

2017
PHAETHON



Here Phaethon lies who in the
sun-god's chariot fared.

And though he greatly failed,
more greatly he dared.

Cover Graphic by Samantha Heansel



The Fall of Phaeton by Rubens

About Phaethon

The myth of Phaethon is simple. He seeks to know his father. So he asks his mother Clymene, and she tells him his father is none other than Apollo, the god of the sun. Phaethon goes to Apollo and asks for some proof of their relationship, and Apollo says he will grant him one wish. Phaethon wishes to drive Apollo's chariot that pulls the sun across the sky. The only being that can do this successfully is Apollo himself. Not even Zeus can pull the sun across the sky. Knowing this, Apollo tries to dissuade Phaethon from this task. This does not work, and Phaethon is placed in charge of the chariot and its horses that breathe fire. Doomed from the start, Phaethon loses control of the chariot and nearly burns up the Earth. The Earth cries out to Zeus for help, and Zeus strikes Phaethon dead with a thunderbolt. Phaethon, now a falling star, plunged into the river Eridanos still ablaze. His epitaph reads:

*Here Phaethon lies who in the sun-god's chariot fared.
And though he greatly failed, more greatly he dared.*

In the spirit of this figure, we at the Phaethon value bold, confident, daring, courageous, and risky fiction, poetry, and art. Phaethon is not a tragic figure. His actions, that of a mere mortal, for a brief moment of time are equal to an immortal. He did something no other mortal, or immortal for that matter, could ever do. His confidence, courage, and daring are an inspiration to all of us. We too, if we risk our very lives, can be gods.

So we want pieces that challenge, inspire, stump, and move us. We crave new expression. New ideas. New connections. We do not value art that tests the boundaries of expression. We value art that obliterates them.

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No Meaning, Just Words

Wally Szarek

Words are pretty fun
But they don't really exist
We just made them up



T-33 by Lindsey Parese

Fishing

Brandon Bevington

You know, fishing can teach you a lot of important things in your life. For so many people, it's almost nauseating how many, they say it has taught them the value of patience. For other, it has shown them persistence, to keep your nose to the grindstone until you finally achieve what you wanted. For me, it has taught me something more valuable than patience or persistence ever could. A fact of life that you should cherish every given day of your life because if you don't, you, my friend, are seriously missing out on some great things. So please, allow me, this unimportant writer to write you something very important.

Before you can even think about fishing, you need to know what type of fish you are going after. You'll need to decide if you want to go for freshwater fish or saltwater fish. From personal experience, saltwater fish tend to get much bigger than their freshwater compatriots, but is a whole hell of a lot more expensive. So, for the sake of your already screaming bank account, you'll be going with freshwater fish. Now that we have chosen the desirable generalization, now you need to decide how exactly you want to fish. Besides the common fishing pole, you also have a compound bow that has been retrofitted to shoot arrows that are tied to a rope which is spun around a reel. This has many a nickname, but one that stands out, is the bowpole. But you came here to learn how to fish, not to here the rantings of a gentleman whose life was changed by fishing.

Now, after purchasing your pole, you need a lure of some sort. Now, your lure will change depending on where you fish. Wait, can you hear that? It's the sound life savings, slowly depleting into the economy and right into the hands of politicians. Anyways, you are going to start out with a simple set up, the bobber/hook tackle. What you'll want to do is pull the line through the metal loops on your pole and keep pulling the line out until you have about three feet of line out. Next, about a foot and a half from the end of the line, attach the bobber to the line. To do this is very simple. Push the top of the plastic part sticking out of the bobber down and at the bottom of the bobber, a hook will appear. Just put the line inside that hook and then let go. Then, you'll have to use your nail to push down the plastic part while holding your thumb onto the bottom of the bobber. This will expose the hook on top of the bobber to lace your line right through. Unfortunately, for an amateur fisherman (or woman, because we can't be gender specific without offending someone in this shithole of a world), this was not the hardest step.

Your hardest task will be attaching the spindle to the end of your line. The spindle is metal part at the end of your line that allows you put on hooks

without fear of tying them to the line yourself and possibly stabbing a certain appendage in the process. Now, there are more involved knots to tie that will actually withstand a certain poundage of weight or force from the fish, but to make things easier for you, a simple square knot will do. To tie a square knot, you just tie the right end over the left end, making a pretzel shape. The you take the left end and tie it over the right end. If you did it right, you should be able to take both ends and push them apart, sliding easily. If not, just do a double pretzel knot and you should be ok for most brook trout.

“Don't be so devoted to one thing in your life that it takes away from your time and your days.”

