

Stylus

Stylus a journal
of literature and art
2012



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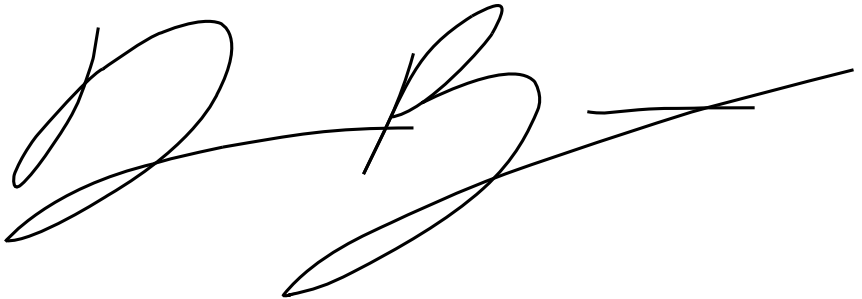
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Editor's Note

Our memories are the baseline upon which we measure the present and forecast the future. Secondhand histories provide us with the context of our own narrative. A grandmother's foreign cooking brings flavor to the tongues of her relatives who speak a language that she wasn't raised with. Some of us have lost our grandmothers, and the flavor of our words has changed.

I recently met, with great surprise, my mandatory journal from my fifth grade English class. To my greater surprise, it did not report the same childhood that I remember living. These memories were handed to me from someone else. I invite you into the journal you hold now. Open up your memories with us, and we will share losses, anticipations, curiosities, and muted pleasures—those remembered and those still to come.

Remember to write,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dylan Bargteil'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dylan Bargteil

Prose

Front Lawn | Laura Pavlo

Molly woke with the sun the morning her brother didn't. Stretching her weedy limbs while standing at the edge of the bed, she saw Lucas from her bedroom window. His left knee was bent back in a way that it shouldn't have been and his right arm was tucked under his torso. Wanting to know why Lucas was lying on the front lawn, she called her mother into her bedroom.

"What's the problem?" her mother asked, running her hand through Molly's hair. Her mother yawned and covered her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Why is Lucas outside?"

Her mother's brow creased. "What?"

Molly pointed at the window.

Turning toward the window, her mother's lips parted.

"Lucas?" she called from Molly's window. Molly watched her mother's face. She thought about the color of snow, of school papers without the blue and red lines, of quiet.

Her mother leaned against the windowpane. Molly heard her breath catch in her throat. She ran out of the bedroom, and Molly followed.

There was blood staining the grass around his skull, a broken halo.

Her mother fell to her knees and lifted his body into her arms. Standing in the grass behind her, Molly watched her little brother's head loll backwards, his limbs loose with death, his body heavy and unmoving in their mother's arms.

Red and blue lights flashed purple onto their white home. Molly stood under her mother's arm on their front lawn. The morning sun rose from above the trees, drew orange lines across Molly's cheekbones. Her father was talking to a police officer, his tone of voice flat.

"We had left the windows open last night," he said. "He must have..." He put his face in his hands.

Molly's mother went in the ambulance with Lucas's body, and Molly and her father followed in the family Volvo. The ambulance drove slowly and without sirens; there was no need to rush, there was nothing to be done.

Her father ushered Molly through the cold hospital halls with a hand on her shoulder. It was hard to see the difference between nurses and ghosts, Molly thought, noticing their blank faces and drawing lines in her mind between their straight-lipped expressions and those of ghouls in Halloween storybooks. An elderly woman pushed a cart down the hallway, the wheels leaving a light trail in the newly waxed floor, the bag of blood attached at her wrist sloshing as the woman lurched forward. Molly's father squeezed her hand.

Her mother was standing outside of a room near the end of the hallway. Her father tried to say something but instead his words fell out of his mouth

like rocks. Molly stood by her mother and reached for her hand, and squeezed it. She didn't squeeze back. Swallowing, Molly closed her eyes.

A doctor walked over to the three of them.

The doctor said it was from sleepwalking, a tumor on his brain, that the fall was not intentional. The doctor said there was nothing they could have done or no way they could have known, that the tumor couldn't be seen until he had already stopped dreaming.

The doctor spoke quietly, "Your son is inside. It is up to you if you would like your daughter to see him."

Her parents looked at each other. Their lips and foreheads were cut with crooked lines.

"Molly," her father spoke slowly. "Do you want to see Lucas?"

Molly nodded.

"I'll be outside when you're ready. Take your time."

The doctor used two keys to open the door.

Lucas's body was on a silver table meant for dead adults, not dead children. Her mother and father held hands. Molly stood between them. Lucas was under a thin white sheet, still in his blue rocket ship pajamas.

Her father traced his fingertips along the ridges of Lucas's eyebrows. Noticing the paleness in Lucas's cheeks as her father's fingers grazed across them, Molly thought about hearing her father coo Lucas to sleep a few times a month, trying to quiet Lucas's walking mind, trying to bring him back from the dream he seemed to have fallen into. She would listen for the creaking of the mattress springs when their father sat down and the softness of his voice when he whispered in Lucas's glow-in-the-dark star-stickered room. Molly's bedroom was across from Lucas's; they kept their doors open at night to prevent the boogieman from knocking on them, and sometimes Lucas would wander into her room and sit on the floor beside her bed. Molly was never able to decide if Lucas was sleepwalking or just lonely. Sometimes she wondered if it was both.

Holding her hand over her mouth, her mother wept silently, her tears slipping between her fingers and running down her wrists. She leaned forward, gently brushed Lucas's teddy-bear-brown hair off of his forehead and pressed a kiss onto it. Molly watched her mother whimper. Her mother leaned her forehead into her father's shoulder and Molly could feel the weight of the situation growing in her bones, an emotional tumor doctors could not find or fix.

Molly touched her little brother's hand: winter icicles around Christmastime. Stringing tinsel from the hand-picked tree's prickly branches, she remembered telling Lucas to be careful with his fingertips around the blunt edges of the ornament hooks, his smile dusted with peanut butter cookie crumbs they helped their mother make by pressing the backside of a fork into their faces two times, Christmas playing carols on the FM radio, the metronome to their laughter. The gentle hum of the radiator in the next room warmed them as much as *chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at*

your nose, and they eventually fell asleep under the glow of crystalline colors, Lucas's head resting on her shoulder.

Molly looked at her brother's fragile limbs. Tiny cuts peppered his arms and face from how he fell. There were little rings around the scrapes on his paling skin, like the kind found in the center of a fallen tree.

"Doctors know everything," Molly whispered, stepping away from her brother's body.

"There are some things no one knows, honey."

In her third grade classroom four months later, with dirt under her fingernails, she picked at a piece of skin on her forefinger. Blood flushed into the crevice between her skin and pale pink nail. She winced but pushed the blood out of the slit, watching it create a little creek around the swoop of her cuticle. Her classmates' chairs were empty, their cubbies cleaned out with the end of the day; brown paper bags, empty applesauce cups, squeezable yogurt strips and metallic cookie wrappers filled the trash bin. She flicked a pencil shaving off her desk. A streak of blood stayed behind.

She tried to be good most days, eating all of her chicken and stabbing at her peas, her hand smushed into the left side of her face, her father telling her to keep her elbows off the table and to sit up straight. She used to share her toys with her brother when he was there to use them and she said nice things to her mother when her mother's eyes lingered for too long on framed family photographs, or when she would stand in the hallway outside of his bedroom, her hand resting on the doorknob. Molly went to bed when her parents asked, and although she spent most nights under the yellow orb of her flashlight sheet sanctuary, she decided she was a good girl for getting into bed in the first place. She listened to the babysitter and signed her name neatly at the bottom of birthday cards to her grandparents and relatives. She never mentioned her brother around her parents, and she stopped wondering why he had left.

Molly was resting her head on her desk, the insides of her eyelids warm, when a classmate poked at her shoulder.

"Don't fall asleep. The windows are open."

The boy laughed. Molly lifted her head and sat up, unsure of how to respond. Her hands felt cold, as though she had been squeezing icicles.

"What?"

"The windows are open," he said, gesturing toward the far wall of the classroom. "If you fall asleep, you might jump right out."

She slugged the boy right in the jaw. She was close enough to hear his teeth, loosened by growing up, crush against each other. Two teeth were pushed out by the hit, baby teeth lost before he could put them under his pillow. The boy was ushered away by their teacher after she shouted, "Molly!" disapprovingly.

At the end of the day, Molly was told to wait in the classroom. The teacher, after wiping dust from the chalkboard, told her to stay put until she came back, to think about what she had done.

Sitting alone in the classroom, she thought about lunchtime two hours

earlier, math problems she did not understand and the homework worksheet that was full of them, the way the boy's eyes welled up with tears when she tried to apologize, his hands clutching his bottom jaw, his whimpering lips in a crooked line.

Molly was a quiet child and quieted more once her brother had gone. There was no one to share their father's lap during bedtime stories, to play with once the babysitter fell into her cell phone, to hold at the edge of her bed when it was too dark in her room even with the sticker-stars. When Lucas was born, Molly, age three at the time, was enamored with the thought that her parents had so much love that it could fill another person. One evening, she whispered into her brother's crib, Lucas's small fingers pinched into fists, his eyes wide with trying to figure out the feeling of light, "I will love you as much as them."

She sat in her own silence for what felt like the length of sixteen hundred rulers, if time could be measured in inches. Anxious, but mostly afraid of what her teacher would tell her when she returned, she reached into her backpack and opened her class textbook. She scribbled in the margins of a chapter entitled "Life Science: Where Plants and Animals Live." Molly thought about where she lived and what science had to do with it, or if there were equations, chemical or non-, that could explain the change in the word "home" since Lucas had left.

The door clicked open. Her teacher walked in, shutting the door behind her. Hesitating for a moment by her desk, she reached for a chair and pulled it next to Molly's desk. Without the teacher asking, Molly began speaking, her words shaky and quiet.

"He told me I shouldn't sleep, that the windows were open," she said.

"That was not nice of him to say, but it didn't mean you should have hit him. You should never hit anyone. Always use words."

"He knows what happened to my brother."

"It was not right of him to say something that would upset you."

"I know. That's why I got mad," Molly said. She crossed her ankles, looked at her hands folded in her lap.

"But anger isn't how you solve things."

"Sometimes I don't know what else to do."

Breathing in, her teacher's eyes fell to the floor and then met Molly's again. She said, "I know things are hard sometimes, but how you feel about what happened to your brother shouldn't make you angry with others."

"I'm sorry."

Patting Molly on the knee, she stood up and crossed the room to her desk. Molly's mother would pick her up in twenty minutes.

Molly's teacher sat at her desk while Molly sat at her own. Drawing lines on her fingers like tally marks with a black-inked pen, thoughts washed around her head until the teacher rose from her desk and gestured toward the door.

Walking down the hallway, Molly kept her head down with her hands loose at her sides. Her forefinger buzzed, pain resonating from the tear in her

skin. When she lifted it up to her eyes to see, her skin was the color of the roses at her brother's wake.

Her mother's car pulled up to the front of the school, a Volvo, because her father said Volvos were the safest to drive. Molly kicked at dandelions while her mother and teacher spoke. She caught a few words, but chose to ignore the majority of them. She picked at her finger again and then let her hands fall to her sides.

