Editor
Celeste Roberts

Assistant Editor
Gavin Johnson

Art Editors
Dane Baudoin
Derrick Lirette

Editorial Advisors
Katherine Tracy
Katherine Conner, Ph. D.
Marla Bernard
Ellen Chauvin

Department Head,
Languages & Literature
Ellen Barker, Ph. D.

Acknowledgments
Joshua Aucoin
Chloe East
Jeffery Edwards
Jena McCoy
Kenna Coyle
Poetry

Hello Again, Darkness by Gavin Johnson ................................................................. 6
Samson by André St. Romain .................................................................................. 7
Bugs at Night by André St. Romain ........................................................................ 7
Pictures of Me by Emily Hubbell ........................................................................ 9
Serpentine by Fernand “Trey” Bourgeois ............................................................... 9
hmmm by Frank DiNicola ..................................................................................... 10
Autumn by Kristen Fisackerly .............................................................................. 12
Hum a Numbing Tune by Gavin Johnson .............................................................. 12
partially impartial by Frank DiNicola .................................................................. 13
isn’t it strange? by Celeste Roberts .................................................................. 13
No Vacancies by Joshua Aucoin, Joshua Porche, André St. Romain .............. 15
The Things I Cannot Miss by Fernand “Trey” Bourgeois ................................. 19
Into the Woods by Gavin Johnson ...................................................................... 19
The Conflict of Age by Emily Hubbell ............................................................... 20
Mental Battalion by Jena McCoy ........................................................................ 20
Slow Motion by Fernand “Trey” Bourgeois .......................................................... 20
Funeral by André St. Romain .............................................................................. 21
experience by Frank DiNicola ........................................................................... 22
From Great Mess to Great-Ness by Aaron Daigle ............................................... 23

Personal Essay

A Re-painted Mystery by Joshua Aucoin ............................................................. 24
Memories of Home by Neha Chitrakar ................................................................ 27
My Pig, the Fairy by Candace Comeaux .............................................................. 30

Short Story

I Like to Eat My Friends: Enduring a PETA-Obsessed Pal by Celeste Roberts ... 34
Awake by Chloe East ......................................................................................... 36
Brained by Thomas Henderson ......................................................................... 44
From a Tower Window by Jeffery Edwards ...................................................... 47
’Til Death Do Us Part by Ashley Hebert ............................................................ 48
Caught in the Act by Tamika Smith ................................................................... 50

Flash Fiction

The Unexpected Visitor by Chloe East ................................................................. 52
The A-Train by Justin LeBlanc ............................................................................ 53

Short-Piece

A Ramble on a Complicated Relationship by Jena McCoy .................................. 55
Just a Fly on the Wall by Thomas Henderson .................................................. 56
A Donkey and an Elephant by Thomas Henderson ............................................ 57
Misunderstood by Tamika Smith ....................................................................... 58

Art

Magdalena Terf Mastercopy by Jeremy Breaux .................................................... 4
New Orleans by Sarah Thibodeaux ................................................................... 7
Portrait by Derrick Lirette .................................................................................. 8
Still Life #2 by Greg Hotard .............................................................................. 11
Untitled by Ryan Crochet .................................................................................. 12
Signs Series by Aggie Thibodeaux .................................................................... 17
Love Birds by Aggie Thibodeaux ...................................................................... 18
Wave by Seth Thibodeaux .................................................................................. 21
Drip by Ryan Crochet ....................................................................................... 22
Malnutrition by Greg Hotard ........................................................................... 23
Mother by Derrick Lirette ................................................................................. 26
Pop John by Aggie Thibodeaux ......................................................................... 29
Underground 1-1 by Derrick Lirette ................................................................ 31
French Woman by Heather Verret .................................................................... 32
Untitled by Greg Hotard ................................................................................... 37
Figure Study #21 by Jeremy Breaux ................................................................. 38
On the Attack by Aggie Thibodeaux ................................................................. 43
Dream by Derrick Lirette .................................................................................. 45
Figure Study #12 by Jeremy Breaux ................................................................. 46
Figure Study #7 by Jeremy Breaux .................................................................. 51
Untitled by Seth Thibodeaux ............................................................................ 53
Achilles’ Heel by Greg Hotard ......................................................................... 54
Memories by Fagan Willoughby ...................................................................... 55
Fire in the Sky by Seth Thibodeaux ................................................................. 56
Blues Night by André Smith ............................................................................. 59
Tiny Dancer by Heather Verret ......................................................................... 60
Dear Readers,

After my graduation in May, I will enter a new phase of my life, which makes me feel like a freshman again. I am nervous and excited to begin my quest of job-hunting and soul-searching. I am also afraid of leaving the university I have called my academic home for the last four years. Writing and reading have proven to be my most reliable comforts in all the times of my life—the joyous and the disheartening, the anxious and the calm. As the editor for the 2011 and 48th edition of Mosaic, I gained the standard proofreading and editing skills, but I also have gained further insight into my fellow classmates’ lives, hopes, fears, dreams, and passions. I have been fortunate enough to get a firsthand look at the births of their imaginations and hearts. Many thanks to the students who have shared their works.

Our philosophy: The purpose of Mosaic is to stimulate interest in creative work and to provide a medium of expression for students with art and literary talents. If your passion lies in creating original literature or art, submit your entries for the 2012 issue. A submission form is located on the final pages of this issue.

To join our staff as a reader or potential editor, send an e-mail to katherine.tracy@nicholls.edu or katherine.conner@nicholls.edu with your request.

Thank you for reading my letter, and please enjoy our 2011 Mosaic. I also would love receiving feedback. Please e-mail me at cr_mosaic@hotmail.com.

Celeste Roberts
Editor
Hello Again, Darkness

Gavin Johnson

Hello again, darkness,
You surely are looking well.
Your touch is warm, darkness.
Your kiss is soft,
Your voice is sweet, and your body is limber.
Your eyes are bright yet sleepy.
At your prime, you melt my heart.
You smile shyly and burn candles.
You leave your chains behind.
We are alone.
This kind of security is uncommon to me.
We, still young, seem experienced.
What is this, love or lust?
True perfection, eternal and glowing, or
Is it untamed and wonderfully ignorant?
Confusion accompanies both.
My mind wanders...
Your eyes flutter.

But you are still darkness.
Still I am unsure of you.
Beautiful shadows hide hideous secrets.
Your room is no more than a chamber,
torturing my heart with longing.
These candles are lovely, but romance is a fire hazard.
Goodbye, for now, darkness.
Our time was brief,
But like the warm wind will return with spring’s awakening.
We will return to this place.
Time and time again.
We will return.

Samson

Andre St. Romain

Surrounded by three thousand Philistines
He stood ’fore all their greatest lords and priests;
Already broken, starved in prison, blind,
And forced to toil at the work of beasts.

So weak he had to lean against a column;
Blinded, by a servant lad he was led;
But with his final effort found the strength
To pull the temple down on their heads.

Thus all great men through history
Who rouse their strength and stand their ground
Must often sacrifice themselves
To tear the social order down.

Bugs at Night

Andre St. Romain

I stepped out on the porch last night
And saw a swarm of insects cast
Their tiny bodies to their deaths
Against my front door’s window glass.

Futile, yes, but still they tried
To reach the glowing light inside.

And in a flash I thought I saw
The whole of hopeless humankind
Flit about, confused and lost,
Wandering in the darkness, blind.

With pain, I saw them heave themselves
With all their strength of soul and mind,
Desperate for the distant light,
Upon the bounds of the divine.
Pictures of Me
Emily Hubbell

I wish I had a camera.
Each snapshot would unveil
Every lovely, lonely image
That’s emerging in my tale.

From butterflies to bumblebees
To picnic tables bare,
Through this day (can’t help but say)
Events have spun unfair.

Of the beauty that surrounds me,
I’ve tried to remind myself
As I place my feelings behind me
High up on the shelf,

Each one in a different colored frame,
But mostly hues of blues and grays
Flecked with pink here and there.
All untouched by sun’s bright rays,

Yet on that shelf they won’t remain.
This emptiness must be addressed
For the feeler to feel sane,
For the heart and mind to rest.

So I let this lens look about once more,
Taking in the sky and trees,
New opportunities for me in store
Meander in on a mid-morning breeze,

Though seated in isolation now.
The photos show a whole other story
Of a girl quite content with the “whys” and “hows”
Of being taught stillness, she shall not be sorry.

Serpentine
Fernand “Trey” Bourgeois

The breath from the tongues of liars illuminate in
the air of truth,
Withering a branch of life—
Betrayal of trust and affection.
Like gold in the hands of saints,
A blink from the eyes of creation,
The smell from its flowing viscosity,
But a different taste on the tongues of misfortune,
And from the most of mouths,
it crept like a serpent.
Still Life #2
Greg Hotard
Oil on Panel

MOSAIC 2011

hmmmm
Frank DiNicola

ah, but when people are people
are they not full of shit?

is it possible not to be full of shit
when you’re there in front of someone
it’s not your fault, you’re not trying to
it’s just the way things are.

the world is too strange not to have bullshit
without bullshit we could not survive
it’s the glue that holds our species together
in fact our drive to stay alive
every muscle spasm approaching a smile
we sit back, relax, have a smoke, crack a bottle
and pretend not to know
we think without thinking
we thought what we didn’t
but that thought brought sinking
so we gave up thought; our thoughts were the
thoughts we were given
and we chronologically formed “existing conditions”
and we smile and we bow
we tip our hats
and we learn to do this
and we learn to do that
and we sing and we dance
and we drink and we cry
and we bullshit ourselves
and we never ask why
and we bullshit each other
this portion is true
that right now this author
is bullshitting you
but i do not mean to
i have white intentions
but these words i type
are enforced by constrictions

if i break away from the scheme i have crafted
this thing falls apart and you’re left with the ashes
if rhyme clashes in a discordic array
you may just stop reading; go on with your day
so i have to keep you on the edge of your brain
i do that with verse and by rhyming everything
if i stopped rhyming words
and i stopped going places
you’d lose all attention
and find my work “tasteless”
i’d be such a loser
insignificant
it’s your world, where i work
it’s my mind’s ascent
so i never finished writing this poem
i never finished writing this poem
never finished this poem
never even wrote this poem
you should stop reading this poem
why are you reading this poem
stop yourself from disappointment
stop your self from re-involve-ment
stop reading this poem
stop reading this poem
stop reading
this poem
reading this poem
is known to cause brain damage
dane bramage spamming tufts of allegory
fell from the 10th story of the library of insanity
come back with me
look to aisle 3
do you see?
the bookshelf near the iv?
with the hot nurse and fresh jug of kfc?
that one’s for you
this one’s for me
i just ate your brains.
Autumn  
Kristen Fisackerly