Now that the spindle is attached, you can secure a hook to the end of your spindle. Once that is done, you can, if you choose or if you're not against using living things to catch bigger living things, put bait on the end of your hook. In New York state, you can use worms and certain bait fish, like shiners or suckers. If using bait fish, hook the minnow about a fourth of an inch below the dorsal fin. Don't worry about hurting it, it was bred for death and it knows it, plus its spine is in the middle of its body. If using worms, just keep putting that thing through the hook until you feel satisfied that it will not rip off as soon as you cast the damn thing. After that whole ordeal, you are ready to cast your line into the water and truly fish for, well, fish.

However, in the time that you did all this, your friends are out having fun and hanging out and playing darts and shit. That girl you like is all alone, waiting for a man of your caliber to come and sweep her off her feet. Or maybe your grandmother is on her final days, wishing for more time to say the things she wanted to say to you, for a long, long time. In the time that you are so involved in this fishing, you don't realize that your friend was killed in a car crash that happened only moments ago, a crash you might have prevented if you had convinced them the night before to not drive in the rain. Don't be so devoted to one thing in your life that it takes away from your time and your days. You only have so many years to live, don't spend it all fishing. ● ● ●

Overdose

Cailey Dosztan

It was a snowy and dark Monday morning in November. Vanessa spent most of her night tossing and turning on her old hand-me-down mattress that her mother gave her. She had few blankets on the bed: a fitted paint splatter sheet, a navy blue sheet that was frayed on the ends, and an oversized, plain crimson comforter. By the morning, she only had the fitted sheet left, and woke up freezing. Her alarm was blaring the sound of an old telephone, but she continued to sleep past it. The seventeen year old hated school, and she certainly wasn't going to go today. The wind outside howled and the snow was coming down hard. She hoped for a snow day that wouldn't come.

Her mother came into the room, shaking the young woman, telling her to wake up because she couldn't be late to school again. That would make twenty-four tardies in the school year already, which means she would be getting in-school suspension the next time. So Vanessa rolled onto the floor, stood up and walked towards the bathroom. She grabbed a towel off the floor, along with a pair of black sweatpants and a grey t-shirt from a skiing event she went to a few years back. She then got in and out of the shower, forgetting to put conditioner in her hair. Next, Vanessa threw on the clothes and whipped her hair into a messy bun. On her way out the door, she grabbed a sweatshirt and a pair of old Uggs. Her mother drove her to school in the dented 2003 car.

Once inside, she met up with a few of her friends who asked if she wanted to hang out after school with them. Vanessa declined, noting that she already had plans with another friend. Although upset, her friends said that it was fine, they could just do it another day. After going from class to class, she reached the crowded cafeteria. She didn't have lunch with her friends, so she often got a snack and went to the bathroom to eat and get away from everyone. She soon didn't feel well, so she called a male friend, Jarrett, and asked if he could come pick her up. He agreed, and drove the fifteen minutes to save the girl from school. Once he arrived, they went back to his house. Here, Vanessa knew her day would turn around.

The girl knew what she wanted, she was having withdrawals and soon, without the drug, she would pass out. This boy was her supplier. She depended on Jarrett to provide her with the necessary amount. He always did, even when she second guessed herself. Inside, she ached for the heroin. She could feel herself getting sick, even after just four days without having any. She needed it more than she thought. Jarrett could see this, she wasn't acting right and sensed something bad would happen if he didn't give her any soon enough. She was surrounded by needles, the boy she loved for the rush he gave her, and the love of her life: heroin. Simply by looking at around the room, she grew intense

feelings of needing the drug.

Often times Vanessa felt like she didn't want the drug, she sometimes felt awful after using, she didn't want her mother to find out. Otherwise, she would tell her father, who would more than likely send her to a rehab facility. She was too young for that, she had a life of dreams to fulfill, this wouldn't stop her. But covering up such a heavy addiction wasn't easy. She hardly wore short sleeves or tank tops because of her track marks. Vanessa didn't want others to know, especially since Jarrett was older than her. He was twenty-two, and her parents would disapprove heavily. Despite her urge to not use, she asked Jarrett to inject her. He tried multiple times to stick the needle in, it just didn't seem to want to go in. The two knew it was only a matter of time before the withdrawal took a nasty turn. There was no place to stick the needle, her arms were covered in marks, so many that there wasn't another place to stick a thin needle in.

Jarrett stated that he could use a vein in her neck, because that would be the only other place it would go in. It would have a faster effect, which is what Vanessa needed due to the withdrawal. At first she was hesitant, but agreed. Jarrett was afraid, he had never done this before and didn't want to hurt Vanessa. She was an innocent young girl who got caught up in a dangerous drug game at a party she didn't even want to be at. So Jarrett brought her home, he gave her the first injection, and was the only one to ever shoot her up. She was too afraid to do it herself so she always had him do it. He was a light drug user who often experimented with making his own drugs. However, he would not use the homemade ones on Vanessa, it was too much of a risk that he wasn't willing to take. He loved Vanessa, they often hooked up, and he knew how much she depended on him.

“She was surrounded by needles,
the boy she loved for the rush he
gave her, and the love of her life:
heroin.”