When they stopped talking, her mother told her to say goodbye to her teacher. She waved, her other hand pinched under the strap of her backpack, and turned to her mother's car.

Molly sat quietly in the back seat, her hands folded in her lap, intermittently picking at the skin around her fingernails. Molly was usually wide-eyed and chirping when her mother drove her and her brother to their soccer games, their plastic cleats dusting the floor mats with chunks of soil. Molly, older by three years, would laugh at Lucas, "Stop pulling on my pigtails or I'll tell the ref to make you lose!"

"I'm sorry," Molly whispered from the backseat, the car engine humming at a stoplight.

"You shouldn't have hit him."

"I know."

"I know you get angry sometimes, but you have to remember that other people get angry too, and if everybody was hitting everybody else, that wouldn't be very good, would it?"

The back of Molly's throat tightened, "No."

The light flicked to green.

"Tomorrow I want you to apologize and tell him how sorry you are."

"I will," Molly whispered. Her mother's disappointment in her weighed two and a half tons on her shoulders. She squeezed her fingers together and followed the threads of her shoelaces with her eyes, tracing the loops over and over until they pulled into their driveway.

"Molly," her mother said. She turned to face Molly in the backseat. She put a hand on Molly's knee.

"Yes?"

"I love you."

"I love you too."

Her mother smiled halfway and nodded. She turned off the car and unlocked the doors. Molly thought about Lucas's favorite color: green, the color of summer grass.

"Can I play outside?" Molly asked as her mother walked toward the front door.

Sitting outside near the tree where they found her brother on the front lawn, leaves spun around her like butterflies. Molly sat against the curve of the tree and folded her legs, leaning her head back, strands of hair getting caught in the bark. She leaned her backpack on the foot of the tree and closed her eyes.

The night before the morning her brother was found, their mother was making cookies and asked for their help. Molly dipped her fingers in the bowl of jam that was supposed to top the cookies. She thought her mother would be angry, her hand gripping the wooden spoon. Her mother dipped her finger into the bowl and drew lines of raspberry across Molly and Lucas's noses. The rest of the evening was spent with sugars and storybooks, drops of jam on Molly and Lucas's fingertips that they licked as lizards would, sour bits of seeds loosening from the back of their teeth as they smiled frothy grins in the mirror, their bedtime a toothbrush away.

Molly used to tell Lucas that sleepwalking happened when dreams weren't good enough. Plucking a piece of grass and threading it around the slit on her fingertip, she decided she wanted to be a doctor when she grew up, that she would learn how to fix broken jaws, broken hearts, and minds that couldn't make dreams.

The Elephant | Lyla Lawless

Abby's stuffed elephant is brand new.

That makes it the most special thing her whole family has, she thinks. She likes it more than her old doll with the red yarn pigtails, or baby Levi's bouncing chair (she doesn't fit in that anyway so it's no fun), or Mama's pearl necklace that she hasn't worn since before Levi was born, when Daddy took her to dinner, and there was a babysitter, and Mama still smiled.

The elephant is pink with velvety ears. Abby rubs them between her thumb and forefinger almost unconsciously, even when she's just carrying the elephant around the house. Daddy brought the elephant back three days ago. He wasn't late coming home from work that time so he made her mac 'n' cheese fresh out of the pot. Mama usually starts it and forgets to finish it. One time Abby stood on a chair to put some in a bowl because she was hungry and she tipped the pot and the noodles went all over the floor. She never tried again, not because Mama saw and was angry, but because later Daddy did and he yelled at Abby in a funny way that made her think he was actually sad.

Now Levi is crying. He's been crying all day. Abby sits under the dining room table in the pool of shadow with her elephant. She pretends she is in a cave and her elephant is a woolly mammoth. She hasn't started her game, though, because the elephant still does not have a name. It was okay for it not to have a name the first day, even the second, but Daddy bought it for her three days ago and she still hasn't named it. It is too old not to have a name.

There is the sound of a car in the driveway. The headlights flash through the front window and—sunlight in the cave! It's morning. The elephant wakes up. Abby pushes her straggly hair behind her ears, then picks Lady Elephant up—it is a she, it is pink—and stands her carefully on four plush feet.

Pinky? No, that's a silly name. She strokes the fur between the elephant's shiny black eyes and considers.

The screen door bangs open. Daddy's boots scrape across the threshold, then squeak on the linoleum. It is raining out. That's why it's so dark now. It has been gloomy all day.

"Hon? I'm home," says Daddy. Mama doesn't answer. Abby abandons the elephant for a moment, crawling on hands and knees between the chairs. She runs to give Daddy's knees a hug.

"Hello, sweetheart," he says, tousling her hair. "Where's your mother at?"

"Sleeping," Abby says. Then she adds, importantly, "I'm playing."

"You are!"

"With my elephant."

"Does your elephant have a name?"

"No...we're in a cave. It's morning time so we're going to have breakfast now. We're hungry."

Daddy jerks his head up like he's remembered something. "Daddy's hungry too. What do you say to some food, sweetie?"

"Elephant and I will be there," Abby says, then frowns and scoots back under the table to consider her toy. Elephant is *not* a good name. It is even worse than Pinky. She could name the elephant Lilac maybe, after her best friend, but that's silly too because Lilac means purple and the elephant is *pink*.

"Hon?" Daddy calls softly down the hall. His heavy work boot footsteps go to Levi's room. Levi is still crying in that hiccup-y way he does after he's been wailing for hours. Abby hears Daddy murmuring to him to make him quiet down. Good. She needs to think. It is morning, and it should be quiet until the elephant has a name.

Abby sees a big dark stain on the rug under one of the chairs. It is a lake. (Okay, it is a red lake, but Abby will pretend.) The elephant trots to the lake and takes a big drink through her fuzzy pink trunk. Abby tries to stand her on her feet after this but the elephant tips over slowly to her side, resting on one big ear.

"Too much to drink," Abby clucks, smoothing the elephant's fur with one dainty finger. "It's okay. You'll feel all right in a little while."

Abby's eyes wander over the rest of the rug. The border is black while the inside is green. That's a canyon. With saber-toothed tigers! Abby shivers just thinking about it.

There is a thump from the hallway. Abby glances up to see Mama stumbling into the room. Mama rubs a hand across her eyes and leans against the wall.

"I'm playing, Mama," Abby chirps.

"That's good, honey."

"With my new elephant."

"I'm going to make dinner. It'll just be a bit."

"My elephant has to eat breakfast first."

Abby thinks Mama doesn't hear this, because Mama opens the cupboards and dishes fall out and it makes a lot of noise. Abby jumps. An earthquake! Oh, no. The elephant wakes right up and trots away from the lake, her little paintbrush tail sticking into the air. But she *screeches* to a halt at the canyon. Just in time, too. Abby can hear the saber-toothed tigers growling at the bottom. They're very hungry, of course. They haven't had breakfast either and they really like elephant.

Daddy comes into the room with Levi on his shoulder, patting Levi's bare back with one hand. "His diaper needed changing," he says quietly to Mama. Daddy tried to teach Abby to change Levi's diaper once, "just in case," he said, but it smelled and she didn't want to and she hasn't ever changed it since that one time.

"I was going to," Mama says. "After my nap."

"Did you even hear Abby come home?"

"She's a big girl, Matthew."

"She's six. Maybe if you're counting in dog years."

"I have a headache. Let's not do this right now."

"You always have a headache. Either that or you're asleep, or..."

"Let me make the kids some dinner."

"...Just peas for Levi, remember."

"I remember!"

Daddy goes back down the hall. The earthquake is over. Abby pushes the elephant's ears down like a puppy dog's so they droop in relief. The saber-toothed tigers will just have to stay hungry. But now, it's time for elephant breakfast. Abby casts about for the nearest thing she can find: a crystal cup. She almost does not use this because it's Mama's nice kind. But Mama is busy and Abby will be careful.

She stands it up so the little drop of red liquid in the bottom does not drip onto the carpet. There, a peanut tree. The elephant stretches her trunk waaaay out and picks a peanut off the top of the tree. She eats three peanuts. That is quite enough for one elephant for one meal. Abby sits the elephant down on her back legs to rest.

Abby wants breakfast too now. No, she wants a peanut butter and fluff sandwich. She didn't have one in her lunch box this morning so she had to eat half of Lilac's bologna sandwich. It was yucky. Abby wrinkles her nose thinking about it; she leaves the elephant to digest and crawls from under the table.

"Mama."

Mama has her back turned. She is at the counter clanking glasses together clumsily.

"Mama, can I have peanut butter and fluff?"

"I'm making spaghetti."

"I want peanut butter and fluff."

"We don't have tomato sauce," Daddy calls from the bedroom.

"We don't need tomato sauce. We'll just have cheese," Mama replies. She puts the bottle away and takes a long drink.

"I really want peanut butter and fluff," Abby says.

"You had that for lunch, sweetie," Daddy says from Levi's room.

"No I didn't. I ate some of Lilac's sandwich."

Daddy comes into the room. "Hon." He speaks to Mama. His voice is tired. "Hon, did Abby bring a lunch this morning?"

"Of course she brought a lunch," says Mama, turning so her back is to the counter and her hands are on the edge, gripping. "I made her lunch."

"Are you sure that was today?"

"Well, the spaghetti will be ready soon."

The water boils and Mama pours the box of spaghetti in. She pours the box in too by accident and she says an unkind word while she scoops it and some of the noodles back out with a spoon.

"I would really like some peanut butter and fluff, please," Abby tries, clasping her hands together primly.

"Abby," Daddy says, his voice a little mean, "please go play with your

elephant.”

Abby does. The table isn't a cave when she goes back: it's a fort. The elephant changed it while she was gone because the saber-toothed tigers are coming! They are coming fast and there is a whole big pack of them with fangs. The elephant shakes with fright, so Abby makes it feel better by smoothing all its fur down sleek. They are both very hungry, so the elephant eats a few more peanuts from the tree. Mama's glasses clink together in the kitchen. Abby finds mountains, a river, and a very large desert in the carpet while the spaghetti cooks. Mama goes to lie down on the couch.

Daddy comes back after a while. He doesn't have Levi anymore. Levi must be asleep. Daddy goes to the couch and bends over Mama. “Did you set a timer?”

Mama is asleep again.

Daddy goes to the stove and finds out the spaghetti is burned. Abby already knew that because she could smell it. Daddy storms back to Mama and shakes her shoulder until she wakes up.

“You didn't put enough water! The whole thing is ruined.”

“I'll make more.” She tries to rise, tipsy.

“There isn't more. I can't afford to buy a ton of food in the first place and then you keep wasting it all.”

“Let me make something else.”

Daddy pushes her back on the couch. “You have to remember to change Levi's diaper. He's going to get a rash.”

“Tomorrow, I'll...”

“Tomorrow you'll just drink more than you did today!”

“Let me make more spaghetti.”

“Dammit, *there is no more spaghetti.*”

Abby peers out from between the chair legs. There is a little silence. She asks, “Can I have peanut butter and fluff instead?”

Daddy looks at her with eyes that are very far away.

“I'm hungry, Daddy,” she says. “My elephant ate without me.”

