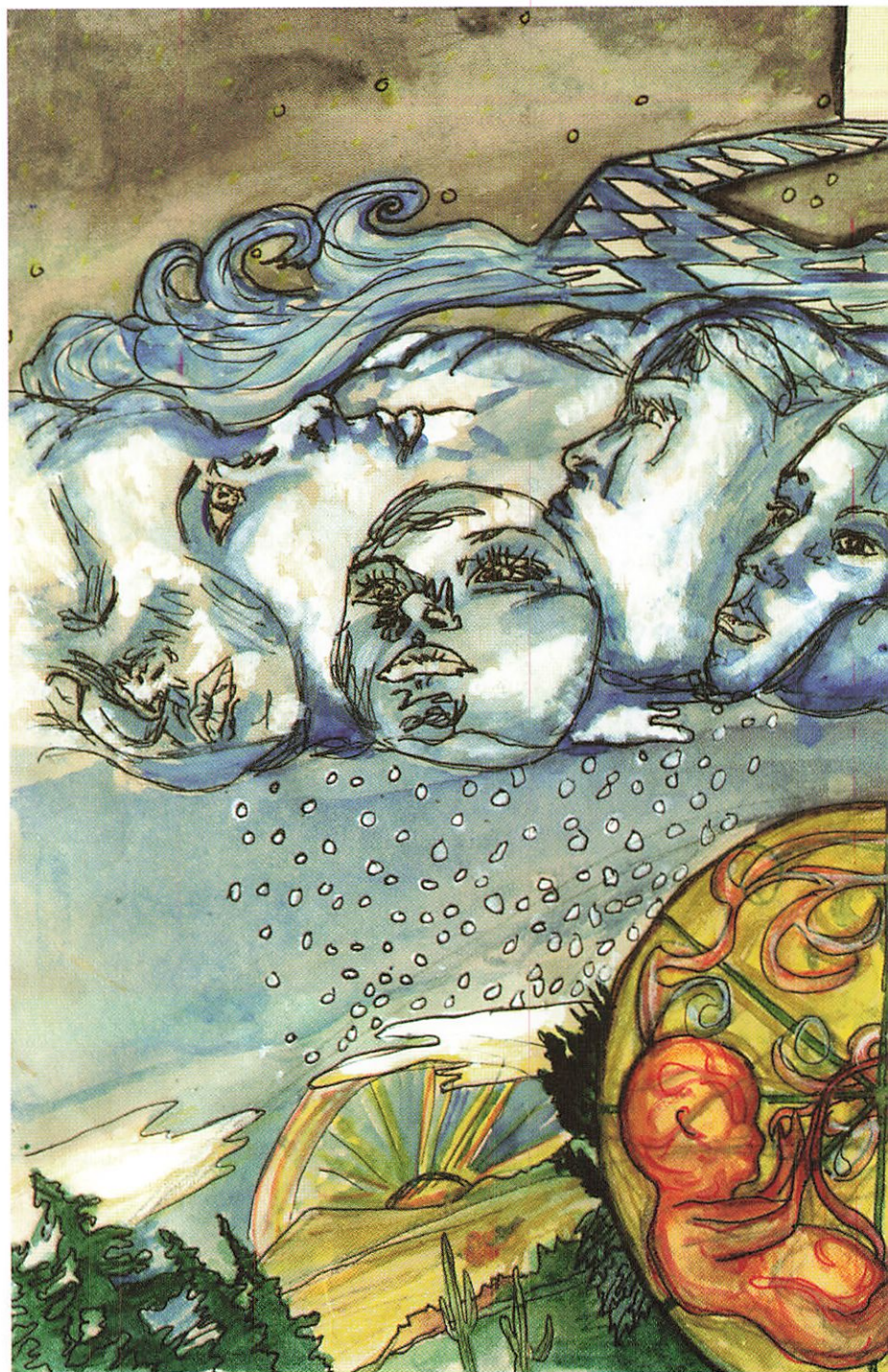
After this, she seemed to be gone—mostly just the song was on.

From a single quiet speaker behind me something corny made the vibe (cacophonous humanity enjoying American fast food, their noise reminding me of children not present).