Vanessa never came home that night after school. Her parents were getting extremely nervous: she wasn't picking up her phone and wasn't texting them back. Her mother got ahold of one of her friends.

“She told me she was going over to another friend's house so she couldn't hang out with us tonight. I didn't ask who because she never tells me who she's with,” explained one of her close friends.

Meanwhile, over at Jarrett's, Vanessa was just starting to relax. She

had just been injected with two doses of heroin to make up for the loss of time trying to find a vein. She laid down on the bed and began to fall asleep. Jarrett didn't know why, she had never done this before. She was usually so excited and full of energy after she got her heroin injection. This time was different, she wasn't breathing right either. That's when she started to throw up. Jarrett could not believe this, he was panicking really bad now. He wanted to understand why this was happening, so he went to the same location and gave himself two injections. He then began acting the same as Vanessa.

The two began throwing up at the same time, the room would soon be covered in a thick stench of vomit. Jarrett lived alone, no one would be home to check on him. No one knew where Vanessa was. There was no telling of when the two would be found. Foam lay at the entrance of both mouths, with two overdosed young adults laying in a bed of vomit and heroin needles. ● ● ●

The Life of a Broken Mind

Chloe Decker

Why can't I be somewhere else?
 Why can't I lie within the sheets of luxury?
 I listen to my heart carefully and wish it would stop
 Look at my wrists, they are crying!
 I dread my life, I dread it!
 Look at my wrists, they are still crying!
 Whose child am I? I am a bastard child
 Who would love a child so tainted by the hands of her mother?
 Look at my wrists, they are closing...
 Who do I love?
 I remember my first feeling of love
 And I remember being hated; for it wasn't the norm
 I have to go away now, I need the help
 Look at my wrists, they are healing
 I know who I am...can I stay this way? Please...let me!
 Look at my wrists-it's just skin now.

Home Sweet Home

Kayla Clifford

I bolted straight up out of a deep slumber. “What the fu-, oh it’s you.” I plopped back down and pet Grizzly, my clumsy, overweight cat and then flicked away the black fur that he left behind on my hand. He had knocked over a metal wastebasket as he jumped to the bed and clearly didn’t give a shit about it. He just wanted to be fed.

My heart felt like it was about to break free from its cage. I got up anyway and gave Grizzly fresh water and scooped two scoops of food into his dish. I thought about it for a second and added another scoop of food. Just in case I ended up taking longer than planned tonight, I didn’t want him to go without.

Tonight was a big night. I was much more nervous than I wanted to be, which made me more nervous. Everything had to go smoothly.

I turned on the water for my shower. Cold. Cold. Slightly warm. Warm. Way too hot. Warm. Ah, there it goes. I was a firm believer that a hot shower could make me feel better from anything, but, not when it was melting my flesh.

Today should be no different than any other day. I would just go through the motions of the day and worry about it when the time came.

I got out of the shower smelling of Old Spice, and I leaned over the sink to look in the mirror. I had more than a five o’clock shadow going on, and I needed to shave. I wet my face and lathered shaving cream all around my face and neck.

I don’t even remember the last time I cut myself shaving. Of course, today would be the day that I do it.

I put a small piece of toilet paper over the nick on my cleft chin. I had really mastered shaving my ass of a chin, but today was just not going to be my day I guess.

It needed to be, though.

I got dressed to impress the three walls of my cubicle at work. I wore my favorite red tie.

“Red is her favorite color,” I mumbled as I was watching myself tie it in the mirror. I realized I hadn’t taken the toilet paper off my face and chuckled at how I almost just made an ass out of myself.

I stepped into the warm spring morning. I could tell that it would be mild out today, typical for this time of year in upstate New York.

A short fifteen minute commute to work was just enough time to eat a donut and finish my coffee before I was subjected to office coffee for eight hours. I savored every sip.

My job was boring. I didn’t hate it because it was easy enough, but it

would just about put me to sleep sometimes. Answering phone calls, stamping papers, filing said papers, filing said papers electronically... It got old pretty quick. All of the papers were important and for a big insurance company, and we were the not-so-important people who got to file them into different categories depending on what they qualify for and how much they’re paying and blah blah blah. Eight hours, five days a week.

“Hey, Eric, some of us guys are going out for drinks after work. It’s free wing Friday down at Eddie’s, are you in?” Jim came out of nowhere and I nearly pissed myself.

“No, thanks I have plans,” I said a little too sharply. He really startled me.

“Suit yourself, we’re going to have fun,” Jim shrugged and walked away, obviously mistaking my tone for irritability.

Jim was a really friendly guy, everybody in the office liked him. He was always inviting people to go out after work on the weekends. The look that he gave me showed me that my response must have been really off putting. Next weekend I would definitely take up his offer to hang out with the guys.

While I did feel bad, I was pretty relieved that he didn’t press on about what my plans were. I didn’t want to explain to anyone. Nobody else should know besides her and me. Our little secret.