Daddy gets up and goes to the kitchen. Abby watches him take out the bread and the peanut butter and the fluff. She scoots backwards into the fort and accidentally—oh no!—uproots the peanut tree with her foot. It tips over. The little red droplet rolls down the glass. Her elephant falls on its side and goes to sleep because it is so sad.

Abby goes to the elephant and strokes its rosy ears. Suddenly, a bright smile flits across her face. She knows what she will name her elephant now: Desiree.

After Mama.

Radio Silence | Nick Meriwether

“This is Two-One. We have contact east of the hamlet. Engaging.”

I was dreaming again.

I had drifted back to Helmand Province every night for the past nine months.

The first dull cracks of gunfire echo faintly from Tyler’s direction. They sound like dead branches snapping under a man’s weight. I scan the thin line of trees behind me. Nothing. The Afghan sky looms above me in a sickly gray pall. I wonder how many Mongols, Macedonians, Brits, and Soviets have stared at this same sky before they bled out in the rocky soil under my boots.

I look down at my hands to check for the shakes. They always give a soft tremble just before my gut wrenches. I hope I won’t puke again. Before every patrol, I gag and throw up warm chunks in the latrine when no one is looking. I used to do the same thing before big tests before I left college. I even puked before the SATs. Not the ideal image of a Marine grunt, but then again, I never felt like one anyway.

The trickle of rifle cracks increases in rhythm and tempo until I hear a hollow symphony of 5.56 mm and 7.62 mm rounds to our east. The twelve of us huddle along a low earthen wall and scan a charred poppy field for Taliban fighters. My rifle feels bulky and strange, and I begin to remember the weight of a woman in my arms.

I think about Natalie. We walked down M Street in Georgetown. It was May, and our ice cream cones melted slowly and dripped onto the hot asphalt in sweet puddles. I ran my fingers along the smooth pale of her skin and told her I loved her. She cooed and whispered softly in my ear.

Keegan’s M16 shatters my eardrums and rips through the hollow daydream.

“Fucker’s over by that wall! I got him!” he yells.

“Matthias get your fuckin’ shit together. Corrigan isn’t here to take care of you,” Fritzger whispers angrily. He notices I’ve zoned out again.

Sgt. Plessy’s radio belches static and loud beeps at odd intervals. A few seconds later, Logan’s voice explodes over the frequency.

“This is Two-One, we have a man hit. Request...” his voice cuts off in static.

My veins pump ice water. That’s Tyler’s squad. My best friend, the only truly familiar face in this endless fucking purgatory, is under fire a few hundred meters away while I ponder an ex-girlfriend. Plessy turns to face us.

“All right, listen up,” his voice booms. “Two-One has a man down. We’re gonna move to their position and push east. Bounding overwatch, two at a time through the village. Don’t hug the walls, and keep your fucking heads down.”

He looks at Fritz and me.

“Matthias, Fritzger. You’re up first.”

The two of us exchange glances. I gulp and grit my teeth. Fritz is slow. I watch the doorways of six mud-bricked buildings loom menacingly a few meters away. The dank stench of spices and cow shit clings stubbornly in my nostrils. I wait patiently for my turn to die and wondered again what the fuck I am doing here.

“Move out,” Plessy barks.

Fritz and I leap up and surge forward to the first hut. I sweep the barrel of my rifle back and forth across the muddy path in search of something to kill. Nothing stirs in the village. I catch a flash of movement in the shadows of a house across the street. I train my rifle on the open doorway and slide my finger onto the trigger.

The boy looks about three or four years old. He waddles out into the open, and his green eyes shimmer brilliantly in the soft gray light. His tiny body looks impossibly small through my rifle sights. The boy flashes me a brave little smile, and I lower the rifle. We stare at each other for an impossible minute.

“Friendly 88’s incoming! Get down!” someone yells behind us.

The first mortar explodes a few yards away, and the world disappears in a thick cloud of dust. My eyes sting and I can’t hear over the ringing clamor in my head. Fritz grabs me and tries to lurch me up the street, but I push him off. I stumble forward until I see a tiny mutilated leg lying in a bed of red-stained soil.

I woke up puking again. The flush of the toilet made me quiver like a baby while I curled up on the cold bathroom floor. After a while, I let the water run in the rusty sink and stared at the gaunt face in the mirror. It was raining outside. I opened the window and watched the cool drops patter in the street. Fait Avenue was still and quiet. I chose it because it provided a little refuge from the gunshots a few blocks north and the yuppie pricks a few blocks east.

The orange streetlamps glistened softly in the puddles, and I thought about Natalie again. I tried hard to repress Tyler and the little boy, but she was the one that started this. An abandoned college education, a war, a dead best friend, and two lost jobs later, I was still thinking about her. She was the drug that ruined me. She was my post-traumatic stress.

It had been nine months since Afghanistan. Four months since I left the Corps. And five years since I met Natalie at the back of a frat party my freshman year at Georgetown.

Natalie Curran was tall and brunette. Taller than me, actually. She had that awkward gait of a former basketball player that I found cute and endearing in a girl. She was smart, too. I was studying prelaw when we met and she was studying psychology. I guess she always knew how to get in people’s heads. I shake my head to clear the memories.

I had to work a double shift at the bar the next day, and I knew I wouldn’t

sleep.

I pinched the bridge of my nose and sighed. Then, I listened to the calm raindrops and tried not to hear machine-gun fire.

The line of young professionals outside the bar wore sleek black clothes that made their fake smiles shimmer a brilliant white. Every night a piece of me died with them. Their deafening banter invaded every inch of my brain and ripped through me like a fucking bullet. The men talked about promotions and expensive alcohol and designer jeans and girls they fucked in grad school. The women giggled in ear-splitting tones about cushy law firm jobs, reality TV shows, brand names, and potential husbands. I heard the same conversations so often I could quote them.

The shiny, smug faces on each ID blurred together to the point that I felt sick every time I turned on the black light. I must have seen thousands. They were all clones of each other. The women fought and starved to stay 115-130 lbs. The men bought two hundred dollar gym memberships and forty dollar protein supplements to maintain 185-210. They were all between twenty-three and twenty-eight. Shimmering hair. Glowing white skin. All from the Baltimore or DC suburbs. Their sickeningly sweet perfumes made me miss the stench of bloated, dead flesh and the metallic tinge of cordite from rifle fire.

In four months of bouncing in Canton not a single person had greeted me aside from drunken taunts. That night, something strange happened. A sweet, mellow voice rose above the dull cacophony, and I was helpless in its aura.

“Danny?” she asked.

Her confused smile was familiar and warm. Her dress was simple and understated. Her hair was messy and she wasn’t wearing make-up. She looked beautiful. I tried to pull myself together enough to smile back.

“Kelly?” I responded. Her jaw dropped slightly and her smile grew in amazement. No smile has ever made me feel so important or loved as the one that night.

“Oh my God! I haven’t seen you in years!” she said. I was stunned as she leaned in and hugged me in a way made my skin tingle and my heart jump.

“God it’s so good to see you. I heard you just got back from Afghanistan. I’m so glad you’re okay,” she said as we embraced.

“Yeah, you too. I didn’t even think you knew I left. I kept it pretty quiet,” I chuckled.

“I know you did. But I kind of had a thing with Mike a while ago, and he told me the whole story. I’m so sorry about everything. It’s just...it’s so good that you’re okay now. You just disappeared after Natalie and everything,” she said sympathetically.

“Yeah. Well I’m back now. And in one piece at least. But Jesus, you’re the one I feel bad for. Mike? I’d take the Marines over that,” I joked. She laughed and I felt a little more confident.

“So, you’re working here?” she asked. My confidence melted to the floor. I didn’t know how to respond. I wanted to disappear.

“Yeah, for the time being. I’m just getting sorted out since I got back. Needed some cash. I know it doesn’t look great,” I mustered with an embarrassed look. She smiled.

“No. I just saw you as more of a high roller nightclub bouncer. Like with an earpiece and sunglasses. Keeping it classy. I mean why study at Georgetown if you’re not frisking rappers and NFL players?” she said.

We both laughed. The line behind us glared and shifted impatiently, and I noticed her friend in the designer dress nudge her softly. Kelly shot her a glance.

“See what I mean? This Baltimore crowd has no patience. I guess I’m just not cut out for Canton,” she said.

“Yeah tell me about it,” I said quietly.

“Anyway, I guess I should go. I could really use a fucking four dollar beer right now,” she chuckled as she pulled out her ID.

“I know I don’t look twenty-one, but could you let me slide?”

“Just this once,” I said. She hesitated for a few moments and looked at me strangely.

“Can I give you my number? I’m not much for girls’ nights. Maybe text me when you get off and we could hang out or something. We have some catching up to do,” she said.

I took the number and she disappeared into the loud din of the bar. For some reason, the hollow laughter of the crowd at the door didn’t make me feel so lonely that night.

I got off early and met up with Kelly in Canton Square a few hours later. We walked until our feet hurt and we reached the waterfront somewhere east of Fells Point. She told me she hated law school. I teased her about dropping out like me. We talked about high school and all the things we missed. We joked about parties and hook-ups and college. We laughed about the first time she came down to visit me at Georgetown with Natalie and passed out on the steps of my dorm. The conversation ended with Natalie’s name, and we didn’t say anything else. Kelly was Natalie’s best friend since childhood, but she knew better than to bring her up to me.

She didn’t mention the cheating, the humiliation, or the four happiest years of my life I learned to drown in bottles of cheap whiskey. She didn’t ask about why I ran from Georgetown with only a year left. She didn’t ask why I joined the Marines. She didn’t ask me anything about Afghanistan or Tyler or the bloody little leg that haunted me every night.

It was the loudest silence of my life.

We listened to the quiet ripple of the waves. I wanted to reach over and hold her hand, but I was scared. She was gorgeous and soft and beautifully complicated. I was scarred and dead and hollow. I looked down at my hands, and they gave a soft tremble.

Kelly noticed the tremor, and we both looked away. In a few tender moments, I felt a shy hand reach over hesitantly and close around mine. Her

skin was gentle and smooth when it rubbed against the harsh webbing of my thumb. I felt her pulse against mine and tried not to think of blood. After a while, we interlocked our hands and I prayed she didn't feel the callus on my trigger finger.

We looked out and watched the soft orange of glowing lights flicker and dance in the water.

I didn't think about anything but that soft, forgiving hand.

That night, I dreamt about the first time I met Tyler.

"...PFC Matthias, you're billeted over there with Second Platoon. Oh yeah, welcome to Camp Lejeune."

I shiver in the North Carolina frost and throw my sea bag over my back. I make my way somberly towards the barracks and someone leads me to our squad bay. Most of the platoon is on leave for the weekend. The room is large and empty. I see rows of racks with green bedding. Lockers. Mess kits. I choose an empty rack halfway down the right side and start unpacking. Three pairs of BDUs, underwear, socks, and a few books spill onto the bed.

"Hemingway, huh? They give you that at SOI?"

I look up. The guy looks a couple years older than me. His eyes are sharp and intimidating and he has two jagged scars across on his cheek and forehead. He scans my modest collection of books.

"No, Corporal," I say.

"Didn't think so. I'm a fan, though. Took a few with me on the last tour. Hemingway was a hard motherfucker," he says.