Wind whistles in loud silence, dances and twirls through curls and fingers, pulls and tugs on strings of cloth, strings of hearts. Near impossible deep breath but—holiday chimneys, table dinners and chatter permeate the air and settle a whisper on my tip-of-the-tongue. I taste a secret, a truth, over, over, over... gone. A thing you won’t know, can’t know, don’t know to know. Then rush-rush-swish. The world shivers and—something. Something new. Something good? Something else, something... rush rush rush

Hum a Numbing Tune  
Gavin Johnson

You are beautiful to him.  
You were beautiful to me, too.  
But I know better now.  
That poor fool.  
You are taking his innocence for granted.  
You are good at that, aren’t you?  
Taking what isn’t for you  
And running.  

So, keep running, kid.  
They’ll catch you soon enough.  
Keep running until you’re gone.  
Take what isn’t for you,  
Give nothing back.  
Watch him cry  
and walk out the door.  

Aren’t you lovely...  
As lovely as a bloody heart on the floor.

partially impartial  
Frank DiNicola

partially impartial  
and yet i feel there’s more to this  
that deep between the lines we speak  
an understanding does exist  

that hers and his, are one, one  
that nothing separates the two  
that every time a word is spoken  
we lean much farther from the truth  
do you love me?  
is it love?  
is it something more than that?  
or is there something out there  
deeper than a hug, a rub, a kiss  
that neither of us understands?  
i believe we do  
but our red hearts must leave a space  
so true light can come shining through  
what are we  
indeed we are  
nothing more than  
shining stars  

frequency

bounces and sends  
light into the darkened world  

freaky friday  
explain to you  
how i meant to be there  
but i couldn’t  
words cannot get through  
and so i speak my mind  
with my mind  
inside my simple thoughts

isn’t it strange?  
Celeste Roberts

isn’t it strange  
that the light  
that led me home  
has fallen  
and broken on the ground?  
isn’t it strange  
that its shattered pieces  
beckon me  
to reassemble the familiar glow  
upon which my life once depended?  
and isn’t it strange  
that I want to remain blind  
for a little while  
and feel along cracks with new hands?  
isn’t it strange  
that my worries  
feed my courage  
and my heart’s wick?  

and...  
isn’t it...  
strange...  
how  
I have found Myself,  
seen Myself  
heard Myself,  
trusted Myself  
more in the darkness  
than in the rooms  
flooded with light?
No Vacancies
Joshua Aucoin, Joshua Porche, Andre St. Romain

See it:
Driving around in the dark
Late at night
With hardly any money,
Wishing you were somewhere else
With hardly any money,
After having driven 500 miles,
Tired to death
With the thousand-mile stare
And lonely to your soul
Looking for a cheap motel
Feel it:
Feeling lost,
Feeling lonely,
Wanting desperately to talk to the girl behind
the check-in desk
Or the one other traveler slumped on the lobby sofa
Or the lady you pass in the hallway,
All of them just as lost,
Just as lonely,
But afraid to break the boundaries
Of whatever weird social convention
Dictates that strangers in a motel don’t speak
to each other;
Wanting to talk to them,
Reaching delicate lobster-like feelers out,
Craving some simple human interaction,
Yet encountering only the cold glass of
the aquarium side.
Know it:
A hotel –
Loneliness incarnate,
Impermanent by nature,
Human cards being shuffled in and out of a deck.
A house that offers no homelessness,
Unconcerned with the very people it houses,
Each room just a claustrophobia-inducing cubical,
A paranoia-ridden mass-produced cereal box
And all the people there lonely,
Like chickens roosting together in a tree branch
(with a new tree every night),
Hating their proximity to each other,
But clustering together nonetheless
And all of them lost
And lonely.

But across the empty lanes
The unenlightened lamps illuminate
The way to other home-less highway houses... 
Street lights keep the curtains aglow all night.
The boy hears his father snore in the bed near the door.
His brother, quiet but also asleep, having stolen
the covers in twisting. Their mother, most likely asleep,
is silent as well. No sound of which to tell.
These moments in the dark light,
the blue aura brightly invading the hotel room,
making the blackness of night creep into the closets
and corners as neon seeps through in rays,
the illumination of fairy tales settles in.
The boy rubs his feet together under the sheets,
swishing. He contemplates the events of the day,
waiting for his senses to dull into gloom.
Hotels are a good place for this,
to sit up thinking. He wonders
how many others are awake with him tonight,
but alone divided into their individual cells by thin
walls that partition them into separate universes,
preventing community, limiting communication.
The boy wishes he were in Europe living a
“real” life, backpacking and staying in hostels.
Vacations with family are examples of when
life eats you: more an experience in practicing
Easy come, easy go  
Maybe in the future  
We’ll ignite the vultures  

I was always told to keep dreaming,  
To keep myself safe instead  

We’re dreaming and we’re scheming,  
And we’re laughing while our eyes are gleaming.  

There’s people like me in these plushy walls.  
And prancin’ ‘round in the halls.  

There’s more to us than  
Simply running away.  

We run to the closest things that  
We want to call home,  
To reach our loving hands out,  
To desire what we wish every day.  

We’re immigrants of a land called Time.  
Some call it the Collective Memory  
And house it in rooms like mine.  
Many call it money mistakenly,  
Like when they built this place  
I call this our soul-clad brotherhood.  

So let’s talk through Time in Time.  
Let’s not be strangers on a whim;  
Let our destinies be of one kind.

Not many, if any, travelers rest easy in sleep,  
and the waspish, warm wind takes us to another street,  
on some other block, in a town not too near here.  
She’s a big world  
And an even bigger ship,  
Sinking the deal, agreeing to thin air,  
The random keys jangle to my hip,  
I spoke to an appointed god this morning,  
More bureaucratic than a devil deal that was born in  
Earthly law, con-ascending;  
He drew me to fate like an ant under contract  
bound chalking.  
I sold myself to well-sculptured seashells  
Tailored through time and cut from the cloth  
From the interstate and the parallels I rip  
And into the bed I fell.  
The night barely passes  
And I know this judging how bad  
These eyes just don’t want to collapse,  
And I’ve been keeping tabs  
On the world outside,  
Wondering what it’s like  
For these people to get home from work  
This late at night,  
But from here they’re nothing but the  
Folklorical, the metaphorical,  
The absentees of bees from the hives  
With the honeysuckle.  
Sometimes I swear  
There’s gonna be a drone warfare  
To take out quizzical queens  
And steal the means  
To get their own share.  
Now I’m speaking in similarities,  
Knowing full and well  
These people just aren’t aware of me  
And that I’d be in the same vacuous hell.  
With that said, we’re all caught on by the same likely fire  
Through the situations dire though  
In time we might conspire  
But you know how it is...
The Things I Cannot Miss
Fernand “Trey” Bourgeois

An epiphany, a dream, only to allow recollection—
I am here forever, unfortunately,
But only as a ghost in skin.
My body will travel where my mind has already been.
I cannot miss these things—my home, my past.
Ideas live forever, wherever my bones may lie.
Unfortunately, here is where I will die.
Can my thoughts process to another?
Or will they live an un-escapable life of burial?
The things I cannot miss surround me, but in death become me,
For I have lived in them.
I cannot miss the things that destroy from within;
A light is on here and again,
Dim as moons that do not light the sky as suns.
Truly fortunate, however, I do not beg.
A life is a life as is,
So pure and untouched.
Why does one life suffer more?
I cannot miss the unexplained;
Only live this life as is.
A quarrel is a quarrel.
Today or tomorrow
I cannot miss these things.

Into the Woods
Gavin Johnson

From his perch,
the great bird watched his prey,
the sickly animal limping along.

The poor beast was damaged;
The wound festered with pus.
The great bird saw opportunity.

But what is the fun just to attack?
The great bird forgot his manners;
It played with its food.

Toying with the disfigured beast,
the great bird cackled.
His ego consumed him like the darkness
consumes the sun

The poor wilder beast escaped into the wood.
Into the sheltering bushes.
Free. For now.
The Conflict of Age

Emily Hubbell

Like a bird in a cage
I flap, fluttering with
The emotions of my age—
Angst, delight, and zealous rage!

This bird's burning desire they spurn,
Giving her no chance to earn
The inevitable freedom to depart
Nor the need to return.

And yet . . .

I sincerely hold no disdain
For those outside and above me
I know how very dearly they love me,
How very little they wish to see me in pain!

They've sheltered me here
Through the good and bad years,
Shared their laughter and tears,
Taught me how to thwart fear.

Such love, care, and affection
Will surely bring reward to them
I merely seek the lack of perfection
That comes from finding my own direction

Till then, let me be well satisfied,
Cradling my passions, but curbing my pride
Whilst patience takes residence right within sight
And these wings of mine learn the art of flight!

Mental Battalion

Jena McCoy

Onward, little creatures now,
Be mindful where you trod.
Lend yourself to finding How,
Or notions of a god.
Wander, cross the limits, through
Those flimsy folded walls.
Give yourself to tales untrue,
And mock the rationales.
Oh, fated little creatures now,
Just grow a meager while.
Collect yourselves in armies, how
You'll capture mile and mile.
Come to me, you creatures, so
That I may tend to you.
Kiss you sweetly with my words,
So that you may live, too.