Five o’clock was never as late as it was today. I clocked out and took my short commute home. I was greeted at the door by Grizzly, who rubbed against and shed fur all over my pants. I patted his side and stepped over him as he laid right under my feet.

I took another shower to pass time and calm my nerves.

I got dressed in grey slacks and a black shirt and put on another red tie. I had so many to choose from. This one was her favorite. Red with black stripes.

Reaching into my closet for a pair of shoes I stopped for a moment to marvel at her beauty. There were many pictures here, some of us and some of her. The ones of us were old. Before we broke up. Before she broke my heart.

We had been together for three amazing years. Everything was going great. I wanted to marry her. I wanted to have a family with her. I gave her everything and then I gave her more. She is the love of my life. I don’t know what asshole got it into her head that I was “controlling” and “obsessive” and “crazy” but, they made her leave me. They made her take my world. I know she’s lost without me, I know she is.

That didn’t matter anymore. I shut the closet door a little too hard and sat on the edge of the bed to put on my shoes.

It was almost seven o’clock now.

I just sat there on the edge of the bed with my elbows on my legs and my head buried in my hands. I thought about what I was going to say to convince her to come with me. Ever since breaking up almost a year ago, I’ve tried and tried again to get her to come back to me. This time was different.

This is the last time I will have to try.

I grabbed my wallet and the keys to my Nissan off the counter where I had left them when I walked in. I grabbed flowers I had picked up the previous day. I pet Grizzly one last time before exiting my home.

It was about eighteen minutes from my house to her apartment. The apartment that she got when she left our home.

I parked on the opposite side of the street about three houses down. I had been to this place more times than I could count, and only inside three of those times, but, every time it has pissed me off to know that she left our home to live on her own in this stupid apartment.

This was not one of those big apartment buildings where you had to buzz to get in, no, this was just a two story house that had been transformed into three apartments. I went around to the back and stepped up to the only door. I peered inside through the crack in the curtains on the other side of the window. I lightly turned the knob and it turned just so slightly before stopping.

"Locked. Fuck," I mumbled to myself as I moved down to the window.

There was nobody in sight, but the lights were on. She was home, just as I knew she would be.

I should have figured her door would be locked. It always is.

I made a quick decision and knocked.

Either she was expecting someone or she had lost her habit of checking who was at the door before answering because the door opened with a whoosh, but, her face turned pale as she saw me.

"Eric," she said plainly, letting out a deep breath.

"Anna, before you say anything, please just come out with me. I want to have a good time with you. I want you to see that I can make you so happy." I smiled really big at her and took a breath. I realized I'd been holding my breath since after I knocked.

"Eric," she paused, not quite meeting my gaze, which was right at her big blue eyes, "I've told you before, I don't want to be with you anymore. All of it. You, it's just too much. Quite frankly you need to stop showing up here whenever you want."

"Anna, please just come with me. We can have everything. We can forget that the past ever happened. All I want to do is make you happy. You are so beautiful," God fucking dammit I wish she would listen to me, just once.

"Go. Please, I won't say it again." She now looked me directly in the eye. While she was standing as tall as a girl of 5'4" could, I could tell she was ready to flee at a second's notice. Her long, chocolate colored hair was swooping in and out of her face with the evening breeze. I could tell she was thinking back to all of those times where I got a little too mad, or a little too jealous, or a little too this or that.

"I'm different now, Anna. I've changed! I've changed so much, and it's

"Red was her favorite color."

all for you. I know that we should be together. I know that you know we should be together. Just come out with me, Anna." I was still smiling at her, and she was still not looking me in the eye.

She had rejected me. Again. All I could do was stand there, dumbfounded, that such a smart girl could turn down someone who only wanted to give her everything.

There was only one thing that I could do now. She had turned me down for the last time.

I drove west out of town towards the high bridge about five miles away. It wasn't a bridge that had much traffic, especially this time of the night. It was about ten o'clock now. The evening had slipped peacefully into a dark, clear night much like one might slip into a deep slumber.

I pulled over the car and parked it on the side, not bothering to hide it.

I walked up to the bridge slowly, thinking. I was thinking about what happens when someone dies. Not if they go to heaven or Hell, more like, what happens in their world after they die. Their stuff is given away, their loved ones suffer, and their whole life is just a memory.

I climbed up onto the ledge that peered over into the dark waters below. It seemed almost as if whoever built the bridge wanted people to jump off it.

The water below was falling over the rocks and rumbling on, cutting through the darkness with a billowing echo. I closed my eyes. I thought of what it must be like to just suddenly end...

A loud noise from the trunk of my car snapped me like a rubber band back into the reality of this situation.

I popped my trunk with the key fob on my red lanyard.

Anna was writhing like a snake whose head was being held between two fingers.