He sticks out his hand. "I'm Corrigan, man. Tyler Corrigan."

He speaks with a laconic Appalachian drawl straight from the mountains of North Carolina.

I give it a firm shake. "Matthias...Danny."

He chuckles. "Ah, so you're the dropout. We've been hearing about you. GW or something, right?" he asks.

"Georgetown," I say.

"Nice. I'm about to finish up at UNC after this next tour. Good to see I'm not the only lost college boy in this platoon. Other than the lieutenant, of course," he laughs.

He takes a seat on the rack next to mine and leans back.

"Was it the money? That's what got me," he says.

"No, not really."

I look down. He stares at me curiously.

"Oh my God. Don't tell me it was a fucking girl, man," Tyler says.

"Yep."

"How long were you with her?"

"Four years or so."

We spend most of the afternoon and early evening in the squad bay. He tells me about the mountains, about growing up shooting squirrels and fucking girls in the bed of his truck. He tells me about Eileen, his high school sweetheart and now fiancé. I ask about the scars on his face.

“This one’s from my brother. He cracked me with the back of Dad’s hunting rifle when I was sixteen. And this one,” he points to the ugly line on his cheek, “this one is from Fallujah. Some hajji tossed a grenade into our CP on the third day, almost blew my fucking head off,” he says.

We sit in silence for a few moments while I ponder my fate. He notices this and tries to change the subject.

“So, what’s Baltimore like?” he asks.

“I don’t know, just like anywhere else, I guess,” I lie. He smiles. For some reason he seems to read me better than most people.

“Bullshit. Come on, give me something. How’d you make it out?” he says. I hesitate before speaking.

“I’m not sure, really. I flipped dope and coke like most kids in the neighborhood. But I was always better at school than pushing. Actually, I sold to a narc once when I was seventeen. The judge looked at my school transcript and said he would dismiss the case if I promised to get my shit together. So I did. I ended up at Georgetown with a full scholarship.”

“And how the fuck did you wind up here again? You dropped out of school because of your ex?”

“I don’t know, man. We were going to get married. My life was set. After she cheated on me and we broke up, I started getting drunk. Missed classes. I thought it would be good to get away. Travel the world, meet interesting people, and kill them, right?” I say. I laugh unconvincingly and he doesn’t return the sentiment. His face suddenly grows serious and he leans forward to look me in the eyes.

“Run as fast as you want. But either here or Afghanistan, that personal shit’s gonna follow you. We deploy in four months. If you keep holding onto her, you’re get yourself or one of your buddies killed. Trust me. You’re a dead man walking.”

It takes a long time for me to understand exactly what he means.

Kelly and I slept together a few weeks after our night at the waterfront. We came home late from a date in Fed Hill. She clasped her hand in mine and yanked me into my bedroom. We faced each other in the dim yellow light of my desk lamp and her fingers tugged at my t-shirt, trying to pull it off. I gently brushed her hands away. I haven’t been naked in front of another person since my old squad stripped off our body armor and BDUs and jumped in a stagnant, fetid swimming pool at an abandoned rec center a few clicks east of Kandahar. We splashed around in the murky green water until my bare ass brushed something soft and furry. I turned to see a dead, decaying dog floating in the water behind me. I screamed profanities and jumped out of the pool. Fritzger and the boys pointed and laughed at me, naked and jumping up and down to

get the slime of rotting carcass off me. They pushed the dog aside and waded to the deep end.

The feel of Kelly's hands rubbing my back and thighs brought me back to the present. She laid me down on the bed and did most of the work. I burned when I was inside her and let my rough hands scour every inch of her. She had a little mole on her breast, like Natalie. I thought about the first time Natalie and I slept together, after some frat party my freshman year. I tried to shake the image, and before I knew it, we were laying side by side, panting and glistening in the ugly light from the nightstand. Kelly curled up next to me and whispered something sweet in my ear, but I could barely hear her over the sound of Nat's moans in my head.

"What's wrong?" Kelly asks. I turn my head to face the window.

"Nothing."

"Danny, you can talk to me," she says.

"I know."

After the first time, we started to see each other more regularly. After we finished, Kelly would drift off to sleep in my arms and I would lie awake until dawn because I didn't want to dream. We got drunk together one night and her intoxicating warmth lulled me back to Afghanistan. I woke up screaming and slick with sweat and headed to the bathroom. Kelly cried against the locked bathroom door while I vomited and curled up on the floor.

"Please Danny! Please just talk to me! Just tell me what happened. Tell someone," she pleaded between sobs. I didn't respond. I lurched and gagged until I emptied my stomach into the toilet. She grew quieter after I flushed the toilet. I leaned my head against the cold of the door. I could hear her breathing heavily on the other side. I just wanted to open the door, but I couldn't. I couldn't let her see me like this.

"Sometimes it's like you're a dead man walking," she whispers quietly on the other side. I clench my jaw and feel the anger rise from my gut. I stand up and rip open the door hard enough to bend the hinges. She has her weight pressed against the wood and falls forward onto the tile when it opens.

"What the *fuck* did you just say?!"

She looks up at me from the floor. Her eyes widen and she looks scared and confused.

"Danny," she says, pleading with me. I can't feel anything but rage.

"*Get out!* Just get the fuck out of my house!"

I have killed human beings, and I have never felt more regret or shame than I did in the hours after she left.

A week later, I called Kelly and apologized for an hour and a half. I clutched the phone so hard my hands shook and my knuckles were white.

"Look, just come to DC with me. I'll explain everything. Please...*please*."

She hesitated on the other end of the line. I could hear her deep, nervous breaths.

"Okay, Danny. Okay."

She never asked me where we were going, even when we passed DC and

headed into Northern Virginia the next day. She just held my hand in silence.

I pulled into the visitor parking lot of Arlington National Cemetery and walked with her in silence to Tyler's grave.

She asked me about him, and I began to speak.

"I always hear the fucking radio first," I said.

"This is Two-One. We have critical wounded. We need fire support."

Fritz shakes me to clear my head and pulls me through the hamlet until we reach a ditch at the end. Plessy and the others take cover and meet us on the other side after the mortars stop. I can't speak and sit in a daze until shouting brings me back.

"Matthias! Get the fuck up and move!" Plessy yells.

The thirteen of us sprint across a small field until the sound of gunfire is all around me and I choke on the stench of death and smoke. I see Sgt. Logan and first squad firing from a drainage ditch. I only count twelve men.

We move from cover to cover until we reach them. I huddle near Plessy and Logan as they talk and scan the faces for Tyler. Then I hear it.

"Corrigan is hit, behind that fence by the second ditch. We can't reach him unless you can give us more shooters," Logan says.

I want to gag and I feel so dizzy I think I might pass out.

Plessy looks at us and points to me and three others.

"We'll lay down a base of fire and you four are gonna move up until you can get to Corrigan."

I close my eyes, and when I open them I can't feel anything. I clear the breach on my rifle. Plessy counts down from three, and the staccato is so loud that I don't hear anything after that. I don't see Fritz get hit. I don't feel the whiz of bullets passing my head. I don't feel my legs pumping or my lungs screaming for oxygen. I don't feel passion or remorse when I bring my rifle up, sight in on a target, and shoot a man four times in the chest.

I find Tyler's limp body in a ditch by the fence. His face looks pale and gaunt. The pool of blood underneath him has already begun to sink into the loose soil. The right side of his neck is ripped open and I can hear his lungs wheezing. I feel warm blood pulsing weakly against my palm as I tried to cover the hole. I scramble for gauze and see a faint glint of life in his eyes when he recognizes me. He begins to move his lips. I hold my ear next to his face until I could make out syllables between his raspy breaths. He repeats the same two words five times before I lose his pulse.

"Stop running."

He dies in my arms, and I cry like a fucking baby. I cry for Natalie. I cry for the little boy, I cry for Tyler. I cry for myself.

I think about the last time I saw Natalie and I scream above the gunfire. I remember walking into my apartment to moans. The sheets were rustling. I watched her yank the soft, wrinkled cotton above her pale breasts and saw

another man in my bed. I left. I got drunk. I got in a bar fight. I spent the night in a bathroom stall with my phone turned off. When I came back in the morning there was a scribbled note on the counter.

I'm sorry we weren't strong enough. I hope you find something else. I love you.

Just like that, she was gone. So was I.

I look down at my hands stained red from thick blood.

A few months after we rotate back to North Carolina, Tyler's wife calls and tells me he has willed \$25,000 of his GI insurance so I can go back to Georgetown. I use the money to buy a shitty apartment on Fait Avenue in East Baltimore.

Kelly reached over and grasped the hand that had felt Tyler's last heartbeat. The hand that had killed. The hand that had wasted two chances at life. The hand that I now feared only remembered how to fire a rifle. She clutched it like we were eighteen and innocent again.

We cried for a long time in that parking lot. When we were done, Kelly asked me if I wanted to go look around Georgetown.

I said yes.

We slept together that night and I didn't dream at all.

Apple Juice | Nick Meriwether

I look in the rearview mirror and watch Becca flip a red Hot Wheels car back and forth in her tiny hands. I can tell she's already jittery from Saturday morning cartoons and the ice cream I gave her as a special treat. She sits on a stack of magazines in the back seat of my beat-up Oldsmobile. Becca is only four, but she's already singing and kicking her little legs to hip hop beats on the radio. I don't let her say curse words, but it's still funny to watch her bob her head to the sweet gangsta rap lullabies.

The car muffler is broken and it makes an ugly sputtering sound that drowns out the radio. I don't have the money to fix the muffler. I don't even have the money to keep my daughter.

"Daddy, where are we going?" she asks.

"Uncle Tommy's, baby. Then we're going to the park later to see Mommy," I say.

She makes a pouty face and looks down at her toy car. I sigh and roll down the window to light a cigarette. My hands are shaking. I take a long drag and stick my arm out the window to make sure no wisps of gray smoke drift to the backseat.

"No smoking!" Becca shouts. She opens her palm and stretches her arm forward.

I laugh and reach for a dime from the stack of change in the cup holder. I turn and place it in her hand. She gives me a wide, gap-toothed grin and I notice brown curls of hair spilling over her forehead. She looks just like her mom, Christy. I think about the first time we brought her home from Hopkins Bayview. I remember the three of us just standing there in my mom's basement, smiling together.

"This is the last pack, I promise," I say

"You always say that. Mommy says you'll never stop," she says.

I grit my teeth. Christy is talking to her about me again.

"I don't see you complaining, babe. You're gonna be rich soon," I say. I turn and give Becca another dime. Her eyes light up and she giggles. Her voice is warm and I feel a lump in my throat when I look back at her.

We crest Eastern Avenue and drive towards O'Donnell. It's a hot, sticky August in Baltimore and the dope fiends and working stiffs are already on the street. I see some of the familiar corner boys and old junkies sitting on stoops when I drive into O'Donnell Heights. Some of them recognize my car and nod when I drive by.

We come to a stoplight and an SUV full of tatted white thugs pulls up alongside us. They glare at me and look at the tattoos on my arms. I stare back. My right forearm reads "6500 CARDIFF" in thick black letters and I have "LOYALTY" tattooed down my left. The driver notices Becca in the back. He gives a subtle nod and looks away.