Outside | masticated / Not on sheep but plastic mould / It was dilapidated / By what I could not control



# Conscious Unconsciousness





(Name withheld upon request)





Sarah Armento

# The Tether

He fell off my radar when I was thirteen.  
This strange, funny, redheaded boy  
with charisma as strong as good liquor  
and wisdom that baffled the most arrogant teachers  
didn't seem the type to vanish.  
If it had happened in the third or fourth grade I would have cried —  
I was in love with him then —  
but by thirteen, I was too absorbed in my own trauma  
and too lost in the sea of adolescent apathy  
to give more than a snort and an "oh-that's-too-bad."

At fourteen, I heard the story.  
The people who had kept in touch,  
the few strained tethers that held us distantly together,  
relayed the story to me.  
The loneliness the agony, the surrender,  
the razor, the ER, the blood volume,  
the miracle that he must have perceived as a curse.  
Then I cried.

At nineteen, I am a different person.  
Shorter hair, ripped jeans, black eyeliner  
and clearer skin on the outside.  
Drier humor, deeper sadness, stronger will  
and keener awareness on the inside.  
When I catch sight of him across the room,  
I can see that he is different as well.  
Tattoos cover his left arm,  
he has a red goatee to match his hair —  
the one thing that remains the same, like mine —  
and his eyes seem darker,  
as though a flickering light has gone out.  
I speak his name as he walks past,  
his midnight eyes locked to the floor,  
but my voice is lost  
under the crushing weight of the music.  
The first time in six years  
that I can muster the courage to say one word to him,  
and he can't even hear it.

The tether has been broken.



With my hunger mounting / I ate nonstop for a week / Alas, I started counting / Which one shouldn't do with sheep

Life is shit.

I wake up feeling nothing, and I soon return to nothing.  
Each lumbering 6'1" step leads me one closer to the end;  
I know this and don't care.

I'm going through the motions, hollow and alone.

I'm sure that's in some jackassed D/C song.

I don't care: originality is overrated.

It's been years since someone's taken the piss out of me;  
now I mostly take the piss out of myself.

Self-defeat has always been one of my strong point:  
my only strength born of my many weaknesses.

Is this a poem?

I don't give a shit.

I have returned to my glory,  
the malaise of high school days flooding my pores once again.

I can't even type. That's just too much to ask.

I don't sleep, not really.

My brain has a lovely little holiday when I close my eyes,  
revisiting work and purpose and blue and grey,  
the latter existing every waking hour and haunting every day,  
just like the mystically clichéd poets say  
when they think they've stumbled upon some new, universal truth.

They take the piss out of me.

That is to say:

I am one.

I am you.

Come, let us embrace one another in self pity.

Come, feel our bodies shake in orgasmic splendour  
and raking sobs of lethargy.

Nihilism means nothing  
and neither do you.

Swallow, choke, and die.