"Now, now, darling, shh. It will all end soon enough." I stroked the side of her face and tucked her hair behind her ear. There were black streaks of makeup running down her flushed face. Her once beige shirt was now red.

I'm sure if she could talk she would have pleaded with me to stop what I was about to do, but, it's pretty hard to talk when you're missing a tongue.

I lifted her small frame carefully out of the trunk. I didn't want to hit her head off anything, so I covered it with my hand. Her hands were bound behind her back with her favorite red tie.

I walked over to the ledge again. This time I did not climb over and watch the water crash around. This time, I lifted Anna's still twisting body up to my shoulders and gently dropped her down.

Down.

Down.

Down she went.

Anna arrived to her new, more permanent home with a loud splash. I waved goodbye.

I got in my car and headed back towards town. Twenty five minutes later I was sitting comfortably in bed with Grizzly to keep me company in my home sweet home. ● ● ●



Rose Bowl by Samantha Sawanec



Spiral by Shannon Holmes

David McKenzie

photography
& digital compositions



Africa by David McKenzie



Outer Space by David McKenzie



Childhood by David McKenzie



Space by David McKenzie



Imagination by David McKenzie



Mind by David McKenzie



Life of a College Student by David McKenzie



The Social Media by David McKenzie



Life of the World's Most Famous Arena by David McKenzie

I Scream Into The Night For You

TJ Hagadorn

It was a dark night, and I could hear thunder rumbling off in the distance, but the sky above me was clear, with nothing in it but the crescent-shaped sliver of the moon, a few airplanes, and the stars. Oh, how I wished I could be one of those stars: Bold, bright, brilliant, seen by millions and loved by many. I longed to join their gaseous forms and live in the night sky, perhaps as a part of Orion, the Big Dipper, Sagittarius, or some other magnificent constellation. But alas, I was merely human, and could only survive on Earth, rather than among the stars.

I sighed and glanced around at my surroundings for what seemed like the thousandth time. Beneath me, cold and gray, was the slab of shale that I was currently sitting on. Moss grew along one side of it, though it was currently brown and dead due to the cold. Under my feet and also covering the ground around my location was snow and ice, pure white or crystal clear where it remained undisturbed, but dirty with mud along the edges where both people and animals had disrupted its existence. To my left ran the creek from which the original city nearby had gotten its name, though the name of the city had since been changed, and further along it there was a small waterfall which only seemed to be a waterfall when there was a flood. The edge of the water was frozen into ice and covered with snow, though the center, where the water ran swiftest, remained open and unfrozen. To my right side, down in the valley, was a gorgeous view of the city, only about a half-mile away from my current location-- certainly within walking distance. This was my happy place; I came here often in order to think in peace, to be left alone with my thoughts and face no unwanted disturbances.

I stared at the two pictures I had taken from inside my wallet. They were of the only two people who had ever mattered to me: My ex, and my former best friend. I felt the lump in my throat grow as I studied them for what seemed like the millionth time in merely two hours. Tucking them carefully back into my wallet, I stood up and began walking towards the city. I knew exactly where I was going, and what I was about to do. As I walked, I glanced around me, and once I entered the city, I looked at the faces of the few people passing by. Not a single person met my gaze; I'm sure if they had, if one of them had simply smiled towards me, or asked how I was, or even just said "Hello", I would have ceased my journey. Any one of them could have stopped me... But, as usual, I was merely a shadow on the wall of their lives.

I headed towards my destination; the Tower. It was a large building, the tallest in the city at 50 stories, and perfect for my plans. When I reached it finally, I didn't head for the front door, but instead walked around to the back

and began climbing the fire escape. It took a long time; I was climbing for what felt like days, but was simply about a half-hour long event.

“Sometimes, though very rarely,
I wish that I had not made the decision
that I did that night...”

I stood near the edge, looking down over the city block, breathing slowly and trying to figure out why I was so utterly calm despite what I was planning. I didn't really register the car horns or helicopters making noise as I stood there, but instead focused solely on my train of thought, which is probably why I barely noticed them come up behind me until they reached out and placed a hand on my shoulder, making me jump.

“Please... Don't do it. I'm begging you.”

“Don't do what?” I asked, turning around and playing as if I had no idea what they were talking about, as if I was simply here enjoying the view of the sunset from somewhere where it would be undisturbed.

“You know what I'm talking about... Please. We can talk about this, all of us can. We care about you.”

“You don't even know me.” I sneered, glaring at the person now standing in front of me. “You don't know the things I've done, the people I've hurt, what I've been through and seen.”

“Yet I do know you. I know how you feel inside, how much you care about others, and how it kills you that you ever hurt anybody. I may not know your story, but I know you. And you know that I do, you've said it before, that I know you even better than you yourself do.”

“If you know me so well, then tell me, why do I feel like this? Why have I planned out every last moment, why am I standing on this roof?” I glared at them still, wishing that they hadn't shown up at all. Who were they to tell me whether they knew me well or not? Nobody knew the real me. The only people who ever had known were gone, were never coming back no matter what I attempted or did.