I'm only twenty-three, but I feel like an old man when I come back here. A few years ago we fought, drank, and flipped dope on these corners. Now I wear long sleeved work shirts to a shitty union job and feel like a stranger in this neighborhood. I glance back at Becca. She is looking at the dark stubble on my face and rubbing her smooth cheeks to feel for hair. I smile and try not to think about losing her.

I pull up to Tommy's house a few blocks away. Becca unbuckles herself and I lift her down to the hot sidewalk. She grabs a pack of dull crayons and a wrinkled sheet of paper from the back. I watch her hop between the cracks and stomp her sneakers on the ground.

"Careful, babe. Don't scuff your shoes," I say. I bought her those pink sneakers with part of my rent money. Becca waddles over and reaches up to grasp my hand. She curls her tiny fingers in my palm. I pray she won't feel the calluses from pipe burns at the Local 47 steamfitters union. I help her up the stoop and Tommy greets us at the door.

Tommy is wearing a dirty white t-shirt and sports the same neighborhood tattoos as me. His clothes stink like grease and motor oil from the body shop where he just worked a double shift. He smiles when he sees Becca and gives me a hug. We walk into a cluttered living room and take a seat on the couch. The house is sparse and I can see clothes on the floor.

"You want a drink?" he asks.

"Apple juice!" Becca says. I nod. Tommy goes into the kitchen and comes out with three glasses. One of the drinks is flat brown and the two others have the thin, foamy head of cheap beer. He places them on the table and Becca leans over to smell mine.

"Daddy, what are you drinking?" she asks.

Tommy looks at me. I pat her shoulder.

"Apple juice, babe."

I place the crayons and paper next to her glass. I pick up the remote and flip through channels until I find the bright colors and loud squeals of Nickelodeon.

"Becca, I have to talk to Uncle Tommy for a few minutes. I'll be right back," I say.

She frowns and looks down at her crayons. I walk with Tommy into the kitchen. We each take a few sips before talking. I can see Becca pick up a yellow crayon in the other room and I look over at the dirty, pizza-stained dishes in the sink.

"What's going on?" Tommy asks.

I take a gulp of beer to calm my nerves.

"Christy's taking Becca tomorrow. They're going to live with her parents down in North Carolina," I say. Tommy looks shocked.

"Jesus Christ, man. I thought you settled this shit at the custody hearing," he says.

"We're not married. With my record I'm lucky I got weekends."

"You gave up fuckin' college for her, man. Isn't there anything you can

do?” Tommy asks.

I sigh and look to the other room.

“I told her I’d get the money for a good pre-school, a Catholic one. But it’s fucking fifteen hundred to enroll. So I asked for more shifts down at the Local. They won’t OK it until I get my certification. I can’t even sell the goddamn car,” I say.

I watch the grimace spread across Tommy’s face. We don’t say anything for a few moments. The high-pitched squeals of Spongebob echo from the living room. I look down at the bubbles in my beer. I want to melt to the floor.

“I told Christy I’d get her the money today. Look...I’ve known you since we were kids, Tommy. She’s your goddaughter. Can you help me out, man?”

I can hear the shame in my own voice. Tommy sighs and brings his hand to his face. I already know the answer. The TV blares animal noises and we hear Becca laugh at brief intervals.

“I...I don’t have it, Mikey. I’m sorry, man. I’m so sorry,” he says.

I give him a slow nod and take another sip. The beer fizzes and tastes like piss when it touches my lips.

“What about Ronnie?” Tommy asks.

I shake my head.

“You know I don’t do that shit anymore.”

“He could lend you the money, man. I know things ended bad, but it’s worth a shot,” Tommy says.

I see movement and look over. Becca is standing in the doorway with a crumpled picture of a yellow square dangling from her little fingers.

“Daddy, can we go to the aquarium tomorrow?”

My breath gets heavy and I feel sick in my guts.

“Yeah, babe.”

I don’t say anything in the car and keep the radio off. Becca sits in the back and admires her Spongebob drawing. It’s getting cooler now and the sidewalks aren’t sizzling anymore. I light another cigarette and watch groups of young men laughing on the corners. Ronnie tells me to meet him in Armistead Gardens near Erdman Avenue. Armistead isn’t as rough as the Heights, but people like Ronnie make a lot of money slinging dope and pills to the burnouts and single moms in the ugly houses there. We pull up next to a run-down pit beef shack across Erdman and I check my phone for a text. Becca asks where we are. I tell her I’m getting her a surprise. We wait a few minutes and she races her toy car across the canyons of dirty upholstery in the backseat.

“Yo there he is! What’s up, Mike?” I hear a raspy voice shout from a few yards away. Ronnie looks the same as the last time I saw him three years ago. He was in the back of a police cruiser with a cheap collared shirt and a gold chain covering the tattoos on his neck. He is short and walks with a limp. I notice the distinctive glass bottle scars on his face and head when he comes up to the window and shakes my hand.

“What up, Ronnie?” I say.

Ronnie leans in closer and notices Becca in the backseat.

“Hey, look who’s all grown up. You remember your Uncle Ronnie?” he says.

Becca shakes her head. She looks scared.

“Daddy, is this the surprise?” she asks.

“No, sweetheart,” I say. I look at Ronnie.

“We need to talk, man.”

“Yeah, bro. Let’s talk,” he says with a smile. He motions for me to follow him inside the dirty bar and grill. I look at Becca and decide to bring her along.

The place is loud and bustling. All around, people are chattering about the heat wave that I hope will roast East Baltimore and burn it to ashes. We sit at a booth with barbecue stains and napkins everywhere. I grab a few and find one of Becca’s blue crayons in my pocket. She curls up close to me and I put my arm around her while she colors blue figures on the crinkled paper. Ronnie leans forward.

“So, I ain’t seen you in a long time, brother. How you doing with the union?”

“It’s hard, man. But it’s decent work. Not like back in the day,” I say. He smiles, but his eyes seem colder than I remember.

“How are you and Christy?”

“I moved out a while ago. We were fighting a lot. Wasn’t good for Becca,” I say. He nods.

“So, what brings you up here?”

“I need your help, man. I’m a little strapped right now,” I say quietly. I nod towards Becca, who is now hunched over the napkin. He purses his lips and leans back. He knows what I want.

“How much do you need?” he says.

“Fifteen hundred.”

Ronnie looks me up and down. He glances at my hair, long since grown out from the buzz cuts I sported when we did coke runs out to Dundalk. His eyes move down to my forearms and he inspects my old tattoos.

“That’s a lot of fucking money, Mikey. You’d have to put in some work for that. Flip a few packages down in Dundalk, maybe,” he says.

I clench my jaw and look down at Becca. She nudges me and slides the napkin over so I can see it. She has drawn two blue stick figures with crude faces and written “DADDY” and “ME” under them. She smiles at me with Christy’s same pretty, warm face.

I don’t say anything for a few moments. I feel Becca’s little hand reach over and clasp mine. Another lump forms in my throat and I swallow hard before speaking.

“You know I don’t do that anymore, Ron,” I say. His eyes grow menacing and he clenches his fist.

“What the fuck do you want, then, Mikey? First it was the college thing. Then you thought you were too good for us because you knocked up that whore, and now you want a free fuckin’ handout?” he says. I stare Ronnie in

the eyes and pull Becca in close.

“Don’t ever talk like that in front of my kid.”

Ronnie glares back at me for a few seconds, then stands up and pushes the table back. I stand and pull Becca out of the booth.

“I do two years on a coke charge for you and Tommy and you have the nerve to come ask me for money? And now you come up here and tell me how I can talk. Go hide behind your kid before I fucking kill you,” Ronnie says.

He shoves me in the chest and I fall back a few steps. Becca screams and grabs my leg. I look down at her for a few moments, then turn to face Ronnie.

“Fuck you,” I say. I ball my fist and punch Ronnie hard enough to hear an ugly crack from his nose. He stumbles backward and covers his face with his hands. I see fat drops of blood drip in dark puddles on the floor. Becca screams loudly and buries her face in my jeans.

Ronnie reaches in his pocket and I see the glint of a knife when he brings his hand up. He swaggers toward me with blood pouring from his nose. I back towards the door with Becca behind me. Someone grabs Ronnie from behind, and I use the opportunity to pick up Becca and bolt out the door.

I listen to the sound of Becca’s sobs from the backseat and grip the steering wheel so hard my knuckles tremble and turn white.

“It’s okay, hon. I’m so sorry. It’s okay, now,” I say.

My voice is hollow and unconvincing.

She doesn’t say anything, just curls up in the corner and lets tears stream down her pale cheek while she looks out the window. I pull over in a parking lot and get out. I open the back door and lean in to pick Becca up. She cowers away from me and scoots to the other side.

“You hurt that man,” she says between sobs.

“I know, babe, but he was going to hurt us. I had to,” I say.

She turns her head and faces the window. I walk to the trunk and pull out a small box with Spongebob wrapping paper. The paper is ripped and frayed. I haven’t wrapped a gift in a long time.

I walk over and get in the backseat with her. She still doesn’t look at me.

“Becca, I got your surprise,” I say.

She stares out the window and I can see her face is still wet with tears.

“I don’t want it. I want to go see Mommy now,” she says.

I sit back in the seat and feel my eyes well up. A tear streaks down my face and I want to throw up. We sit for a several minutes in silence. Becca looks over and sees me crying for the first time. I feel her hand reach over to hold mine.

“Daddy, why are you crying?” she asks.

I sniff and wipe my face.

“I love you so much, sweetie. I’d do anything for you,” I say.

She scoots over and I hold her tiny body in my arms. I think about an empty backseat and how cold it will be tomorrow.

Christy is already waiting on a bench in Federal Hill when we walk up

with ice cream cones. We hop over cracks and drip creamy puddles on the hot sidewalk. Becca dangles her new Barbie doll from her free hand. I look up at Christy. She is wearing tight jeans and her brown hair shimmers in the spots of sunlight under an oak tree. She stands. Becca squeals and runs over to hug her mother.

“Hey, you’re early,” she says with Becca wrapped around her legs.

“So are you.”

She motions for me to sit on the bench with her. Becca sees a flock of pigeons and runs towards them. They flutter up and away in a brilliant explosion of gray wings. Christy and I chuckle. We turn to look out at the Inner Harbor and we see the skyline of the whole city. I look down at the harbor below us and see the bright reflections of downtown high-rises bobbing in the waves. I turn my head east and see the shipping terminals and factories belching white smoke over the skies of O’Donnell Heights, Sparrow’s Point, and Dundalk.

“Do you remember that night when I was pregnant, you brought me up here?” she asks.

“Yeah,” I say softly.

I do. We were nineteen and I loved her more than anything. I told her we were going to build a family in this city. I pointed to the smoke in the east, then towards the fancy townhouses around us in Fed Hill. I told her one day we would have enough money to live here and take walks to the park with Becca after school. I choked on the lie.

“Look, Mike, I don’t want to fight about the money anymore. Have you thought about it?” she asks. I gaze back out at the city, then turn and look into the deep green of her eyes.

“I want her to have a good life. Both of you,” I say.

Christy reaches over and touches my arm softly. I notice her hand is covering the tattoo of my old block.