Slow Motion

Fernand "Trey" Bourgeois

One slow step dictates what the eye can see,
speeding by like an erased glimpse of what used to be.
Controlled, yes, only at the point of no movement at all,
A blur running through your fingers like sand
from an unknown desert.
A blade of evening grass watches it all go by,
who's tied to the ground, by day, by night.
While your world stands still and you're lost out at sea—
you're just going nowhere for the whole world to see.

Funeral

Andre St. Romain

As I moved slowly through a field,
I stopped to rest in peace a while;
It seemed so quiet, still and cool;
I lay upon my back and smiled.

All around was only ground,
And there were flowers near my head;
I wore my finest tailored suit,
With boutonnière of white and red.

My hands were clasped; my eyes were closed,
More relaxed I'd never been;
I didn't feel like moving 'round
Or ever getting up again.
experience
Frank DiNicola

the goddess rests silent within
as a muse, a pulse, a pathway toward
enlightened life
experimental living
and holding true to who i am
and knowing who that guy is
looking back at me
when i stare into clear glass

those eyes that pierce into my soul
how many others have they seen?
how many lives have they touched?
how much anger, happiness, have they been
able to bring?

and what is the goal?
light?
dark?
something in between?
express love
or simple being?
a flash of something...
nothing...
something...
a simple blip in a sea of delusion
but in digression
i say to thee
that one spark leads indefinitely
to many
pierce the veils of time and space
for together we defeat this night
and bring the world back again
into the everlasting light
of eternal experience

From a Great Mess to Great-Ness
Aaron Daigle

Let’s talk about hard times when the sun ain’t shinin’,
When deep dreams down in your heart start dyin’.
You were climbing a bit higher, faring fine for a minute,
yet facing situations left you feeling like life has finished.
You’re at the clinic: she’s pregnant, and your parents don’t know,
But if they did they wouldn’t care ‘cuz Momma’s strung out on dope.
So you try to cope, keeping your head up about as high as you can lift it,
Yet it’s hard ‘cuz Daddy’s gone, painted himself right out the picture,
Then it hits ya ‘bout as quick as a crash on the freeway—
you’re trapped in a mental prison—alone without a key made.
Yet we say, “It’s kewl, it’s fine, and nuthin’s missin’,”
while hiding behind tears, subtly struggling with our addictions.
And listen. Full-time jobs with five classes is major pressure.
Warm grades needing to be made in a school that’s in wintry weather!
Whenever we find ourselves entangled in such dilemmas,
we seek surety and safety. Some find it, but just remember:
your refuge may differ from another’s in this life.
Personally, my remedy is simply trusting Jesus Christ,
For he took me out of strife, brought me from a great mess,
And has led me through the pain right into great-ness.
A Re-painted Mystery
Joshua Aucoin

“Dad, did you fool with my painting?”
“What painting?” he asked, not looking up from his reading.
“The one in the…never mind.”
I moved on to my brother’s room, reminding myself that it could be fixed. It was still wet, which would make it much easier to hide the blatant disfigurement.

“Mitch, did you touch my painting?”
“The one in the extra room?”
“Yeah.”
“None.”
“Are you sure?”
“Yeah! Leave me alone.”

I held my hands up and pulled on my ears, letting the steam blow out harmlessly. Someone was searching for my painting, and it was too late. I knew he had seen it.

“Working away for two weeks then coming home for a few days, that was hard enough on you and your brother. I didn’t want there to be a big scene or tearful goodbyes every time I went away. I couldn’t do that. Do you understand?”

I had said I did, but I would never understand. He always told us that we, family, came first, and I knew that’s where his heart wanted to be. The reality, however, was that I was twenty years old before I really saw this playful nature in my dad. He used to draw and paint when he was younger and had even taken some drafting classes before he quit college. He could spot good art, but having an eye for a picture and actually making one were as different as white and black.

“No, it doesn’t look better. It’s ruined,” I said with weak conviction.

“That big, white sign in the heavens didn’t stick out at you? It didn’t look right. I had to do something,” he said, chuckling a little.

I cleaned up and got what I could of the purple stains off my hands. Having the remnants of color dyed on my hands for several days after I painted was nothing new and not half as embarrassing as explaining to my father why my toenails were a glossy black upon returning from my ex-girlfriend’s house one night.

“I fell asleep on the couch…Uh, her younger cousin was watching…well, you see. Thing is, I guess she got bored.” My father had shaken his head in shame with his face contorted in a painful grimace.

“Dad, are you sure you didn’t do anything to my painting?” I watched him thinking, pausing to figure out what he would do to smooth over this whole mess. I knew it was him, not at first, but it was evident looking at him fixed in thought, trying to work up an excuse.

“What happened to your painting?”

“Someone re-did the sky. There was a white spot, a cloud, and it’s gone. It looks like someone went over it with their finger.”

“No, it doesn’t look better. It’s ruined,” I said with weak conviction.

“You’re talking about your painting, dear?”

“Yes.”

“I haven’t seen it yet.”

“Look, I won’t be mad. I have to know who did it.”

“Sorry. It wasn’t me.”

I wanted to leap into the air and scream, “WELL, IT WAS ONE OF YOU!” I stomped back to my waiting canvas and brooded. I made a hasty palette, mixing up a heavy purple hue and thought about how to re-paint the whole sky to mask what looked like finger painting. Whoever had done the denied act had made all the strokes in the same direction but against the flow of the rest of the sky I had painted. It was a purple sky, and it was beautiful. White wisps of clouds rushed through the lavender sunset, whipping away at the clay-colored mountains. I was proud of it. My second plein air painting done completely with an assortment of palette knives. It stood on its easel, defiled. I picked up my knife several times only to lay it back down again and stare at the monstrosity. Exhaling with an exaggerated sigh, I played with the paint already on the canvas. It moved easily because I had just put the oils on it yesterday. I added some reds here and there, put a little violet, and titanium white streaked throughout more like ribbons than clouds.
Memories of Home
Neha Chitrakar

It has been nearly two years since I first left Nepal in order to complete my studies in the United States. I still remember telling my parents of my decision to leave Nepal for the first time.

“You’re going where?”
“How do you think you’re going to survive so far away from home?”
“You are our only daughter. How could we bear to send you away?”

Opting to come here in order to study and build my career was a decision filled with heartaches, anticipation, and many tears. After all, I would be separating myself from the people and possessions closest to my heart. The hardest part was beginning a journey where I knew nobody and could call no one my friend. And yet, I came because I knew that I would have to find my independence, leave the nest that I dearly loved, and venture into the unknown to build a life of my own.

I wanted to bring with me everything I had cherished as a child; however, the only things of importance I carried with me the day I boarded the plane were the memories I had of growing up in Nepal. It felt like I was leaving a part of myself behind, like a chapter in a book had ended. Part of me was in a state of disbelief. Had I really come so far from being that scared three-year-old on her teacher’s candy lying on the table? Another part of me was almost sick with expectations of the new life I would be living from here on.

I was a sensitive kid: shy and quiet, easy to hurt, easy to make cry. It was accepted in my family that I was a person with a head and a body but devoid of a brain. I vividly remember the day when I tried seeking the affection of an older cousin. I ran and tried to put myself into his arms, as children do. However, he denied me that simple act of love only to hug my brother, who was right behind me, and say, “I don’t like dumb retards. I only like smart people.” Then he planted a kiss on my brother’s face. I was only a kid, but I cried for days after that. I wondered why I had been born the way I was.

Nothing was wrong with me: I was a perfectly capable and intelligent human being. Yet I still go through phases when carrying out a simple task becomes excruciating because in my mind I feel like a “dumb retard” upon failing.

The time I was most happy during those days of blissful childhood ignorance was when I got to sit on my grandma’s lap and hear her recount the stories of her childhood. I would ask her, “Grandma! Did you really have to pee in latrines?” I would also listen to her soft voice as she told me the story of Rama, the Hindu god who rescues his wife from the evil demon, Ravana, but later on questions her fidelity. Grandma was a woman of short stature who constantly walked with a limp because of her arthritic legs. I loved to play with her round, horn-rimmed glasses, and she let me do it with the condition that I never break them. I’ve been told that my grandma, my mom, and I look alike, a resemblance I’m proud of. Some of the best times I had were spent in my grandparents’ home, where my cousins, aunts, uncles, and I would gather for a family reunion simply to catch up on one another’s lives and to eat delicious food.
By nature, I’m a loner. I can go for long periods of time without having the urge to be with anybody. With solitude as my companion and silence as my armor, I’m perfectly happy to ruminate upon the meaning of life and its mysteries. I’d be lying, though, if I said that friendship wasn’t important to me. Some of my best non-familial relationships developed during my high school days, strengthened by time, trust, and many misunderstandings. So I was only too happy to learn that Kumud, my best friend, would be applying for admission into US colleges, too. She was and still is a mischievous and funny girl—quick to make friends and also quick to get her heart broken by an asshole whom she shouldn’t have trusted in the first place. We had one big reason for being melancholy: once we arrived in the United States, we would not be able to celebrate Dashain or Tihar. These two Hindu festivals are huge in Nepal. We were particularly attached to Tihar, which is also known as the festival of lights and is practically that—a celebration of the light and life within each living being. I’d always loved this festive season; people from all walks of life throng the streets to buy flowers, multi-colored garlands, incense, delicacies, and various other items. The aromatic smell of bright, vibrant chrysanthemums, jasmines, and carnations was irresistible to me. Especially fascinating to watch were the tiny, twinkling earthen wicks people placed outside their homes at night to add to the decorations. I also loved to celebrate the relationship I had with my brother, which was part of the festival. It gave me no joy to think that I’d be missing out on all of it.