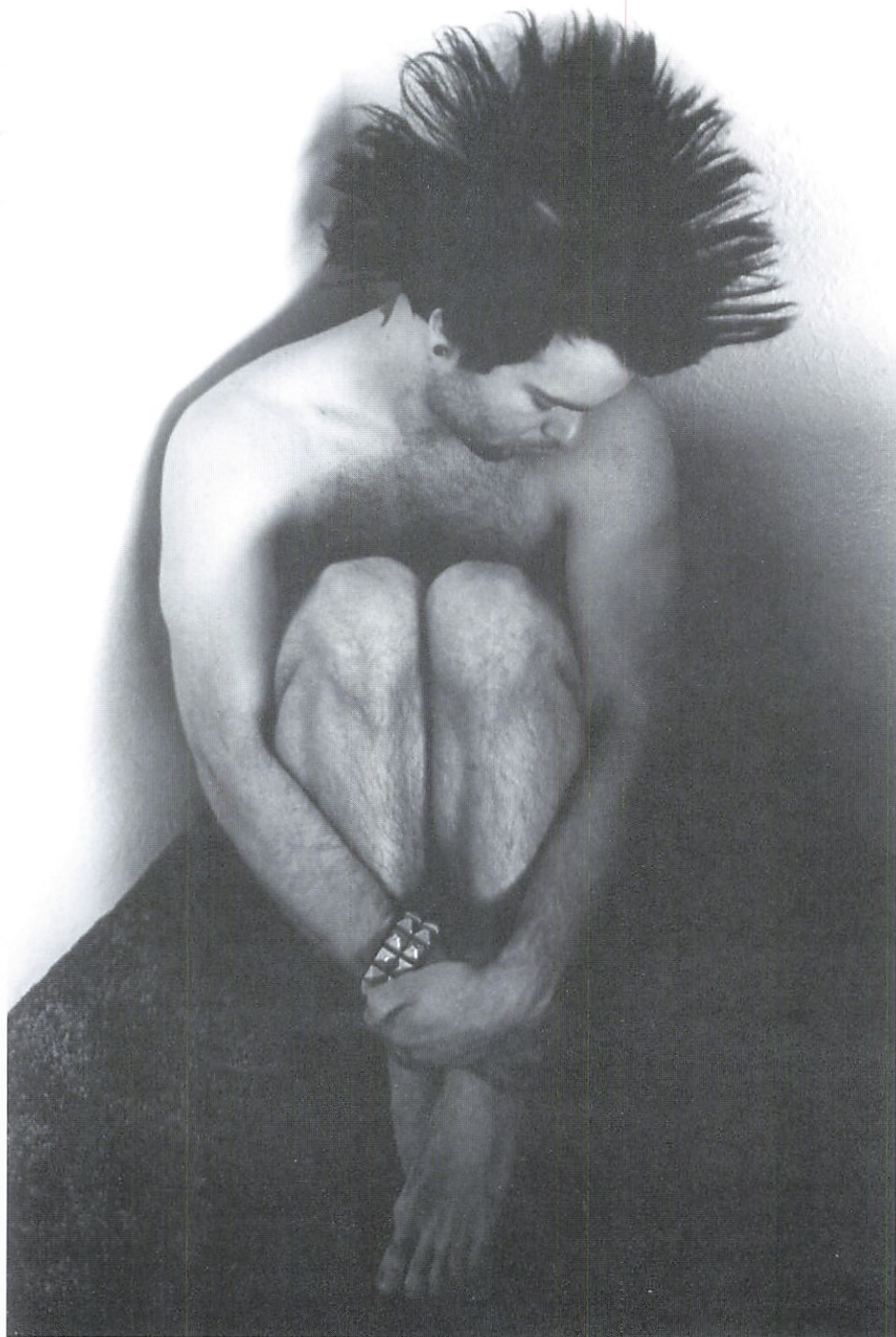
Swallow,  
Choke  
& Die

**Mick Gael**

# *Broken Façade*

**Tana Gardner**

They stoked a blazing fire / To burn Smarties at the stake / I started to perspire / 'Till I, sort of, was awake





# Bruce Lee Kung Fu Club

**Andrea Summers**

It had been waiting on the edge of its seat for her to wake up since the very early morning hours, and is the first thought of the clamoring throng to race across her mind when she finally does. I can't keep doing this.

She yawns and uncoils; her eyes stay closed, and the foggy unreality of sleep dissipates.

Her eyes open, look first at the clock — 7:30--then at him. She studies his tranquil face for a moment, suspicious that he might be feigning sleep. But no, she's convinced; it's she who deceives in those small ways. Gingerly, she rolls out of bed, careful not to wake him. It'll be a lot easier for both of us. Especially me. She's rotten and she knows it; the feeling fills her gut, and it's somehow satisfying.

She had tried to tell him in the beginning that she would do this. He was so naïve; he thought that all she needed was for him to love her, that she could be fixed. She knew it was a joke; but he told her she smelled good and brought her flowers and held her hand. His guileless smile promised that everything would be okay. His faith was infectious, lulled her into believing

that she wouldn't eventually want to destroy that uncorrupted part of him. So they both deserved this. A fool never stops being a fool.

Her eyes make a quick sweep around the apartment. It's a studio: bathroom, small kitchen, this room with bed/table/chair. And all his things, boy things, bits of his life; their intensely personal nature repulses her. I have to get the fuck out of here. She's still wearing his t-shirt from the day before, but her jeans lay in a rumpled heap on the floor where she left them. She slips them on, mindful of quashing any renegade jingling of loose change or belt buckle. Her bra is nowhere; it's unimportant. He can have it as a souvenir.

Her eyes dart about the room; she has not been unprepared: her jacket and her backpack lay in a chair next to the door; they are Security, filled with Security Objects. Keys, phone, wallet, cigarettes, notebook. She could leave everything else behind.