Becca comes over and asks us to play tag with her. For about ten minutes, we laugh and run through the trees in the park. Becca tags me and I run after her. When she hides behind a tree, I sprint towards Christy and touch her arm. She gives that familiar, warm smile I remember from my rearview mirror. Becca runs over and hugs both of us around the knees.

“Daddy, are we still going to the aquarium tomorrow?” she asks.

Christy looks at me and I can see tears forming in her eyes. I pull her in close so the three of us are holding each other. I feel their warmth against mine and breathe in.

“Yeah, sweetie.”

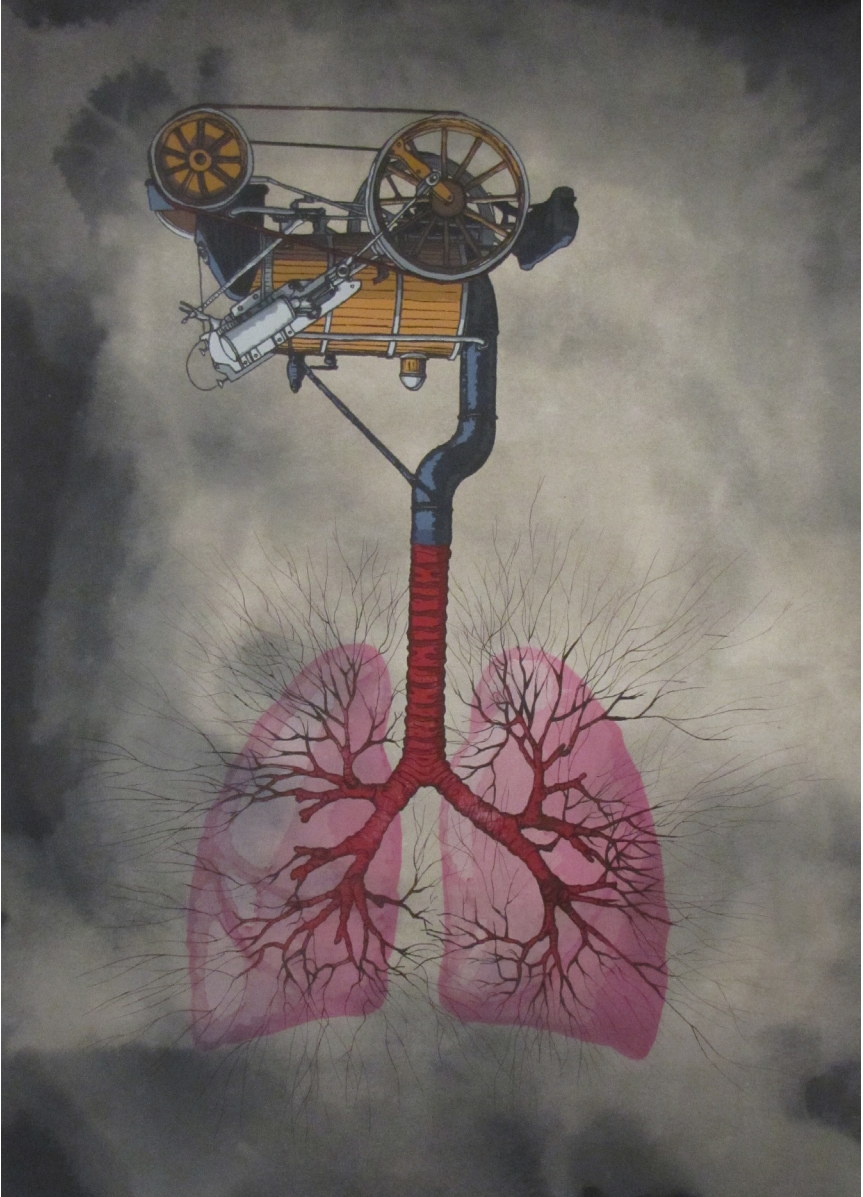
I go home to an empty apartment and open the refrigerator. There is a stack of cold beer next to a half-empty carton. I close the door and look at Becca’s wrinkled napkin on the counter. There are three stick figures on the paper, not two. The third one says “MOMMY” and all three are holding hands.

I pour myself a glass of apple juice.

Art



"Save Our Libraries"
Ingrid Berbery
Photograph (8.5" x 11")



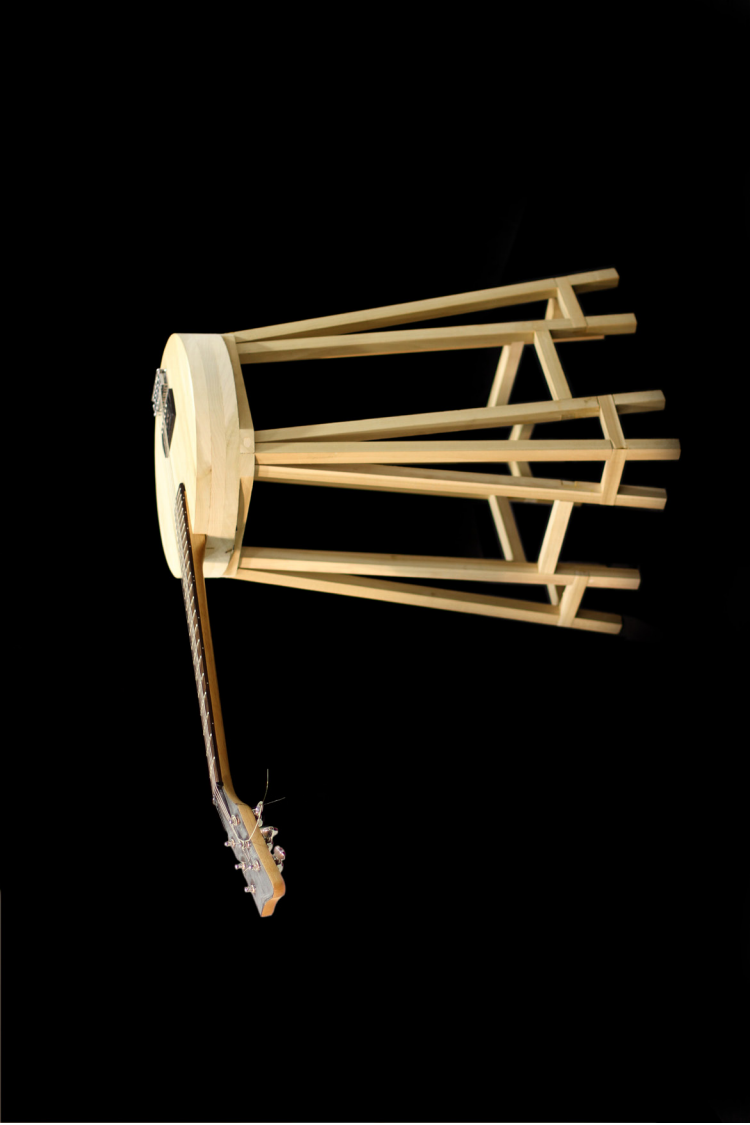
"Organ"
Theodore Denman-Brice
Screen print and ink pen (21" x 30")



"Tenants Harbor"
Sheila Bell
Etching (8" x 8.5")



"Pure"
Dorsa Afsharjavan
Digital photograph (8" x 10")



"Sitar"
Ian McDermott
Poplar, Misc. Electronics, A Person (3' x 1' x 2.5')



"Beckon"
Maila Dyson
Wood, branches (7' x 20' x 1', across three walls)



"Perception"
Bingjie Leng
Wood-cut relief print (2'1.5" x 7.5")



"We Are Not Bees"
Becca Goodman
Oil and acrylic on canvas (60" x 96")



"Rachel"
Eun Jeon
Oil on canvas (24" x 36")

Cabrini Art Award

The Cabrini Art Award is an art contest conducted by *Stylus* and judged by our talented art editor, Annie Pi. The Cabrini Art Award winners were selected from a pool of submissions that the editors collectively voted on as finalists for the award. Annie Pi then determined the three winners based on a point system meant to objectively score each piece on artistic merit.

The Stylus Cover Art Award is a separate contest judged by the art editor, layout editor, and editor-in-chief. The cover contest gives an artist the opportunity to have their artwork featured as the cover design for the journal. The specifications for the cover contest were tailored to represent this issue's theme, tone, and mood. The art submission that best represented these aspects of this year's artwork and writing was awarded the honor of cover design.

All art submitted to *Stylus* for publication was considered for both the Cabrini Art Award and Stylus Cover Art Award.

1st Place



"Let Go"

Becca Goodman

Installation: Athletic field paint on grass. (10,000 sq. ft.)

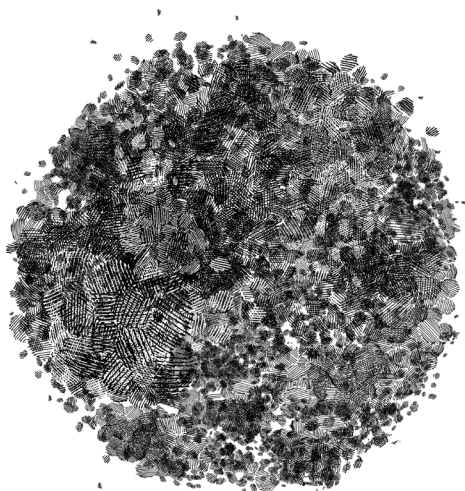
Photograph: Silver Gelatin print (dry mounted). (20" x 30")

2nd Place



"Patchwerk Cube"
Theodore Denman-Brice
Assorted wood segments and iron grate (20" x 22" x 24")

3rd Place



"Marks"

Kevin Gomes

Screenprint on Revere paper (16" x 22")

Poetry

Open | Mark Stubenberg

The counselor says
To say *ahhh*, and I show
A rickety wooden staircase
Descending
To my esophagus

He smiles
Snaps a glove on
Walks his fingers down there
Like a little man
Listening to the creaks
Of the steps

It hurts when I swallow, I choke out
It may for a while, he responds

Cultural Studies |

Brendan Edward Kennedy

For a girl I would never meet,
she had the most wonderful breasts I had ever seen—
made up with red petals stenciled around the areolae,
two big roses with stems snaking into the deep
between them and up her slender neck,
a pair of industrial studs piercing the nipples,
linked together by a fine steel chain
and she held them, large and pale
in her hands, her cherry-lacquered fingernails
dimpling the smooth of their curves just hard enough
to part her five-alarm lips in silent O.

Someone brushed up behind me and
I shut the girl back up in the tattoo book she came from,
shelved her somewhere, and calmly
walked away from the Cultural Studies aisle
of the White Marsh Barnes & Noble.

The Dancer |

Brendan Edward Kennedy

She could easily watusi, two-step,
or foxtrot all over her apartment,
maybe even sing a few bars of a showtune
to break the late hour's silence
but she sticks to a spot between the kitchen table
and the loveseat, whispering
one two three four
one two three four

maybe for the neighbors' sake
or out of concentration
or reverence to the empty rooms
once kept by friends now scattered
by graduation.

Her right foot in the wrong place on the off-beat,
she stops the count,
breathes,
and resumes.

Were I there with her tonight
instead of my many elsewheres,
I would be on that makeshift dancefloor
not dancing, but misstepping
so she could teach me the patience
to move alone in one place.