 Needless to say, Kumud and I also became closer to our families; their random acts of love didn’t feel so random anymore. I spent many sleepless nights wondering what I would do if I ever fell sick in a foreign land. I wondered whom I would go to if I wanted to throw one of my bizarre tantrums. Home had always been a place where Mom, Dad, and my brother lived. Would I ever have a home in the United States? No amount of elaborate words can ever express the amount of overwhelming sadness I felt for having to leave my family, but there was no better option. Nepal was swirling and entangling herself in political problems that wouldn’t see respite for long years to come. I did not want my career to suffer because of some self-centered, narcissistic men who hungered only for power and money. The salty liquid never hesitated to fall out of my eyes and graze my cheeks whenever my thoughts became irrational: would my brother ever forget me? Would my family learn to live without me? Would I be non-existent to them? I prayed that would never happen.

My last day in Nepal was, obviously, a sad one. Earlier on, I had promised myself that I would not shed a single tear because I didn’t want my parents to see me cry. Somehow, I managed not to. The most striking memory I have of that day is the one when I saw my mom in her beautiful yellow kurta, standing a few feet apart from the rest of us. She was wiping the tears away from her cheeks with her shawl. I wondered—and still do—what it must have felt like to say goodbye to her only daughter who was the apple of her eyes. Everywhere I looked, I saw a picture of sadness welcomed me: my brother’s jocular, ever-grinning face was close to tears, and my dad was doing his best to be a man and restrain his emotion in public. Although I have always been closer to Mom, the relationship I share with Dad is of a different kind. A short, balding man in his 50s, he reminds me of any era gone by, a relic of the past. He is somebody whom I will never completely understand because we come from such different backgrounds. My dad never finished his high school degree. He was taught the technicalities of his profession, painting, by his father. I learned the value of respect and dignity from him.

Now here I am, one and a half years in the United States. The newness of being in a different land has worn off. I’ve tried and failed to come to terms with the fact that I’ll always be homesick. Many things have changed since that fateful day I boarded the airplane. I’ve gone through many heartbreaks and also through a rite of passage that has forever changed me and how I see the world. Also, I can safely say that, in the arms of the man I love, I’ve found safety, comfort, joy, and a home of my own. I do not know what the future holds. The call of home is still strong and always will be. It is not easy to live with the knowledge that it will be many years before I can go back home again. As an international student in the United States, I certainly am not rich and cannot fund my expenses to return. The questions in my mind are incessant. Will the relationships of old still be the same, or will they have grown empty and stale? Will I be as happy as I envision myself to be when I return home, or will the sting of disappointment and hurt greet me as I find out that the place I call “home” has changed into something I no longer recognize? I do not know the answers to all the questions that haunt me every time I think about them; I can only wait and live with eyes open and a heart beating wildly, breathing in the moment and immersing myself in all the sights, smells, and sounds that I take for granted during the usual humdrum of everyday life. And so I let my thoughts travel “across the universe,” like John Lennon once did, and wait for the day when I can run into my mother’s arms and say, “I’m home.”
My Pig, the Fairy
Candace Comeaux

It’s just a decorated pig from a hospital gift shop. Pinkish purple and dressed as a fairy, it’s actually kind of ridiculous. Her cheeks are highlighted with purple blush, and her lips are stained an obnoxious shade of fuchsia. Glued to the top of her eyes are fake eyelashes like the ones on baby dolls. She carries a pink flower in her mouth, and her head is adorned with a crown made of the same flowers. Her dress and her high heels are green, and so is her remaining wing. She has a slot in the top where coins should go, but those who know me know saving is not my forte. Thus, she remains empty. I walk by her every day; my eyes pass her up without so much as a single thought. But every now and then, I really see her, really look at her. Like an old meaningful song played at the right moment, looking at her takes me back to the time I received her, but more importantly, the memories I have with the woman who gave her to me.

My father’s parents divorced and remarried years before I was born, and I was raised with three grandmothers. My two biological grandmothers both passed away before I made it out of middle school. I was lucky enough to have my step-grandmother, Linda, in my life until my junior year of high school. When she got sick, I went into denial. I did not accept that the lung cancer could actually take her life until the day it did, a mere four months after her diagnosis. The year before her death was a special time for us, for we grew closer than ever before. I began to appreciate her for who she was as I grew up and matured. She was a quiet person. I don’t recall ever seeing her get angry or unappreciated.

I don’t remember what brought her to the hospital where she discovered these embellished pigs, but I remember when she gave me the first one she bought for me. It was a year or two before she got sick. I was visiting with my grandfather when she walked in and hollered, “Candy! I got you a present!” She pulled the pig out of her shopping bag and seemed disappointed at first by my reaction. I stared at it for the longest time, thinking it was the strangest thing I had ever seen.

“Isn’t it hilarious? Look at those eyelashes!” she exclaimed.

Before I could say anything, she began to laugh hysterically, and her laughter was always contagious. I began to think it was funny, too. Who had thought of this? It was the single most absurd thing I had ever laid eyes on. Of course my grandmother would have found it and bought it; she always had a knack for spotting things that were both completely extraordinary and wholly unappreciated.

When I was a child, I generally accepted whatever adults around believed as the truth. My grandmother’s silence was often mistaken for snootiness, and since my family never really cared for her, I wrote her off and blatantly favored my biological grandmothers. Things soon changed when my family was divided and I found her to be the only one on my side. When my parents divorced, I was seven years old. I instantly decided I wanted to live with my father. My mother knew this was not in my best interest, but I became a wretched child until she finally gave me my way, not knowing what else to do. It was really not in my best interest to live with my father: he was an alcoholic, a violent one at that. I didn’t see a problem with his drinking at the time. I just knew not to drink out of Daddy’s cup because his Coke tasted funny. I knew daddy changed jobs a lot, and it made Mommy very upset. I knew my mother claimed he had drunkenly beaten her and broken one of her ribs, but I never believed it for a second. That is, until I saw it for myself.

I lasted five months with him before I couldn’t stand it anymore. His drinking had progressed even further, and one night I found myself his target. I slept outside that night, and I knew I would go to school the next day and call my mom. I would tell her to come get me, that I wanted to go back home. When I did this, I knew people would be upset. I knew my dad, once sobered up, would be horrified at what he had done. I knew he would apologize and beg me not to leave him. What I didn’t know was how his entire family would treat me, how they would rally around him and act as though I had committed some unspeakable betrayal by moving out. The first time I walked into a room with them after I moved out, no one said a word, except grandmother. She held me and whispered, “You
did nothing wrong. And I love you too much to ever be mad at you.” Her words were the absolution I needed, and I don’t think I ever told her how much what she had said meant to me.

When I was younger, I used to think my grandparents lived in a mansion. We had always lived in tiny trailers, so visiting their big brick house used to feel like visiting another world. Their bathroom was my favorite room; I would often go sit on the floor in there alone while the other children played. The wallpaper had a pattern that kept me occupied. It was a succession of images of a boy, a girl, a swing, a castle, and a few instruments. I used to make up stories in my head to go along with the pictures. I spent countless days at their house, but my grandmother always had an excuse as to why I couldn’t sleep over. It wasn’t until I was much older that I realized it was because she was embarrassed. Their house wasn’t a mansion after all; it was being eaten by termites. The floor was giving in, and even the once-magical bathroom was falling apart. I was in there one day, thinking about the stories I invented with the walls as a child. I heard a drip coming from the tub, so I pulled back the curtain to turn it off. I gasped when I saw the humongous hole where the tub should have been. I never mentioned it to her;; I knew she worked so hard to keep the truths of life from me. I could never bring myself to shatter the illusion she had carefully constructed just for me.

She got me;; she just understood me. I would call her to complain about what a pain my younger brother was, and she would agree that he was, in fact, pretty annoying. If I was bored, I called her, and she would immediately pick me up and whisk me to the nearest bookstore. I would like the caramel one since it was sweeter. She decided to order a mocha one instead, but after I let her taste my caramel one, I could tell she preferred mine. I told her I was in the mood for chocolate and asked if she would mind switching. She happily obliged.

My grandmother was tragically and mistakenly insecure. I thought she was the most beautiful grandmother I had ever seen, but she never saw in herself what I saw in her. She had the most beautiful clothes and jewelry. Her hair was never out of place, but she always wished she had curls and I don’t believe she ever gave one that the recipient didn’t immediately fall in love with. So when it was time to order my senior ring, I turned to her. She helped me design the perfect ring, and I couldn’t wait to show it to her. But when it came in, she was in the hospital. My dad told me that the doctors didn’t think she was going to make it and that I should go see her immediately.

When I walked in, her eyes were open, but she wasn’t speaking. I held up my ring and showed her, but I don’t think she saw it. She died quickly, and before they took her body away, I began to study it. I tried to engrain things into my memory, things I never wanted to forget. I grabbed her hand. She always had the softest hands. They were full of age spots, but they were beautiful. I remembered all the times she held my hand with hers and squeezed mine to encourage me. I looked at her lips, now dry and cracking. I closed my eyes and remembered all the times they were coming down to me as a child, all puckered up for a kiss and always perfectly glossed.