“They told me, you know. How much they loved you, and how badly you were hurting. They didn't want to go, they just couldn't handle reality.” They looked at me, gazing at me with those eyes until my own were cast down to the roof's surface. I heard them sigh, and they reached for me again, causing me to take a step backwards, closer to the edge.

“Don't touch me. You come any closer and it's over. I'm not joking, I really will do it.”

“Everybody's worried about you. Every last one of them. We've been

worried since you left three weeks ago. It was a shock, honestly... They expected you to do it in the bedroom. Their bedroom. The one you wouldn't leave for months." I noticed them strategically avoiding the name of the person I loved, the person that destroyed me. It was a good idea on their part; If anything would officially send me over the edge, that would be most likely to do so.

"Yet nobody looked for me? Hmph."

"We tried. Your so-called 'friends' made sure we couldn't find you." I made a mental note to thank them if I somehow ended up safely off of this roof. As long as things went as planned, I would not be thanking them for a rather long time, if ever at all.

I glanced behind me, looking down as I did so and noting how far my feet were from the edge of the roof. Two feet... I could manage that easily. Then I looked back at them slowly, glancing into their eyes again and willing myself not to start crying. That was my one fatal flaw: I cried all of the time, over the silliest of things. It aggravated me to my wit's end.

"Please..." they started again. "Don't do this. I'm here for you. We're all here for you. I mean it, and so do the others. We won't leave you. I promise."

"Promises mean nothing to me anymore. I'm sorry... I have to do this." I swallowed, a tad nervous now. I had no control over what they could possibly do.

"No you don't. Just let us help you..." I shuffled backwards, slowly so that they wouldn't notice. One foot away now. They whispered now. "Please... please, please, please... Don't do this..."

"Why do you care...? Honestly, tell me why."

"You're my friend. I care about you so much, it would kill me if you did this. Or, at least, it'd make me extremely upset..." They stared into my eyes so intensely that I had to force myself to look away.

"You. Barely. Know. Me." I shuffled backwards again. Mere inches now.

"I know you well enough." Centimeters.

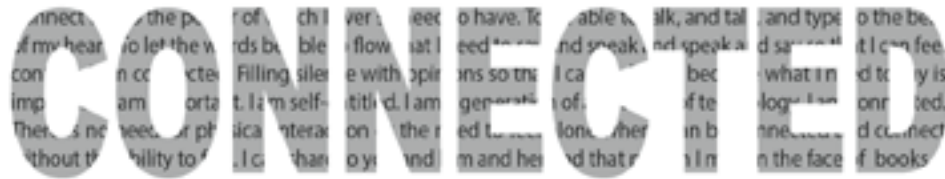
"I'm sorry. I can't help how I feel, and my heart is telling me to do it. I'm so, so sorry." My heels were off the cement, hanging over the edge.

"Please, don't do this!" They pleaded, both with their lips and their eyes. "We can work through this. I can help you. We all can help you. I promise! Just please... Please, don't do it."

Sometimes, though very rarely, I wish that I had not made the decision that I did that night... Other times? Other times, I am quite glad that I jumped.



City Lights by Milndlis Diese



BY: SHARON HOWELL

Connect me to the
P O W E R
 of which I ever so *NEED* to have.
 To be able to talk, **and** talk, **and** type to the beat of my heart.
 To let the words be able to flow that I *NEED* to say **and** speak
and speak **and** say so that I can feel **C O N T E N T .**

I AM CONNECTED.

Filling silence with opinions so I can feel valid
 because what I *NEED* to say is

I M P O R T A N T

I AM IMPORTANT.

I AM SELF-ENTITLED.

I AM A GENERATION OF A NEW AGE OF TECHNOLOGY.

I AM CONNECTED.

There is no *NEED* for physical interaction
 or the *NEED* to feel alone *when I can be connected*
and connect without the ability to feel.

I can share to *you and him and her and* that person I met
 on the face of books

ALL THE WAY IN SPAIN

I know what he did today

He just bought a coke zero today.

I know this because

I AM CONNECTED.

I get to **C U S T O M I Z E** how I feel with an emoji
 or a status or a tweet on twitter because I have an
O P I N I O N on all these twits that tweet on twitter and

E V E R Y O N E

who pokes or likes or has a belief.

I NEED TO VOICE MY OPINION

BECAUSE I CAN

BECAUSE EVERYTHING IS ABOUT ME

BECAUSE I AM CONNECTED.

I have over 1,000 friends and followers

that see what I want at just a click

*because I get to customize the real me. I get to show them my best
 even though I only know a handful in life.*

I have the satisfaction to be liked

and to feel satisfied,

and satisfy my needs.

I CAN FEEL FOR JUST \$10.99

WITH JUST THE CLICK OF A BUTTON.