Pillow Talk |

Brendan Edward Kennedy

Lady, for you
I want to take a Steinway and obliterate it
with the clumsy judgment of a Louisville Slugger—

Or, maybe, if the Slugger won't do,
I might use the dusty sledgehammer
my Dad keeps out back in his shed.

Regardless, I promise you
I will pulverize that piano—
trust me, it will not *be*
once I have that Slugger
or sledgehammer in my hands, splintering its hood,
slamming blows onto the chords much,
much harder than Beethoven or Liszt or
even Rachmaninov's fingers could ever pound them—
I will snap them, twang them in twain,
clang all of my swing into the soundboard,
though I will hardly dent that thing
as it is steel, but the clang, yes,
THE CLANG will be enough
and I will try my first cigarette

and I will hate my first cigarette

and I will flick the not-even-half-spent cigarette
into the coffin of the Steinway, whereupon it will explode
as I will have poured a liberal quantity of gasoline into it.

At this point you will have walked through
your apartment door, fear-eyed and wondering aloud
as to why there is a bombed-out piano in your living room
and I will nudge my weapon of choice
under your smoldering sofa,
roll up what remains of the piano wire,
grab some of the shattered ivories
like broken teeth from out of your carpet,
kiss your screaming mouth and,

by the light of your apartment ablaze,
suggest we make each other necklaces.

I can't grow things |

Anika Warner

I can't grow things. I plant seeds in the earth and they shrivel when they touch the soil. I water flowers and they wilt and wither. Even unripened fruit stays sour and hard for me. I can't grow things. So I wasn't surprised when nothing sprouted inside me. When a seed did take, I got scared and nipped it in the bud before there was too much to do and too much at stake. I asked my store-bought spinach leaves "why can't I grow things?" and they whispered "self fulfilling prophecy!" I'm not sure about all that. What I do know, is that I can't grow things.

The Lowering | Charles Zhuang

I did not say goodbye—not even
when his body was lowered,
the frame, in black, a fallen tree,
his departure, a mountain on its knees.

Route 1 | Charles Zhuang

There, as if asleep, fuming steam off its face, the car
rested on the side of the road, one wheel down, flat.
The rubber, airless, sagged like the tired breast
of an exhausted mother, done feeding, leaning
to the curb. You will find me here,
observing the damages, holding
a hub cap in hand. I am
at this part of town where the asphalt
is peeled. Where high rises
and cranes pin the sky, imitating
in a way, the obelisks
of ruins, especially
in the setting sun. The only thing
that stands apart
are the pedestrians who walk
to the liquor stores and gas stations, laughing
amongst themselves—the way pilgrims do
when travelling.

Double Vision | Codi Gugliuzza

when we were in high school
my friend and I started smoking,
pack a day, fingers shaking
with excitement for the first puff.
we would sit outside and laugh
at the cross-dressers and girls
that dyed their hair unnatural colors.
we went to house parties and ate
the limes out of other people's drinks
because they gave an extra smack.

when we were in high school
my friend and I [hated] smoking,
ugly smell, dangerous addiction
from the first light on.
we would sit inside and wonder
about being boys and wear t-shirts
splashed with tie-dye.
we made [our own] parties with seven
layer bean dip, watching b-movies,
marker drawings on our bodies.

Vacations | Ted Sim

a new magnet
sticks
upon a white fridge.

white
Welcome to Wisconsin
white

L'esprit de L'escalier |

Allison Gibeily

When it rains, every inch of air is moving.
A drop falls oblong through layers, forcing
space to push down and in—closer to each other
until we're inhaling liquid and you

sound like you're drowning.
One time you said you were scared shitless
of the sound of your future—the white
humming of hollow expectation

so I asked you what you loved. Back then
there was snow on the streets
of South Philly and the air smelled like urine
and dried my two lungs to paper.

But I breathed in anyway and it choked me
to listen—you said somehow
something was missing but I couldn't stand to look
and you do everything for someone but I wouldn't hear who.

When you held me last, the drops were warm and
ebbed a space in my skin until it swelled to a river.
You asked what it meant to love, but the streets had melted
and I was already immersed, out of breath.

Afternoons | Allison Gibeily

Just seven, sitting perched tall on a pinewood dressing table
too small to see my Teta's green eyes from the vinyl floor.
She smells foreign, sauntering with the spice of fasolia
and the chemical lemon of the acetone she used
to clean my nails, now painted sticky-red
ready to dictate a world of what to play with next.

I choose Popeye the Sailor Man on VHS
recorded the old-fashioned way on Saturday
morning television, commercials included
which could have been fast-forwarded if
the ancient set had more than a dial to choose.
I sat through them on couches covered with blankets
and blankets covering me, drying my ten tiny paintings.

When it's done, I walk up stairs and feel the crumbs gather
on the soles of my feet, remember where I could be.
I find Teta in the kitchen, cooking too much for just me.
I ask her why, but her wise crippled hands
with lines deeper than I can see give no answer.
She looks at me, I take a bowl of green beans.

November | Meg Sawyer

This table is far too small
to support such dysfunctional
shit. Billy rambles on
about his hamster wheel for dogs.
His hand won't stop grazing
my sister's leg.
The gravy is cold, it's been sitting
too long. The top layer curdles
into a film of stretched skin.
The house smells
of something like nature,
wood and sweat.
I can taste it in my wine.
My cheeks feel flushed,
and I fix my eyes
on the crook in the table.
Aunt Vicky makes a toast
to my dead grandmother.
She cries. She tells a story
she can't remember.
Her Greek seems thick
when I'm drunk.
I don't think my grandmother
cared for her much.

Pa's Room | Meg Sawyer

His chair faces a window,
dregs of weeds and patches
of green. The air in the nursing home
is sanitized but sickly, and it smells
of something like lavender soap.
The room is cold and anonymous,
with tiled floors, and curtains
the color of sand.

Pa stares down at his newspaper,
hands shriveled and shaking,
watching the words,
little ants marching across the page.
His food falls in crumbs,
littering his chest. Drops of milk
rest on the creases in his lips.

A sweater engulfs his body
swallowing his frame like a boy
playing in his father's closet.
And it's strange how infantile
he's become. His eyes disappointed,
watered and confused.

When will you be coming back?
He surrenders an empty sigh
and shuffles, fragile, to the window,
his body shrinking.

I image his bones, brittle, grinding,
collapsing upon each other until
they're dust on the floor.
After we leave, I can't bring myself to call.
I worry he'll pick up, I won't know
what to say. But leaving him there,
in that heavy wool sweater
crumbling and forgotten
is worse.

Maiden name Conroy |

Emily Voelker

It is a warm Fall day that could be Spring,
and the air smells nice now.
There is Earl Grey tea in it,
and perhaps pretty little shaped soaps, like scallop shells and baby Jesuses
and flowers,
slipping through the window to smell like my grandmother.

It settles around recollections of figurines and crucifixes made of faint
ceramic,
recalling potpourri, warm dust, and poor Irish cooking.
Through the creak of photo albums and floorboards under trampled down
carpet,
my grandmother sits and fears God,
and taxes,
and makes quiet, dry jokes about death.

A Brown Spot | Dylan Bargteil

My best friend was a mortar man. Now he's a machine gunner.
The United States Marine Corps killed 1,400 pigs this year.
They shoot the pigs with shotguns and rifles
to train infantry in triage. I imagine that means
trying to hold the pig's guts in, trying to stop the blood
like plugging a hole in a dam with your finger.
My friend said maybe he learned something from it, he doesn't know.

I had a dream that he was out on patrol and was shot
in the belly by a sniper. I dreamed his skin—
a plastic bag from a grocer, broken open
from the weight of the fruit inside. The plums tumbling
out. My hand instinctively reaches for them falling through
the air. They bruise so easily.

Desert Animals |

Maria Zilberman

More cream than camel-colored,
they kick at his knees until he buckles,
belly smacks against the ground and
rotten brown teeth jut from a mouth that
doesn't cry, but roars as only a desert animal can.

Nothing to echo against, his volume starts
in the stomach and screams its way up,
past the rope that ties his mouth to the ass
of the quiet one sitting in front of him.

A herd of tourists waiting to ride their
humped backs, we take out our cameras
to capture the moment—a cultural experience,
like dissecting an animal, only to learn which fibers
are the nerves that have feeling.

The Crazy Lady in the Shed With a Rake |

Jon Wolper

Mary Valcourt made a habit of watering her plants once a day, as soon as the sun leaned against her fence, and when the reinforcements found her she was on the floor of her shed with a mustard stain on her apron and a steel rake silent next to her open right hand.

“The crazy lady in the shed with a rake,” Bidarski said to Harvey, and a few officers laughed and so did Harvey as he slid his hands into his pockets to try to stop them from shaking so hard. He had made sure to focus on the mustard stain on Mary Valcourt’s apron when he placed a bullet through her throat. *She was coming at me*

and a streak of blood, redder than any blood he’d ever seen, painted the north corner of the shed. The rake clanged to the ground, and Mary Valcourt, who made sure to watch Jeopardy every night and yell at the screen whenever some moron dipped into the red, fell instantly. The Chief had his arm around Harvey and guided him away from the shed. “You all right, son?” he asked, because once when he was a patrolman he had to shoot a 14-year-old child point blank and he understood what it was like.

“Yeah.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah. She was coming at me.”

Bidarski was pretending his night stick was a penis, and the other officers were laughing, and the coroner walked over to Mary Valcourt, who earlier that afternoon told her ex-husband on the phone to go fuck himself you son of a bitch go fuck yourself.

He leaned down and brushed away a spider that was trying to spin a web inside her neck.

Our Shadows Shook the Jasmine Bush | Jon Wolper

“Please keep calm and orderly in the process of this short-term evacuation.”
— April 27, 1986

The babies are snatched from the gridded nursery, their blankets
left
 untucked to rot.
A stuffed lion asphyxiates in the corner.

There was the carnival they would never see,
an acid cloud slipping from the sky. Bumper cars unhinged and treading
 water;
a limbless doll eaten by the road.

The forest advances into the city, unaware,
and yellowed books carpet the floors. Next to a ticket booth, an elephant’s
head
 dangles
by a few stubborn threads.

The children can’t ride the ferris wheel without worrying
about that elephant, its legs shattered in a way that is all too human.

Back Matter

Staff Biographies

Dylan Bargteil, Editor-in-Chief

Dylan Bargteil is a senior physics and math major. He is a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and has been writing poetry and music for several years. He is interested in public and anonymous art activities as well as rebranding science as a creative act.

Adriana Scott, Assistant Editor

Adriana Scott is a sophomore journalism major and creative writing minor. She loves writing fiction and being involved with philanthropy on campus. She enjoys spoken word and supporting other poetry lovers on open mic nights.

Marlena Chertock, Poetry Editor

Marlena Chertock is a junior journalism major and creative writing minor. She is a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. Marlena is also the online editor of *The Writers' Bloc*, the literary newsletter for the Writers' House program. She writes features and news articles, poetry, and creative nonfiction essays (especially disjunctive).

Codi Gugliuzza, Assistant Poetry Editor

Codi Gugliuzza likes wading in the ocean and homemade chili with Fritos. She is currently an English and art double major, creative writing minor, with a personal interest in French language and Italian culture.