The letter. She pulls it from the pocket of her backpack, a month since she wrote it to enumerate all of the reasons why he will wake today to find her gone. She's struck by the envelope's

simplicity: flat and white, four corners, 'BEN' in black ink. Better get this over with. She had anticipated this feeling like a bad person; she could live with that. But she hadn't counted on remorse. She skulks in socked feet to the bedside table, lays the letter next to the clock, underneath his pack of smokes. He would see it first thing. She slides into her shoes without unlacing them, throws on her jacket, saddles up her backpack. Out in the alley, a kid screams and there is the clanging of metal trash can lid meeting concrete. He stirs; she holds her breath. Fuck.

His eyes open, their wandering blueness illuminating the dingy apartment and the motives of the woman poised guiltily at the door. The bridge of his nose crinkles as if he thinks he might still be dreaming; he scratches his disheveled head and realizes what he's woken up to. "Where are you going?" He blinks twice.

Panic; there is the feral impulse to flee. Her eyes shoot to the envelope next to the bed, and his eyes follow their trajectory, then back to her face. "I have to go." She says it like she says 'I have to go to the library,' or 'I have to go to work.' But they both know what she really means. She doesn't mean she has to go. She means she has to go.

His face is slack with incredulity, but only halfway. He knows she's serious; he's only been waiting for this day. She knows he won't even try to talk her out of it, and this disgusts her. She despises him for his weakness, disdains him for

being such a fool. This is what you get.

"Where are you going?" The words ricochet off the dirty walls and the scuffed wood floor.

"Home." She's turned on the cold, and she knows he can feel that she's already disengaged; she hovers, her hand on the doorknob, her head saying goodbye to the bra that he'll eventually find under the bed or tangled in the sheets. Over and over in her head the mantra, gottag ogottagogottagogottago.

"Can I call you?" He's thinking maybe there's still a chance.

She shrugs. "I guess." In the third-floor midweek quiet, the buzz of her mounting drive toward flight reaches a pitch that is almost audible. She's thinking of everything he's left at her place. She was careful never to leave anything that can't be lived without. He got comfortable, and would probably want back all the evidence that can be accumulated and left in someone's apartment. A year is a long time. He got attached.

They stare at each other for half a minute longer. Again, she says, "I have to go." This time the finality of these words hang in the air between them, ringing like a gunshot. He reminds himself in vain that it was her recklessness that attracted him in the first place. So go figure. She turns the knob, and slinks out the door. The last he ever sees of her is a patch sewn onto the sleeve of her denim jacket. It's red, and it says 'Bruce Lee Kung Fu Club.'



# *City Lights*

**Tina M. Calhoun**



This prompted me to dream the sea / From drool on my retainer / It flowed into reality / My pillow was the drainer



# Mother

**Tana Gardner**

I didn't mind it.  
Sunday mornings were the best  
With frozen waffles, warm  
Like the gold of my mother's hair  
My feet padding down the bare stairs  
To a kitchen of mix-match pots and  
pans  
The sweet syrup and burnt edges  
Climbing to meet my nostrils  
I'd cling to her as long as I could until  
Moist lips on the forehead,  
Then she peeled me off and sent me to  
Sunday school  
To learn about the Father  
And to learn about sin

It was life. I didn't mind it.  
After school, a vacant man in front of  
a TV  
And on Fridays my mother's lips  
And Father's absence  
Till 3 am when I heard harsh voices  
and  
Shattering and the next day there  
would be  
A missing vase or frame or  
Some kind of nick-knack or ornament  
But it was alright, and I never  
missed them

Saturday Mother would look lovely  
Always in sunglasses, dark like a

cold burner  
She didn't even remove them for church  
Or movies or winter or any occasion  
And that was the way things were  
In public people would look at her  
funny  
But that didn't change her  
And she pretended not to notice  
I didn't mind that Daddy left for weeks  
Or the few unexplained cold nights  
Mother and I spent in rented rooms,  
Listening to moans like sin and death  
Through cardboard walls  
But we all sin sometimes  
At least that's what I'm told

It was life. I did what I was told  
And I didn't mind it  
Till Mother was gone.  
That Sunday there were no waffles  
And a fowl sweet smell  
Leaked from the oven  
Nauseating like burnt fingernails  
And when I questioned, Daddy got  
mad  
Said it was my fault  
Made me scrub away the black and the  
blood  
And the ashes and I didn't dare ask  
About the tangled mess of gold hair  
That clung, matted to the oven handle  
As if hanging on for dear life



My cuspids caught the moonlight / As I blanched and heard a boom / The cow was briefly blinded / So it crashed in the moon