I never took great care of the pig before she died, and by the time she passed away, I had already managed to break off both a foot and a wing. I regret that now, of course. I should have I can still touch and hold. It can resurrect the sweetest memories, memories of a woman who found laughter in the most unexpected places and shared it with the people she loved most.
I Like to Eat My Friends: Enduring a PETA-Obsessed Pal
Celeste Roberts

I knew it was a bad idea before I’d even lifted up the phone to my ear three days ago.
Kristi sat adjacent to my right at our small cherry wood dining table, my little sister to her own right. Kristi’s freshly-dyed hair shone a magnificent green emerald underneath our overhead stained glass lamp; I nervously glimpsed across the table to see whether my Alzheimer’s-stricken grandmother had taken notice of the abnormal hair color. For all I could assume, Grandma would begin screaming in ecstasy and call up all of her bingo friends to “come over and look at the Jolly Green Giant, who is here in our very own dining room!”
I could only hope for something that predictable to occur this evening.
Kristi continued rattling off nutrition information to my dad, who looked as though he’d much rather stick his salad fork up his own rectum than hear about how tofu “is so much healthier than pork, and, oh, did you know that cow’s milk contains more bacteria than soy milk? I don’t think you could handle failing kidneys and intestines at this stage of your life, Mr. Pratter.”
“Mom!” I hissed irritably. “I thought I told you that Kristi’s vegan!”
“Oh, she’s just going through some silly phase, Brianna.” Mom stirred the corn and turned off the fire underneath the mashed potatoes. “I remember how much she loves my homemade roast; she’s praised it time and again. She can’t stop us from eating how we like to, even if she’s a little hippie now.”
“But, Mom, you don’t understand,” I groaned. “I want Kristi to understand that we’re all willing to accept her new lifestyle; I want to make her feel welcome in our home.” I sighed wistfully. “I want my best friend back.”
Mom gave me a look of disbelief. “Well, shouldn’t she be accepting of your lifestyle as well?” That shut me up. Well, whatever; I missed my friend and was tired of suddenly being accused of selfishness and stagnancy.
“I hope you’re hungry, Kristi,” Mom said as she served her a plate of pot roast, mashed potatoes, corn, and a crescent roll. Kristi’s eyes widened to the size of Pamela Anderson’s bra cups.
“Mrs. . . . Pratter . . . ” You’d swear that she was having an asthma attack. “How could you . . . advocate . . . the death . . . and . . . ingestion . . . of this . . . poor . . . helpless . . . friend?”
Mom continued setting a serving down before each one of us. “I don’t remember ever introducing myself to this particular cow.” She placed her own plate down, stuck her fork into a bit of the meat, and then lifted it up to her mouth. “Mmm,” she mused. “Mighty delicious acquaintance, I’d say.”
Kristi’s jaw dropped in horror. “How . . . could you?” She began gagging, so she pushed her chair back and made a run for the bathroom.
Dad smiled as he cut his portion into smaller pieces. “Bon appétit.”
I stared at my plate. I knew this was a bad idea before I’d even lifted up the phone to my ear three days ago.

Oh, crap.
Had my mother not paid attention to my warning?! I rose and hurried into the kitchen.
“Mom!” I hissed irritably. “I thought I told you that Kristi’s vegan!”
“Um, Kristi, I like salads and cantaloupe, too. I’m an omnivore,” Danielle had replied.
“You’re playing both sides of the field.” Kristi had then coughed, “Traitor.”
Well, whether or not she approved, I intended to continue allowing cow’s milk to mingle with my breakfast cereal. Without her knowing, of course.
“All right, I hope everyone’s good and hungry!” My mom peeked in from the kitchen and smiled. I would have done the same had I not suddenly caught a whiff of pot roast.

I Like to Eat My Friends:
Enduring a PETA-Obsessed Pal
Celeste Roberts

I knew it was a bad idea before I’d even lifted up the phone to my ear three days ago.
Kristi sat adjacent to my right at our small cherry wood dining table, my little sister to her own right. Kristi’s freshly-dyed hair shone a magnificent green emerald underneath our overhead stained glass lamp; I nervously glimpsed across the table to see whether my Alzheimer’s-stricken grandmother had taken notice of the abnormal hair color. For all I could assume, Grandma would begin screaming in ecstasy and call up all of her bingo friends to “come over and look at the Jolly Green Giant, who is here in our very own dining room!”
I could only hope for something that predictable to occur this evening.
Kristi continued rattling off nutrition information to my dad, who looked as though he’d much rather stick his salad fork up his own rectum than hear about how tofu “is so much healthier than pork, and, oh, did you know that cow’s milk contains more bacteria than soy milk? I don’t think you could handle failing kidneys and intestines at this stage of your life, Mr. Pratter.”
“Th...
Awake
Chloe East

I opened my eyes and had to shut them again immediately. Everything was too bright. My mother must have flipped the light on to wake me up.

I tried opening my eyes again, slowly this time. When my eyes finally adjusted to the brightness of the room, I looked around in confusion. Everything I could see—from the wallpaper to the bedsprad—was a sterile white. I tried to sit up to get a better look, but I was stopped by restraints across my chest.

“What the…?” My voice came out as a weak croak.
At that moment, the door opened and a dark haired woman in a white lab coat walked in.

“Hello, Candace. It’s nice to see you awake. I’m Doctor Harris. How are you feeling?”
I blinked up at her from my bed and tried to clear my throat. “Where am I? Why am I strapped down?”

The doctor sat in a chair next to the bed and gave me a grim smile. “You’re currently a patient at the Brookhaven Mental Institution. Do you remember anything about what brought you here?”

I frowned, trying to remember. When the memories surfaced, I gasped. “Monsters! They came out and attacked–!”

I stopped talking when I noticed Doctor Harris shaking her head.

She sighed. “I was hoping that weaning you off your medication would have a more stabilizing effect. No, Candace. We believe you took too much of your phenelzine and had a reaction.”

I shook my head. “No, they were real! I saw them killing everyone!”

She got a look on her face that was both pitying and condescending. “Monsters don’t exist, Candace. I need you to accept that.”

“Candace, there was no one left alive in that room but you, and the cameras outside the school didn’t show anyone coming or going.”

“I didn’t say someone came in and attacked; I said that monsters came out of my head and attacked everyone!” As I spoke, I realized how crazy that sounded.

Doctor Harris placed a hand on my shoulder. “No, Candace. It was all you,” she said softly. My heart skipped a beat. That couldn’t be true… it just couldn’t.

“But I’ve never hurt anyone in my life! No medicine could make me a murderer!”
Her voice remained soft and soothing, as though she were talking to a wild animal.

“Candace, phenelzine is a potent drug. Taking too much of it can cause a number of side effects, one of which is an altered mental state.”

“I don’t believe you. Those monsters came out and killed my classmates.”

“Candace—”

“I want to go home. Let me up!”

Doctor Harris stood and stepped away from my bed as I started to struggle against the restraints.

“Candace, calm down.”

“I want to go home!”

“You can’t go home, Candace. Not right now.” She kept her tone even, but I saw her motion to someone outside the room. “You’re a danger to yourself and others. You have to stay here and go through treatment.”

Behind her, I saw one of the monsters standing quietly in the corner. I started screaming. “Let me out! Untie me!” I was thrashing around—or trying to, as the restraints were too tight to allow much movement. A young man wearing scrubs rushed into the room, a syringe in his hand.

“Hey!” I cried out. “What the hell is that??”

“Something to help you relax.”

“I don’t need to relax, I need to get out of here! Ah–!”

The male nurse jabbed my arm with the needle. The room floated away on a wave of calm.

Several days passed in much the same way. The drugs would wear off, I would start screaming when I saw the monsters all around the room, and they would inject me again. Finally, I had a long enough period of lucidity to decide that I would do a lot better if I played along.

“How are you doing today, Candace? The nurses tell me you’re being much more cooperative.”

I attempted a smile, but I could feel that it didn’t quite reach my eyes. “I feel a lot better.
I think I’m ready to talk about this calmly. I know that monsters aren’t real...well, the type of monster I saw isn’t real.”

Doctor Harris frowned at me. “What do you mean by that?”

“Well, I would classify pedophiles and serial killers as monsters. They’re just not demon-type monsters.”

Just then, there was a knock on the door. Before the doctor could say anything, it opened, and two policemen walked in. My pulse sped up at the sight of them.

The taller of the two cleared his throat. “Good afternoon, ladies. I’m Officer Coker, and this is Officer Woodall. We need to ask Candace a few questions.”

Doctor Harris frowned at them and stood. “Could I have a few words with you gentlemen outside?”

They glanced at each other and nodded. Doctor Harris walked out and pulled the door shut behind her. My thoughts whirled around in my head. How could I answer questions for the police without sounding like a lunatic? Was the doctor telling them I was unstable?

After a few minutes, they came back into the room. Doctor Harris came to sit next to me again.

“Candace, these officers need to ask you a few questions. However, because your parents haven’t gotten here yet, they’re going to have to wait. Isn’t that right, officers?” she asked, turning to give them a look I couldn’t see.

They nodded, but they didn’t look thrilled about it.

A few hours later, my parents arrived. My mom was the first to enter the room, and it hurt my heart to see her so upset. Her face was pale, and, even after she had sat down, her hands kept fidgeting as though she didn’t know what to do with them. My dad walked in a few minutes later, already deep in conversation with Officer Coker. When he looked at me, his face was an unreadable mask.

“Candace, these officers are going to ask you some questions,” he said, “and I need you to be completely honest with them.”

I nodded as my mom took my hand in hers.

Officer Coker took a seat near the end of my bed and pulled out a pen and a notepad. He cleared his throat and looked at me.

“Okay, Candace, let’s start with how you were the only person to make it out of that classroom.”

I glanced at my mom, who tightened her grip on my hand.

“I don’t know why they didn’t kill me,” I whispered. My mom’s eyes filled with tears.

The officer wrote something on his notepad and looked up at me again. “How did they get in there?”

I looked at him. I couldn’t tell him the truth, but I couldn’t just lie. The doctor would call me on it. “I didn’t see where they came from. It was like they just appeared.”

“Okay, let’s get into the details. What about the monsters, Candace? What monsters?”

“I...um...” I couldn’t think of anything to say, other than the truth. “The monsters that came out of my nightmares.”

The officer looked at me blankly for a moment, before writing that down. He muttered as he wrote. “I take it you’re going for the insanity plea, then?”

“I know how it sounds, but I’m not crazy, okay?”

He frowned and looked at me.

“Of course not. You killed your classmates, and now you’re spouting off some bull about monsters. You’re not crazy at all, honey.” His voice dripped with sarcasm.