I CAN CLICK TO BUY EMPTY HOPE AND HAPPINESS

AND CLICK TO FULFILL THE NEED

TO BE CONNECTED.

We **T H R I V E** for connection
 but lose the ability to bond when we are **F I X E D**
 to the **P O W E R** of technology.

BUT I CONNECT MYSELF TO FEEL THE COLD MACHINE

AGAINST MY FINGERS, AGAINST MY FACE

TO FEEL, TO FEEL, TO FEEL,

WARMTH IN MY HEART.

Because when I can feel

I CAN FEEL CONNECTED.



Something Familiar by Amanda Michelle Youker

When the Dame is Awake

Chloe Decker

When the lights shut out, the dame is awake
 Within the area of your bedroom, she lurks with no noise
 You feel the room darken as the door closes
 Click, the lock cries loudly
 Within the air you feel hysteria
 But you know she's there by the shift of the blankets
 She hides behind you and her arms are around you
 The dame is quiet until her frosty hands begin to wander
 By then her breath is on your neck excitedly and her black eyes are shut
 Her skin is sweaty
 Your body is cold
 She walks away, finally full and satisfied
 But the dame never fully leaves for she strays in your dreams
 While you are awake she's quiet and still
 But her breathing still haunts you
 And even though she leaves you, the shame and regret lingers...
 And kills....
 And torments.....
 And live on you will....
 But never will the dame leave your backside....
 Or your dreams.....

Snowfall

Lora Andela

I watch the snow coming down out my window. It appears violent and aggressive but that is only the size of the flakes. Tying my boots I realize, people really are just like snowflakes. Yes, we're all different, but also the way we appear and how others look at us. From this side of the glass the big flakes seem intimidating, one wouldn't want to walk among them. But once you get out you see that they are gently falling and quite beautiful, much less painful than the small, "weak" flakes in yesterday's squall, pelting and reddening my face as I walked.

Before leaving I check over my room, everything is neat and in its place. My parents are asleep, they won't notice my leaving. The cold air is refreshing as I start my way out of town. Looking in the dark shop windows I see my reflection, skin pale as ever, just like the princess Snow White. The streets are empty, which is the reason I'm now walking in the early morning hours. I have a plan each time I walk but never could carry it out.

You see, nothing is good anymore. We fight and argue, there is never peace in the waking hours and school is no better. I am sick and either a burden or a joke to everyone surrounding me. They're getting a divorce and I can't help but feel that it is because of my disease and the struggle to treat me. I know we can't afford it and I'm going to die anyway, so why bother? That's my plan when I walk, to end it all; but something always happened to stop me, someone always interfered. But nobody can interfere when they're asleep.

I get to the woods and realize that, while I planned to end it all I never decided how. Should I go to the river? Perhaps I should come again tomorrow night and bring instruments, rope or knives. I clear a spot at the base of a big oak and curl up against it, closing my eyes and listening to the breeze in the branches above me. Amazing how silent the snow is compared to the impact it has.

Next thing I know I'm waking up, the sky is clear and the sun is just rising. I stand and stretch, feeling oddly warm for someone who just slept against a tree, midwinter wearing only a light jacket. I turn towards home but suddenly notice that there is no sound when I step, no cold seeping into my boots, there is wind but no chill. Stopping, I turn and see myself lying there against the tree. I look so peaceful, like a porcelain doll asleep, still as stone and whiter than ever.

Snow has fallen. ● ● ●

Lost

Amanda Cummings

Round and round,
So far from the ground.
Be I forsaken?
Or never found.
I hear a voice,
Perhaps I'm free?
But just a noise,
For I can't see.



Harvest Moon by Samantha Heansel

In Retrospect

Fallon Jeffers

"Pull the fucking trigger!" he cries out.

Spittle flowing from his lips covers his bearded face. The barrel of the 38 caliber Smith & Wesson is jammed back into his mouth, chipping his tooth and gouging out the skin on the roof of it.

"Just pull the fucking trigger already, get it over with and stop making me wait" he thinks in his mind. He knows that just a few more ounces of pressure will trip the sear and release the hammer of the small pistol, which will then fall and strike the primer that will send a 158 grain copper projectile through his head. With any luck it'll be quick, much better than the ones he's seen, or even better than the one he deserves.

His wrath is replaced with agony and mourning as tears stream down his face like a child. He is almost incoherent. It feels like his heart is shattering because he has no idea what to do, allow the hand the squeeze just a little more, or stop it and live...but for what purpose?

He can only think of the small child that is asleep in the house, far enough away that the report of the shot wouldn't wake her. He thought he was a good father, but that couldn't be true, he was too much of a failure. Remembering the past year of hell, a bitch of a wife that walked out on him.

"I just need to find myself..." She'd explain.

"You need to take your pills..." She'd accuse.

"You've become someone I hate..." She'd blame.

"You're a fucking monster and you should just die!" She'd spit!