# *Reflections*

**Carolyn Staub**



As penitence I howled and moaned / And panicked for a time / If spacemen dig up lunar bones / They'll find it fault of mine



**shawn@beautybeneath.com**



# February In Vancouver



**Wendy Batson**

I jolted awake from one of the most uncomfortable sleeps of my entire life. My eyes were dry and sore from my contact lenses. I must not have planned on sleeping so long. My surroundings on the bus looked as though a tragedy had occurred, with bodies strewn about in various awkward positions over all the seats. A familiar turning in my stomach returned as I remembered who I was, where I was and what was to come in the next few hours. I was to return "home," to the place I did most of my growing up and where my mother still lived. The emotional cocktail of nerves, excitement, sadness and fear of the unexpected took over and my brain reeled with the "what-ifs" and "maybes." It had been nearly

2 years since I'd left Pacific Northwest for the Midwest. I knew my leaving the nest had been a running away of sorts, but honestly I didn't care as long as I didn't have to face the people I'd lost and the people I wanted to lose. I was now required to return now to congratulate my little brother on his graduation from boot camp. Why had I agreed to this? I tried not to think about all the people who wouldn't be there to greet me at the bus station. We were still hours away so I searched for my headphones. If I couldn't sleep away my worries, maybe I could drown them out.

We did not arrive on time. The bus came to a halt finally and I saw my mother just outside the gate. By the

It did not yell or tremble / As it spiraled though the air / Its flight abruptly dithered / As it glanced across a chair

*February In Vancouver*

look of her troubled countenance and disheveled hair I could tell she was distressed and had been waiting more than awhile. The Portland afternoon air was crisp, and the temperature was in the 50s, which was a nice change from the freezing ice and snow I had left behind. Even though it had been so long since we were last face to face we only exchanged pleasantries. I could tell she was disgusted by my appearance.

"You could be so pretty. I don't understand why you insist on doing that stuff to yourself."

I played with one of my three lip rings and looked at my feet. Inside I wanted to scream. I wanted to throw my arms around her and hold on until she was forced to physically push me away. No other person could bring out the combination of love and hate that seethed through my veins every time we met. We were the classic example

of the mother/daughter troubled relationship and we had our counterfeit pleasantries down pat.

"Hi Mom. How was your Christmas?"

We got into her familiar car, drove the familiar drive, past all the familiar schools, to the familiar house and I

arrived as the unfamiliar girl. Everything was the same, yet very different. Could the difference be my own perspective? Had I changed so drastically

**"Would I still be the same person I had grown into now if I had never left?"**

in just two short years? I suddenly longed for everything to be how it was. The turning in my stomach returned. Now everything I had anticipated had become the reality; things would never be the same. I knew I had missed the place where I spent the majority of my teenage years, but I missed the place how it was two years ago, not this foreign empty shell of what was once a home.

My father had been dead for three

years now due to lung cancer and I'd left behind my best friend, Charlotte, for nine months. What was this place I knew so well, but was so unwelcoming?

Instead of "what-ifs" and "maybes," my mind flooded with the "would-haves" and "should-haves." Would I still be the same person I had grown into now if I had never left? If I had stayed could I have saved my friend from her heroin addiction that she gave into so shortly after I left? I knew it was silly to think such things, like I could 'save' people from what always seemed inevitable anyway, but I still felt a little responsible when it came to Charlotte's death. I had decided to cut off all ties with her when she told me she had no intentions of stopping or getting help.

Everything I had left in my room was untouched, like a shrine to a girl who had gone and would never come back. Candles unburned, dresser caked in dust and clothes all over the floor. Had she that much contempt toward me that she couldn't even touch my clothing?

The doorbell rang and I ran up the stairs to see if my Grandparents had arrived. Finally, something I knew would never change. My Grandmother and I had always been very close and we

had kept lines of communication going steadily since I had left.

She held me, and I could smell her perfume—a cross between freesia and a hospital, just how I remembered. I could tell she still wasn't well, but her radiant smile made up for the sunken in look under her eyes. She too made comments about my appearance, but with more humor than abhor, so I didn't mind.

The clock on the piano let us all know it was three o'clock by playing Westminster chimes. This was something that signaled to me that I was in my family's home and company. Even if it would have been more welcoming and those two people I missed with everything in my bones would have been there, this still wasn't my home now. My home was a three-bedroom town-home in Indianapolis and my family was the people I shared it with there. Telesa and Brandy were like the sisters I never had. Indiana and Washington were two completely different cultures I associated myself with 'being from'.