My dad stepped toward the officer, a scowl on his face. “Don’t talk to her that way. I believe it’s still ‘innocent until proven guilty,’ and I don’t recall hearing a judge condemn her. I think we’re done here.”
Later, after my parents had signed me in to stay at the institution until my trial, Doctor Harris came in to see me.

She sat next to me and looked me in the eyes. “Candace, do you think you would be up to attending private sessions with me?”

I felt myself tense. “I don’t know if that would be a good idea…”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Well…”

Doctor Harris smiled slightly. “I think it would be a good idea.”

I hesitated. However, if I didn’t go along, I might never get out of this place. I nodded slowly.

“As long as it’s just the two of us, I guess it would be ok.”

She sat next to me and looked me in the eyes. “Candace, do you think you would be up to continuing.”

A dark haired girl came to the door and smiled at me. She gestured for me to follow her.

At five, I wake up screaming bloody murder, and my parents come rushing in to calm me down. I am inconsolable because I am convinced the monsters are real and will eat me if I close my eyes again.

At seven or eight, I wake up screaming so hard I lose my voice completely and spit up blood.

At thirteen, I wake up from yet another nightmare but manage to keep the screams from escaping. I cry as quietly as I can, alone in the dark, because I don’t want my parents to worry.

I looked down at the floor. It was easier to look at than the doctor because I couldn’t stand the sinister face hovering just behind her. “I’ve had endless nights of endless nightmares. When I was sixteen, I started doing sleep studies. The doctors discovered that the nightmares began the second I left our house. Then I would fall asleep. When I woke up, they were still there.”

As I spoke, the memories played like a movie in my head.

My throat suddenly felt parched. “Actually, could I maybe take a break? Go to the bathroom… get some water?”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“Okay…then I guess I’ll start with my childhood.” I paused and cleared my throat. “I’ve had these nightmares since I was a baby. My parents took me to several therapists. At first, the therapists just passed the nightmares off as a phase. They said it was just night terrors and I would eventually stop having them.” I laughed bitterly. “They were so wrong.”

She stopped as well and lifted an eyebrow at me. “I’m not really sure where to begin.…”

Welcome, Candace, where would you like to start?” Doctor Harris asked with a small smile.

“As long as it’s just the two of us, I guess it would be ok.”

I hesitated. However, if I didn’t go along, I might never get out of this place. I nodded slowly.

Doctor Harris smiled slightly. “I think it would be a good idea.”

“Well…”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“I overheard you talking to the doctor. Okay, I was eavesdropping,” she amended when I gave her a questioning look.

She started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“Because I started seeing the nightmares while I was awake. What you should understand is they aren’t just silly nightmares where you have a test you didn’t know about and suddenly you’re naked in front of the whole school.”

Doctor Harris smiled and let out a small chuckle. I gave her a weak smile and swallowed thickly before continuing.

“They’re blood-filled nightmares about torture, death, despair. Basically, they’re about hell. I spent every night of my life trapped in hell.”

I paused as the she wrote something on her notepad. She looked back at me and asked me to elaborate on my version of hell.

“These creatures—I call them Stitches—are always there. They’re not too fast, but there are so many of them that it really doesn’t matter. They have this wild, matted black hair and big mouths full of razor sharp fangs and their eyes are so black, it’s like they repel light. They always have blood stains on their faces. Human blood.”

My heart jumped in my chest. How did she know about them? “What are you talking about?”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

I felt my heart jump painfully in my chest. How did she know about them? “What are you talking about?”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“I overheard you talking to the doctor. Okay, I was eavesdropping,” she amended when I gave her a questioning look.

“Okay then, I guess I’ll start with my childhood.” I paused and cleared my throat. “I’ve had these nightmares since I was a baby. My parents took me to several therapists. At first, the therapists just passed the nightmares off as a phase. They said it was just night terrors and I would eventually stop having them.” I laughed bitterly. “They were so wrong.”

They caught me just about every night and sliced me up.”

“They’re so wrong.”

She smiled slightly. “I think it would be a good idea.”

“Well…”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“Because I started seeing the nightmares while I was awake. What you should understand is they aren’t just silly nightmares where you have a test you didn’t know about and suddenly you’re naked in front of the whole school.”

Doctor Harris smiled and let out a small chuckle. I gave her a weak smile and swallowed thickly before continuing.

“They’re blood-filled nightmares about torture, death, despair. Basically, they’re about hell. I spent every night of my life trapped in hell.”

I paused as the she wrote something on her notepad. She looked back at me and asked me to elaborate on my version of hell.

“These creatures—I call them Stitches—are always there. They’re not too fast, but there are so many of them that it really doesn’t matter. They have this wild, matted black hair and big mouths full of razor sharp fangs and their eyes are so black, it’s like they repel light. They always have blood stains on their faces. Human blood.”

My heart jumped in my chest. How did she know about them? “What are you talking about?”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“I overheard you talking to the doctor. Okay, I was eavesdropping,” she amended when I gave her a questioning look.

Later, after my parents had signed me in to stay at the institution until my trial, Doctor Harris came in to see me.

She sat next to me and looked me in the eyes. “Candace, do you think you would be up to attending private sessions with me?”

I felt myself tense. “I don’t know if that would be a good idea…”

“Why not?” she asked.

“Well…”

Doctor Harris smiled slightly. “I think it would be a good idea.”

I hesitated. However, if I didn’t go along, I might never get out of this place. I nodded slowly.

“As long as it’s just the two of us, I guess it would be ok.”

“Welcome, Candace, where would you like to start?” Doctor Harris asked with a small smile.

“As long as it’s just the two of us, I guess it would be ok.”

“I’m not really sure where to begin…”

She smiled and let out a small chuckle. I gave her a weak smile and swallowed thickly before continuing.

“They’re blood-filled nightmares about torture, death, despair. Basically, they’re about hell. I spent every night of my life trapped in hell.”

She smiled and started walking again, not even looking back to see if I was following. I hurried to catch up with her.

“I overheard you talking to the doctor. Okay, I was eavesdropping,” she amended when I gave her a questioning look.
her a disbelieving look.

“The doctors in this place are useless,” she went on. “They never let themselves notice when a patient lies to them about their progress because that would mean they aren’t doing their jobs right. But I could hear you. Your voice was shaking, and you looked terrified right now.” She looked at me from the corner of her eyes. “You’d better not let some boogy monster come in here and eat me.”

“What…are you saying you believe me?” I asked skeptically.

We reached the bathroom door and she paused. She appeared to think it over for a minute before shrugging and pushing the door open.

“Why not?” she asked. “At least that would be interesting. It gets really boring in here when you’re the only sane one in the bunch.” With a wink, she added: “Of course, I could be completely insane, and you just don’t know it yet.”

A few days later, Tru and I sat down to eat lunch together in the large room that served as a cafeteria/social room. She had decided that we would be friends because she wanted to hear more about the Stitches.

“Do you see any right now?” she asked excitedly when I went to take a bite of my sandwich.

“No.”

She pouted at me. “You didn’t even look.”

“I don’t want to look. If I see one, I won’t be able to eat, and the doctors will start thinking I have an eating disorder on top of everything else. Please. . just stop asking about them for now.”

She huffed in annoyance. “I don’t see why you wouldn’t be able to eat.”

I gritted my teeth and glared at her. “I don’t know, Tru, maybe it has something to do with the fact that they have tormented me my whole life. Or maybe it has to do with the fact that they sliced my classmates into little pieces, and the blood is still all over them.”

I pointedly looked away from her patient lies to them about their progress because that would mean they aren’t doing their jobs right.

Tru’s breath was coming faster now. The Stitch was running its hands down her neck.

“I stood up. “They burst free, and it’s all thanks to those little pills I took. While I’m not happy about people being hurt, I am happy that it will never be me again.”

As I turned to walk away, a male patient at the back of the room let out a scream when a Stitch, tired of the game, dug its claws into his leg. Tru whimpered, and I took a moment to consider what it must look like to her. All she could see was a man being sliced up by nothing. It must have been a disturbing sight. A few seconds later, people were screaming all over the room. The nurses and orderlies that were on duty came running, only to become the next victims.

Tru started crying. “Candace! Don’t leave us here!”

A female patient got away from the Stitch that had her in its clutches, but another Stitch was waiting nearby. She didn’t make it far.

I stopped walking and stood for a moment. The screams were like knives in my gut. I took a deep breath and started walking again. As I walked, one of the Stitches separated from the rest and started following me. I felt my pulse speed up in fear, but the Stitch made no aggressive movements. It just followed.

As we entered the hallway, I saw a few guards running in our direction. I stopped walking. I would never be able to explain this away. First my classmates then my fellow patients…the guards would stop me, and I would be blamed. I glanced at the Stitch, and then looked back at the guards.

“Please. . just stop asking about them for now.”

They wouldn’t be able to see the Stitch. From the corner of my eye, I saw the Stitch smile.
Brained
Thomas Henderson

All Jeremy Cole can remember is blackness. All he feels is a slight chill creeping up his body and a throbbing around his head. He tries to move his arms but feels them tightly restrained and the same with his legs. His dulled senses slowly return to him, and he notices an intense light pressing through his closed eyes. He opens his eyes and then closes them because of the blaring light hurting his eyes. He repeatedly opens and closes them to adjust to his surroundings. He tries to let out a moan, but his mouth is gagged with a coarse cotton cloth tied around his head. He hears the clack of hard-soled shoes walking towards him and then stop a short distance from him.

A feminine voice says, “Well, well. It seems that Mr. Cole has finally awakened.”
Jeremy tries to speak, but his words are slurred and unrecognizable due to the gag.
“What's that you say? How am I doing today? I am wondrous! Excited! Intrigued.”

More muffs come from Jeremy.

“Intrigued? Ah, you see I have a small little experiment to test on writers. I like to see what makes their brains tick.” A hint of amusement shows through her speech.

Jeremy feels a sharp prick in the top of his skull and tries to yelp. Several more pricks follow, but each one becomes less painful until his scalp is numb. His eyes become wide. He is clueless as to what is happening and how he got here.