Nick Lyle, Prose Editor

Nick Lyle is a senior English major at the University of Maryland and a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. This is his third year working on the *Stylus* prose board, this year as prose editor. In addition to *Stylus*, Nick also works as editor-in-chief of the University of Maryland's premier-by-default satirical newspaper and humor magazine *The Maryland Cow Nipple*.

Maya Montayne, Assistant Prose Editor

Maya Motayne is assistant prose editor of *Stylus* and a first year member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She is a sophomore English and communication double major and will be working on a Chinese minor while studying abroad in China next year. She is also a columnist for the Writers' House monthly newsletter, *The Writers' Bloc*.

Annie Pi, Art Editor

Annie Pi is a junior majoring in English and information systems. She is currently studying abroad in Sweden where she manages the art board in between shopping at IKEA, cooking meatballs, and dancing on her own to Robyn.

Samantha Fleischer, Assistant Art Editor

Samantha Fleischer is a sophomore studio art major.

Carla Lake, Senior Copy Editor

Carla Lake is a senior English major and Spanish minor. She is a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and the Language House, and has been involved with *Stylus* for three years. She aspires to a career in editing.

Jamie Lee, Copy Editor

Jamie Lee is a junior English and journalism double degree student. She does not like writing bios.

Kat Small, Layout Editor

Kat Small is a senior English and Latin double major. She is a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House.

Jenny Hottle, Assistant Layout Editor, Copy Editor

Jenny Hottle is a freshman journalism and Spanish major who would love to be a foreign correspondent or investigative reporter one day. She is also in the Digital Cultures and Creativity Honors Program and a copy editor for *The Diamondback*. When she's not writing or practicing Spanish, Jenny enjoys playing intramural sports, traveling, and learning to play guitar.

Tarsilla Moura, Multilingual Editor

Tarsilla Moura is a junior working towards a BA degree in English and minor in Portuguese. She is involved in several groups on campus, including the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and the English Undergraduate Association. She loves learning new languages, and her next conquests will be, hopefully, French and Italian. She works in the Architecture Library on campus, and she is also a tutor at the Writing Center. She is originally from Brazil and has been in the US for the past six years.

Charles Zhuang, Treasurer

Charles Zhuang is a senior philosophy/computer science major, but he doesn't like talking about either of those subjects. On cold days, you might find him walking around in a black long coat. It's his favorite coat. It's older than him. It has a lot of patches. It's a hand-me-down. It's also a woman's coat.

Contributor Biographies

Dorsa Afsharjavan is a freshman art scholar at the University of Maryland and is majoring in landscape architecture. Dorsa has a great passion for photography, painting, and design. She hopes to one day travel the world and expand her views and skills as an artist.

Sheila Bell is a senior art student in the Art Honors Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Sheila often incorporates elements of her past into her pieces, which reference the ideas of anxiety, quietness, and transition.

Ingrid Berbery is a senior in studio art and Latin American studies. She is interested in social justice and bhakti yoga and has been deeply involved on campus in the Latino Student Union and the Bhagavad Gita club.

Teddy Denman-Brice is a senior studio arts major graduating this May. He recently changed majors from physics, and is often influenced by his previous studies in his current work. Teddy is now a member of the Art Honors Program and is working on his thesis, making large mechanical sculptures and similar screen prints.

Malia Dyson is an art major in her senior year, currently enrolled in the Art Honors Program. Her inspiration comes from biological materials and natural structures. After graduation, Malia plans to continue creating art and travel abroad.

Allison Gibeily is a junior studying English and creative writing at UMD. She likes rain, grey things, and Philip Larkin, the latter of which is the topic of her honors thesis. She also appreciates cynicism, self-deprecation, and all of the other love languages.

Kevin Gomes is an American artist who is an unofficial but natural born arborist who enjoys making art when not climbing things. In his spare time he fights crime and does impressions.

Becca Goodman is a junior at the University of Maryland, where she studies studio art, art history, and chemistry. She is actively pursuing a career in art conservation and restoration. Her work is heavily associated with psychology and is often rooted in her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

Eun Jeon is a junior studio art and art history major. Eun's work can be found at <http://www.eunjeon.com>.

You are **Brendan Edward Kennedy**. Your weakness is puppies. You have had at least one peanut butter sandwich today, statistically speaking. You are the world's second strongest poet. You find the following words particularly pleasing to say: echelon, quaff, haberdasher, subterfuge. You are not the lord of the dance and you should probably stop telling people that. You are an advocate for playing pretend and making believe. You will always be a poet, dammit. You want to read me everything.

Lyla Lawless is a freshman English major who takes writing classes so she can call her procrastination techniques "homework." She also loves photography and making music—if a piano or bass guitar is not available, a grass whistle will do.

Bingjie Leng is currently a senior double-degreeing in neurobiology and studio art. She is fascinated with interdisciplinary links between science and art and enjoys the perspective each field brings. In her spare time, she enjoys painting, printmaking and paper-cutting.

Ian McDermott, better known by his stage name Perth O'duibhdiorma, is an artist and comedian from the DC area. In the past few years he has developed the belief that in a world of intense sensory stimulation, it has become much more interesting to observe the interactions between humans and aesthetic forms than it is to look at the forms themselves.

Nick Meriwether is a sophomore government and politics major from Baltimore, MD. His influences include David Simon, Benjamin Percy, Raymond Carver, Ray Lewis, John Jameson, and Christopher Wallace. Special thanks to Eva, Nina, Peli, Dr. Fitzpatrick, and the residents of 1221.

Jane Ostdiek is a senior studio art major.

Laura Pavlo writes best once the sun has gone down. She believes in the ellipsis because there is always something more to say. She studies English and art at an east coast university because art is everything she can't say and English is everything she can. Some of her poetry is published and her graphic design work is often times found scattered across her university's campus. One day she will publish at least one full-length novel, although she plans on publishing more than that, depending on how well the publishing economy is doing when she does so. Wish her luck, because who doesn't need it?

Meg Sawyer is a senior studying Spanish language & literature at the University of Maryland. Given that most of her class time is devoted to reading

the great works of famous Spanish writers, it's been nice to take the time and explore her own passion for creative writing. This is her first published work... hopefully there are more to come!

Ted Sim is a freshman English/theater double major. He studies film. When watching movies, he likes to cry until people tell him to shut up.

Mark Stubenberg is a senior English major at College Park. He became interested in poetry in middle school and has been writing ever since.

Emily Voelker is an environmental science and policy major concentrating in land use, and is currently in the purgatory that is the creative writing minor waitlist. She wants to turn abandoned warehouses into urban farms, and to fill the world with affordable healthy food and public art. She is a member of the Satanic Mechanics, and her interests include getting mad about things on the news and trying to explain to people what the word "polyamory" means.

Anika Warner is a junior at UMD.

Jon Wolper is a graduating senior who's majoring in journalism, minoring in poetry, and currently slaving over some sort of written piece.

Maria Zilberman is a Belarus-born, Baltimore-raised poet who started playing with words in high school. A student of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, she graduated in December 2011 with a degree in journalism and a minor in creative writing. She writes for *The Daily Record* in Baltimore.

Stylus and the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House

Stylus is largely funded and supported by the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, a Living-Learning Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Many of the journal's staff members belong to the program (though any UMD student can be involved with *Stylus*). Located within Dorchester Hall, the Writers' House is a campus-wide literary hub for the study of creative writing across cultures and languages. Students hone their skills through workshops, colloquia, and lectures led by Writers' House faculty and visiting writers. The two-year program is open to all majors and all years. For more information about joining the Writers' House, visit our website at writershouse.umd.edu or e-mail the director, Johnna Schmidt, at jmschmid@umd.edu.

Literary Prize

The Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize is an annual writing contest open to all University of Maryland undergraduates. The prize is in its tenth year and is administered by staff at the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. To preserve anonymity, outside judges read the manuscripts after names of authors have been removed. This year Savannah Renehan and Dan Schwartz were the first round judges.

Poetry Judge

Laura Lauth served as founding director of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She received her MFA in creative writing and PhD in English Literature from the University of Maryland. She lives in Takoma Park with her husband and two sons.

Prose Judge

Carmen Boullosa is a leading Mexican poet, novelist, and playwright. She has won a number of awards for her works, and has taught at universities such as Georgetown University, Columbia University, and New York University, as well as at universities in nearly a dozen other countries. Boullosa has written over a dozen novels, and some of these works have been translated into five different languages. Her bestselling novel, *Son vacas, somos puercos* (1991) was translated into English in 1997 as *They're Cows, We're Pigs*. She is currently Distinguished Lecturer at the City College of New York. She has two children—Maria Aura and Juan Aura—with her former partner, Alejandro Aura—and is now married to Mike Wallace, the Pulitzer-prize winning co-author of *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*.

Poetry Awards

1st Place: “A Brown Spot” by Dylan Bargteil

2nd Place: “Desert Animals” by Maria Zilberman

3rd Place: “The Dancer” by Brendan Edward Kennedy

Finalists

“The American Bison” and “Untitled” by Dylan Bargteil

“Torah, Party of Six” by Lianna Berne

“Futaba” by Marlana Chertock

“Road Kill” by Meg Eden

“Friday Morning, September 3, 2010” by Tafisha Edwards

“Roots” by Codi Gugliuzza

“Caricatures” by Brendan Edward Kennedy

“Song of My Spasm” by Tyler Kutner

“Salamanca, Summer 2009” by Meg Sawyer

“Caving Inward” by Maria Zilberman

Prose Awards

1st Place: “Apple Juice” by Nick Meriwether

2nd Place: “Front Lawn” by Laura Pavlo

3rd Place: “The Elephant” by Lyla Lawless

Finalists

“Generation” by Nicholas Benjamin

“Ash Like Snow” by Ashley Delaney

“And Entirely Not Alone” by Frenki Kozeli

“Shells in the Oak Tree” by Molly Morris

“When We Were Young” by Rachel Simon

“The Heart” by Robert Wolfe

“The Highway” by Kwon Yang

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Benefactors

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Submission Guidelines

Submit all work to our submissions database via www.styluslit.org/submit.html.

Stylus accepts high-quality submissions of prose, poetry, and art from all students currently enrolled at the University of Maryland, College Park. Our reading period is from September to March, and our final deadline is January 31. Submitters will be notified of their status by April 1. We accept up to five pieces across all genres. The work is put through a rigorous, anonymous review process. A brief biography of the author or artist must accompany each submission. Please also include your UID with each submission. We maintain flexibility in the layout process. No work is guaranteed acceptance until publication. Those interested in serving on our staff, please email styluslit@gmail.com and visit our website for more information at www.styluslit.org.

Prose and poetry should be uploaded through our website in .doc(x) , .txt, or .rtf format. Our prose limit is 3,500 words. Students interested in submitting longer pieces of exceptional quality are invited to email an excerpt of their piece, along with an abstract.

Multilingual work should be accompanied by an English translation when possible, or with expressed permission to be translated by our staff.

Art submissions may be emailed in PNG, TIFF, or JPEG format at greater than 600 dpi. Submitters should also include information about the medium and dimensions of each piece. Students unable to submit their work via our database should email art.styluslit@gmail.com to contact our art director.

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