What I once considered to be the funniest accent (typical Midwestern—like a cross between a Southern drawl and someone very drunk on cheap beer) I'd ever heard was comforting now to



hear over the telephone.

"How is everything going?" one of my roommates, Brandy, asked.

"About as well as could be expected. It's just . . . weird, you know?" I knew she understood what I was going through. She had gone back to see her family for the first time in years that past Christmas.

"Yeah, I know. Give me a call if you need anything." Despite how close we were, I doubted I would. This was something so personal to me and at that time I didn't think I could explain exactly how I felt and what I was going through to anyone.

February in Vancouver was still beautiful. I sat in the damp grass, took a long puff on my cigarette, stared up

at all the trees my brother and I used to climb and build forts in when we were little, and listened to the humming silence of the neighborhood. It was so empty compared to the past hustle and bustle of teenagers driving too fast around the corners and parents rushing out to yell after them. The kids I grew up and went to high school with had all moved into their own apartments or gone off to college and it seemed older here now. It was if the houses and trees had matured too even.

I quietly decided to myself that I missed that area of the country, but not this exact spot. I think that coming back home after leaving for awhile had matured me more than leaving in the first place, because it gave me the option to recognize just how much I had changed.



# Catharsis

Cameron Kingzett



Then came an interloper / Apt to sniffing 'round the floor / It probably smelled my supper / And so walked in through the door

# *For two years* **Lindsay Stalone** *consumed*

For two years consumed of complication and regret.  
I am red-faced puffy-eyed head-splitting jags of saltwater,  
where tonight, in wretched exhaustion I curl into a fetal ball,  
remaining here until serrated silence stretches between you and me  
like the sound of snow falling.  
It drifts around our shaking shoulders.  
Intrinsically incapable of comprehending  
your pain is unequalled, unrivaled, resolute to seek  
the root of desecration buried beneath years of betrayal.  
You are a black wave traveling across an obsidian planet,  
enduring oblivion in pursuit of discovery why  
every woman from mother to me has stolen your trust  
and shredded it,  
like the pages of this shameful journal, in which you discovered  
my turbulent, degrading attempt to erase your ink.  
You do not use the word love.  
It is a malaise condemning you.  
I sob for somnolence, die in the inertia of estrangement,  
seize with grief for lost parts of my body.  
Eventually, you cross the room, closing distance

He saw the wayward plastic / Focused black and white, through clear / Aside it was a spastic / Being which sadly died of fear



My dog, penchant to trouble / Revealed a crooked maw / "My handsomeness will double / If I put this bracing on"

**"I want  
to suck  
your  
abuse  
addiction  
dry."**

you've held for ten hours, to amend lamentation.

All your tears transfer to my cheeks  
where cold fury and spectral fragility fail  
to turn my possession aside.

I want to suck your abuse addiction dry.

You curl up next to me on the floor,  
our two hollow husks hover together for heat  
holding, here, corpses cradled in earth.

We lost nothing but context, stepping  
into chasm paths, velvet bags, torture beds.  
Choosing isolation from all anchors of identity,  
you and I elicit raw monsters of ego  
to waltz out for battle.

A holy war,  
in which the only choice is to love aggressively.  
There is nothing you can do to make me not love you.  
Don't chase definition through the dictionary.  
Right here, clinging inside a cathedral of fear,  
dreaming consists of coarse supplications to God.  
Love speaks of prayer together.

His clever thoughts unfolding / But clearly not thought through / He later found the moulding / Quite enjoyable to chew



**Susie Morrill**



# The End

**Luke Good**

Earth is a space  
And time is its child occupant.  
Cold waters finger forward from  
Ravines and lapse judgment.  
Where have you gone?  
I have shaken out the tapestries  
And rugs that warm our cave.  
I have collected that dust  
And made a monument to moments,  
One that will stand when  
There is nothing left.  
Apocalypse, Apocalypse,  
My friend said strawberries are overrated,  
But I believe it is you she meant.  
I have seen signs  
And felt you lulling in the sky,  
But I am the great ender.  
I end again.

The chewing made him murky / As he soon began to snore / He dreamt of trees of jerky / So he chewed it all the more



# *Hope*



**Lander Beauchamp**



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