The whine of a saw comes to life near his ear, and he tries to let out a shriek. He feels the pressure on his head and then hears it tearing through the flesh and bone of his scalp.

“I told you. I like to know how a student’s brain ticks.” A crazy laughter escapes from her.

He sees the scalp move across his face and is placed onto something next to him. Nausea grips at his stomach, and he almost passes out from the sight. The woman puts smelling salts under his nose, making him stay awake through his ordeal.

“No. No sleeping on this job. We get to see how you feel as we perform the experiment.”

His right leg goes numb suddenly and then his left. He can’t feel or move them. His breathing is reduced to short deep breaths as panic ensues with a sob begging to show through. Tears blur his vision as he sees chunks of pink matter pass in front of his face.

“Oh, not much longer, I’m afraid. And we were having such fun. Class starts in several minutes, and I can never miss that.”

His body goes numb, and he is only able to breathe, hear, and barely see. Then the figure moves, and he can see his demon. Anger wells up him, knowing that it is she who put him through this, his favorite teacher, Mrs. Jackson. Then the world goes black.

Dream
Derrick Lirette
Charcoal
From a Tower Window
Jeffery Edwards

Glare-blind from the climb, he peers into the dim tower room, seeking the sweetness of first sight. “I am here, my love,” he says, plucking golden tangles from his fingers. She does not reply. Shadow becomes shape, and there she stands, slender and silent, doe-eyed in distress, helpless beneath flaxen fetters, her pale flesh luminous in the low light.

“I am here, my love,” he says again, advancing. She raises her hands, palms pleading for pause, and fact: “You will not do.”

A weakness creeps into his knees, and uncertainty—the most alien of emotions to a man such as him—creases his brow. “But I have come for you,” he says, as if these words are weapon enough to combat her censure. “I have only done as you have asked and have aided me to do, as by your locks was I lifted.”

She shrugs, the subtle lift of her shoulders sending tremors through the vast arachnid sprawl of her hair. “From these heights, all creatures are as crawling things,” she replies, “and you are not as you first seemed, long ago and many floors away.” She points to the window behind him, the slight curve of her perfect arm piercing him like a falchion. “You know the way out.”

He turns back to the window, limp-legged. He clutches the hard, stone edges of the window, and the sunlight again claws at his mind. For a moment, all is a wicked wash of pain and perfidy, then cruel clarity. He wonders if his broken body will serve as a beacon to warn those who follow, but for the first time remembers the bleached bones he himself quickly passed over in his own imperiousness. He steps into air, and the earth reaches up to pull him to its cradle.
‘Til Death Do Us Part
Ashley Hebert

“How do you like it, honey?” Cheryl asks as she pulls out the lace negligee she just bought from the dollar store. Her and her husband’s fifth anniversary is coming up soon. She wants to look her best for her husband so they can begin trying to save their marriage.

“Like what?” James asks and turns the page in his magazine.

“If you looked at me half as much as you look at those pin-ups you keep in your desk drawer, our marriage would probably mean something.”

“I do you regularly, Cheryl. It’s not like you ever go un-serviced.”

“It’s not ‘serving’ that I need, moron!” Cheryl yells, opening the refrigerator door and pulling out what she needs to make dinner. “I would just like five minutes of the undivided attention you give Ms. October.”

“Isn’t once a week enough for you?”

“Will you just look at what I bought?” Cheryl asks, picking the piece of black lace back up for him to admire.

“Why? So I can see yet another tub of ice cream that you’ll oink down after dinner?” James shouts at her husband. “We still have about thirty thousand dollars left on your student loans. Why the door.”

“I’m busy.” Cheryl replies without sparing her a glance.

“Do you really, Cheryl. It’s not like you ever have to compete.”

“Like you’re worried that I’ll get fat,” Cheryl replies with a sneer. “You refuse to even share a bed with me, and I don’t blame you. Look at what I have to compete with.”

“And what about the house?” James asks as he flips the page.

“What about it?” Cheryl asks, trying to get some kind of reaction out of him by answering a question with a question.

“You never do any cleaning. The house is a mess. I’m embarrassed when people even come to admire.

“I work full time at Donny’s and part-time at the gym trying to pay our bills,” Cheryl nearly screams at her husband. “We still have about thirty thousand dollars left on your student loans. Why don’t you get a job so I can have time to clean? Or, better yet, you can even clean the place yourself?”

“Why?” James asks as he takes the piece of black lace back up from Cheryl and passes it to her. “I do you regularly, Cheryl. It’s not like you ever have to compete.”

“Exactly. You don’t care about me or our marriage.”

“Well, if I’m such a lousy husband, why don’t you just divorce me?”

“Forget it!” Cheryl throws the magazine at James’ head. “Fix your own dinner! I’m going to my room.”

When the bedroom door slams closed, James picks up his magazine and sits back down in his chair. He starts turning the pages as he stares at the wall.

“Why do you like it, honey?” Cheryl asks as she tries to reach around James. He manages to stave her off for a while, but Cheryl persists until she has another magazine in her hand.

“This trash is only valuable to men like you for the release you get when you pick them up,” Cheryl says as she tries to reach around James. He manages to stave her off for a while, but Cheryl persists until she has another magazine in her hand.

“These magazines could be worth millions of dollars someday,” James shouts at her. Cheryl knows that he is trying to tempt her into stopping by bringing up money.

“No one would buy these from you, James. Just look at them!” Cheryl shakes the magazine she’s holding in front of James’ face and pulls it back as he tries to snatch it away from her.

“What are you talking about? They’re in perfect condition.”

“What do you call reality, James? Those things have gotten more of you on them in less than a month than I have since we got married!”

“That is ridiculous, Cheryl. I pay way more attention to you, baby.”

“If you pay more attention to me than your magazines, then tell me what I was just trying to show you?”

James looks down at the floor.

“Exactly. You don’t care about me or our marriage.”

“How did this get to be about our marriage?”

“It’s always been about our marriage!”

“Well, if I’m such a lousy husband, why don’t you just divorce me?”

“Exactly. You don’t care about me or our marriage.”

“He can’t bring himself to dismember any of his girls.

“Exactly. You don’t care about me or our marriage.”

She’s holding in front of James’ face and pulls it back as he tries to snatch it away from her.

“Exactly. You don’t care about me or our marriage.”

Cheryl says as she tries to reach around James. He manages to stave her off for a while, but Cheryl persists until she has another magazine in her hand.

“This trash is only valuable to men like you for the release you get when you pick them up,” Cheryl says as she tries to reach around James. He manages to stave her off for a while, but Cheryl persists until she has another magazine in her hand.
Caught in the Act
Tamika Smith

“I wonder where she got those pants,” the woman sitting next to me says out loud.

We are the only people sitting at the bus stop. I hope she doesn’t continue talking to me. I don’t have time to chat, and quite frankly, I just don’t care. I would like to make it home in the next twenty minutes to watch the midnight re-runs of Perry Mason, eat a pint of ice cream, and soak my feet. People should be able to sit at a bus stop, or anywhere, without someone trying to see how fast they can tell their life story to complete strangers. Who cares anyway? I wish her bus would hurry up and come or someone else would walk up and sit beside her.

“What time the last Broad bus passed?” a woman standing in the street asks, wearing an all-in-one jean outfit, sunglasses, and high heel platform shoes. She’s wearing red lipstick along with heavy make-up. The front of the outfit has rips that probably didn’t come initially for style, and the wig she’s wearing is sideways.

I stay quiet.

“Baby, I don’t know cause I’m not catching the bus,” the woman sitting next to me answers.

“Alright, sugah, no need to get all snappy,” she responds, still standing in the street.

The woman sitting beside me sighs heavily.

The woman in the street says, “Gail, is that you girl?” She walks towards us, swishing her hips.

“Who needs to know?”

“It’s me, Diane,” says the woman, now standing in front with half her breast out of her jean jumper.

Really, can this reunion happen somewhere else? Here’s an idea—not here.

“I see you still doing the same old thing, at the same old time,” Diane says.

“I don’t have time for your small games.”

“Looks to me as if you never really arrived where you wanted to be in your game either.”

Gail sits her purse between us and then tightly clutches her fist tight.

I don’t have time for this. As long as nobody accidentally hits me, I’m good.

“I don’t want any trouble, baby. I just got my nails done,” Diane says, walking away.

“Jealous wench,” Gail says to Diane as she walks away from us.

Diane turns around and says over her shoulder, “Tell Councilman Jackson that he owes me for last week. Oh, you thought y’all were exclusive, huh? Get over it, Gail, he will never leave his wife.”

“I have to be hearing things. She shouldn’t have said Councilman Jackson.”

Just because you get paid more than me don’t mean nothing. Like they say, you can’t turn a ho into a housewife,” Diane says.

At this point, I look over to get a clear look at Gail’s face. Before Diane came, I had no interest in Gail. Her cheap perfume makes me nauseous. The clothes she’s wearing look nice but smell stale, like they have been sitting in a drawer for a while. Her make-up is not as heavy as Diane’s, but it could tone down some. Although Gail is beautiful, anyone could tell the trials of life have added on years. Even through her cake on make-up, I can see where she tried to cover up a black eye. I’ve seen and covered up many in my days. During college, my roommate would use all my concealer to cover up the “love taps” her boyfriend gave her. I wonder, Is Jackson a cheating dog and woman beater?

The Broad bus arrives, but I can’t move. I will not move. The biggest sex scandal is about to unfold in front of my eyes, and I will be the first reporter to print the story with proof. I figure Gail’s not catching the bus because this is his spot to pick her up. I look for my camera, but the batteries are dead. I ramble through my camera bag to find my spares. The only place to pull up is where the bus loads. These shots are going to be perfect. I see Gail’s hands beside me going to grab her purse. Where the hell are those batteries? Gail stands up, and I haven’t found both batteries. All I need is one picture, so I grab my cell phone. The bus pulls off, and a black town car drives into its spot.

“You are late,” I hear Gail say.

This picture will save my job.

“Get in the car and close the door,” speaks a male voice.

The only way to get a clear shot is to move closer. I untuck my blouse and pull up my skirt to fit in with Gail, so Jackson won’t be alarmed.

Staggering over to the town car with tinted windows, I yell, “Gail, you picked up the wrong bag,” I say, holding it. But it’s too dark for her to recognize I’m lying.

I don’t have a clear view of the man, so I stop. I hope she’ll get out and walk and meet me the rest of the way. She starts to get out. As plain as day, he sits comfortably in the back of the car in his tailor-made suit and designer shoes—Councilman Jackson.

Gail doesn’t step too far away from the car, so there is a chance to still get her in the picture before she walks any closer.

“Never mind. You do have the right bag,” I shout, holding up my bag in the air to show her. I hold my cell phone up with my bag, I hope that I aimed and clicked in the right place.

“Time is money, baby, and you just wasted a minute of mine,” she says before getting back in the car.

However, it was enough time for me to snap a good picture for the Times tomorrow morning.
The Unexpected Visitor  
Chloe East

He was waiting in her apartment when she got home. She paused in the doorway as shock and fear gripped her. She remained silent as she shut the door and took a seat across from him. The sight of him sitting there so calmly made her skin crawl.

“Your early,” she said.

“I am never early and I am never late. When it is time for me to pay someone a visit, I do.”

She took a breath and let it out slowly. “I’m not ready.”

“People rarely are.”

Her eyes met his and she felt chilled by the way his dark eyes gazed back at her from an impassive face.

“I’ve heard you like chess. Is there any chance you’d be interested in a match?”

The corners of his mouth turned down a bit. “Chess no longer interests me.”

“Why not?”

His head tilted as he regarded her silently for a moment. “Consider, for a moment, how old I am. Nothing holds my interest for very long.”

“What about a trade? I could find someone to take my place. Two people, even!”

He frowned as he stood and straightened his suit jacket. “I do not make deals.”

“But what about all of the stories? There are countless tales about mortals who got away! They can’t have come from nowhere.”

“Temporary amusements. I am no longer amused by this silly habit humans have of begging and bargaining. It is your time.”

He reached for her hand, and she jerked it out of his reach. When he reached for her again, she scrambled off the couch and backed away.

“How can it be my time? I’m just twenty five! Stay away!”

He stood silently watching her, his expression once again completely blank.

“Why can’t you make a deal with me? Just let me have ten more years. I could be happy with ten more years.”

He didn’t respond. She turned to run, she caught her foot on the rug. As she fell, her glass coffee table rushed up to meet her. Then everything went dark.

The A-Train  
Justin LeBlanc

“A-train quit runnin’ at seven,” said a raspy voice.

“I beg your pardon?”

Carla turned to see a homeless man sitting with his back against the wall next to a heavily decorated shopping cart.

“You waitin’ for A-train, right?” Carla was confused at first, but she finally made out what the man was saying.

“Oh, yes! The A-train. I’m waiting for the A-train.”

“It don’t come no more. You missed it. Last one come ten minutes ago.”

“Oh, no! I’m going to be late! I’m not from here. I was just told to hop on the A-train and take it to central station where I would be picked up. What’s the quickest way to central station?”

The homeless man hopped up, grabbed his shopping cart, and wheeled it up to Carla with a smile. “My rocket ship!”
A Ramble on a Complicated Relationship

Jena McCoy

I am no longer acquainted with the night. I am, however, married to my Laptop. I may as well be. We spend hours staring at each other, its glow reflecting off my features, my fingers gliding across its body, searching its depths for responses. Who am I to complain that I do all the work? My Laptop gives me what I want, and I always go back for more. But it’s a dreadfully dependent relationship, you see, one that takes away from my more desired endeavors. My sweet Sleep doesn’t get to see me as often as it used to. I recall with nostalgia the long nights I’d spend in its embrace, my steady breathing a complement to its powerful hold on me. Now, those nights are pierced with the harsh illumination of a pixelated face, pulling me into deeper hours. Alas, I am constricted to this Laptop, this bastard of technology. I am so helpless to its strange charms that I am forced to carry it everywhere, even in the campus, our technological copulation resulting in some mass orgy of research, status updates, and ultimately, lingering headaches—digital hangovers. My heart aches; I surrender again and again to the Laptop. Surely I am no better than a whore. I hope to stop myself from glaring in disdain at the instructors who have pimped me out to MLA and to APA to satisfy their quest for grades and positive student reviews. Ah, even as this tirade ensues, I am engrossed in the action, embedded in this accursed Laptop, my calculated complaints pleasuring the keyboard with titillating tip-taps and click-clacks. I’m ashamed. But it is complicated. I need it; I rely on its presence. Surely it must feel some love for me . . . surely?
Just a Fly on the Wall  
Thomas Henderson

I landed on a wall in a room with only one occupant. He was sitting on a high-back chair staring out an open French window. I could taste a hint of decay permeating through the room. saliva dripped from my proboscis ready to decompose my food. I stayed motionless hoping that no creature would come and strike me down before I had the chance to enjoy my glorious meal. Then the itch started. I slowly moved my right leg and began to scratch my eye and quickly moved it back. A shadow formed behind me, and I left my resting place. A gust of wind was at my back followed by a smack as the shadow hit my previous spot. A grunt was followed, and then I saw the attacker. A second person had entered the room and was now walking to the sitting man. I perched myself on the ceiling and continued to daydream about the coming feast I could enjoy. The sitting man turned his head slowly to the new comer and slowly smiled. The newcomer made odd noises, and the sitting man replied in kind. I could not feast with the newcomer so close to my prey. The newcomer finally stood up and walked out forgetting the predator that lurked in the room. I took flight and landed next to the victim and slowly probed his defenses. One leg on his skin, then two, then all six. The smell of victory was at hand—until pain shot through my body with a crunch.

A Donkey and an Elephant  
Thomas Henderson

“I hope that bill passes banning salt from restaurants.”
“What bill?”
“You didn’t hear? A state legislator is trying to ban salt from restaurants and bakeries. It’s such a forward-thinking concept. Salt is a major contributor to poor health in America.”
“Wait, wait, wait. Banning salt in restaurants? Isn’t that an ingredient used in almost all food to enhance flavor and to cook and preserve meat?”
“It doesn’t matter. You’ll be able to choose to put salt on it after it is prepared.”
“There is a difference between cooking with salt and putting it on afterwards. Salt isn’t just for flavor.”
“It’s unhealthy.”
“So what if it’s unhealthy? It’s my choice to be unhealthy.”
“I don’t want my tax money to take care of people who are unhealthy.”
“I don’t want my tax money to be used to take care of anyone, but it does.”
“That’s not the point. This is a way to make America better. Salt has an effect on blood pressure.”
“Stress has an effect on blood pressure, yet are we banning anything stressful?”
“You don’t understand—”
“I understand completely. Limiting our freedoms. That’s all you damn liberals think about.”
“Just like a conservative to think about no one but himself.”
Misunderstood
*Tamika Smith*

To my dear friend Stacy-Ann,

The sun has appeared forty times since the last time we talked face-to-face. I still think about the flood of tears that streamed down your face as the officers placed me in the back seat of their car. Don’t worry or cry so much because things will get better; I plan on escaping before the forty-fifth sun rises. How are the children and your husband? Hope they all are doing just fine, and hopefully Judi didn’t grow up too much. Sometimes it’s hard to tell what day it is or the time, so I just mark the times the sun rises and falls. I don’t belong here, Stacy, so hopefully when I get out, you can help me and keep me safe.

Recently, I have been saving all the tops to the soda cans from lunch along with dental floss. I plan on braiding the dental floss until it is thick enough to form a rope to get me over the wall of the last gate. I will use the soda can tops I melted together and shaped into a razor for anyone that gets in my way; I guess going to public school wasn’t all that bad after all. Public school also taught me how to survive in the social jungle of society. Using my survival skills, I made friends with this cute janitor who has access keys to the entire place. I know that’s how I got here in the first place, but this time he is the one being used, not me.

Besides, Keith deserved to die slowly with his mistress.

Well, the moon has come to visit me now, in order to tell me the guard is ten steps down the hall. I hate it when he yells, “Lights out, crazies.” I have to go now, but I will see you before the forty-fifth sun comes up. I trust you. Don’t tell anyone.
tiny dancer
heather verrett
black ink
Advisors and editors of Mosaic look especially for the following in choosing among selections submitted:

1. A freshness and originality of thinking.
2. Readability and appeal to students.
3. An excellent command of the language.
4. A fit with any theme(s) that grow out of the submissions themselves.

Title / Category / Art Medium (If applicable)

1. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
2. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
3. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
4. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
5. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......

Advisors and editors of Mosaic look especially for the following in choosing among selections submitted:

1. A freshness and originality of thinking.
2. Readability and appeal to students.
3. An excellent command of the language.
4. A fit with any theme(s) that grow out of the submissions themselves.

Title / Category / Art Medium (If applicable)

1. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
2. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
3. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
4. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......
5. ............................................................................. / .................................... / ......

Signed

[Signature]

Date

I hereby affirm that the following entry or entry or entries are entirely my own work and are not plagiarized from any source, published or unpublished. I understand that the Mosaic staff reserves the right to edit any manuscript before publication.

Signed

[Signature]

Date

[continued on back]
Advisors and editors of Mosaic look especially for the following in choosing among selections submitted:

(1) A freshness and originality of thinking.
(2) Readability and appeal to students.
(3) An excellent command of the language.
(4) A fit with any theme(s) that grow out of the submissions themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title / Category / Art Medium (If applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ............................................................................. / .................................... / ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ............................................................................. / .................................... / ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ............................................................................. / .................................... / ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ............................................................................. / .................................... / ..................................</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ............................................................................. / .................................... / ..................................</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>