All these spoken or yelled at one time or another, every one a culmination of a failed marriage before it could even start.

"Such a god damned failure, but I'm good enough to take care of my little girl." He thinks of her little head resting on her pillow, "just like she used to do on my chest." He slowly releases his finger from the trigger, pulling the barrel out of his mouth wet with blood and saliva.

"Your so much better than this" he says out loud. Looking through tear clouded eyes he sees the garage he would have ended his life in. All the tools, clean and shiny in their places. The floor swept and clean. He looks to the benches, cluttered with parts, a Shovelhead engine from an old Harley Davidson stripped down to the scarred cylinders.

"You're such a fucking idiot," standing up straight he feels the sharp pains all through his body, knees and back aching. "Dumbass!" He screams, throwing the pistol across the garage bouncing it off a bikes gas tank, denting it. The pistol comes to rest against the far wall.

"Shit, I can't believe I just did that." He says out loud, rushing over to

pick the weapon up, brushing it off with a shop rag pulled from his back pocket. Wiping it down he wraps it in the rag and gently places it in the top of his toolbox, almost reverently, right where it'll stay until he needs it again.

He walks to the door of the garage, turning off the lights as he leaves. Standing outside under the roofs overhang he looks around, his mind is so full of fuck. He thinks he sees things, just out of his eyes focus, dark shapes standing there, but he never really gets a good look at them, they always flit away when he looks directly at them.

"Go away," he gasps out under his breath, "Do you know who I am, what shit I've been through?"

Looking towards the small blue house, ignoring the imaginary beings he sees out of the corner of his eyes, he walks towards the only good thing in his life. As he walks he mumbles to himself.

"I'm the last child of the 70's, I grew up listening to records, I survived my childhood."

"I'm a son, brother, uncle."

"I've chased a midget stripper around Toka-ri."

"I've fallen out of a helicopter, I've been pushed from airplanes."

"I'm a soldier, a veteran...I'm a father."

He opens the door to the house, quiet, no noise, no whimper of a bad dream. Tiptoeing down the hallway he peeks in, his daughter fast asleep, school in the morning. Walking past to his own room he sits on the bed and kicks off his boots. Laying back he lets his mind wander, knowing it'll be another night of no sleep, just memories. Turning on the radio he hears "Sundown", a song by some old guy named Lightfoot, the lyrics bore into his brain as he waits.

Like clockwork, the hallucinations begin...

He watches as a dark specter rests at the foot of the bed, the smell of bad BBQ and burnt oil wafts to his nose. White teeth smile at him from a rictus grin, lips cracked and burnt, split open.

"Come on in you sons-a-bitches, sit right down, tell me how it's my fault," he says, talking to no one, at least no one real.

"It doesn't matter if you think I'm real or not, it's still your fault. You're the reason we are here. So go ahead, say I'm not here, say it's all a figment of your imagination. You'll still hear us, in your sleep or when you're awake, you'll see us out of the corner of your eyes. You can blame it on your PTSD, a bad trip, whatever you want, but we will always be here, we're your failures, enjoy it."

"You're not real, so hurry up and fuck off." He barely manages to whisper.

The stink invades his nose with the noise raping his mind. He curls into a ball as the specter laughs and goads him on, more and more join in until

it's just a white noise of hatred and blame. This is how his nights go, he keeps a straight mind long enough to keep his friends and family happy, long enough to tuck his little girl in bed for the night, then it's gone. Any semblance of sanity gets stripped away bit by bit as the memories of his past and thoughts of a failed future flay his soul.

"I just want to be ok," he whimpers.

"I just want to be happy, I want to live and take back my nights from you assholes!"

His emotions flood forth, the dam holding back everything finally breaks. The ghosts of his memories laugh as they fade away, knowing it's another night of ruined sleep, just a few more nights like these and he would be theirs for eternity. The last thing he sees is that evil grin, white teeth like mini tombstones smiling at him.

"You will be ours soon enough pussy, just let go and I will catch you." It whispers in the dark.

The smells are gone, and so are the ghosts but the feelings are still there, weighing down on his heart. It's only a few more minutes until the alarm will go off, he won't let it, shutting it off a minute before its time. His morning will go much the same as any: get her up, make her breakfast, clothed, lunch bag, off to school. Structure.

Another meeting with the Veterans Affairs therapy group, to hear about all the shit everyone has gone through. Lost friends and family, failed marriages, anger and rage.

A new guy is talking about his deployment, rambling on incessantly, at times vacant-eyed. The kid's maybe twenty years old, wearing a combat infantry badge on a ratty Army T-shirt.

"There was a car bomb that -- what happened was, there's an Iraqi police station and right next to it was, like, a coffee shop, and a lot of the police officers would go there to get coffee in the mornings. There were a lot of civilians in that area, a car bomb just drove up and just indiscriminately killed everyone - cops and civilians."

"On the side of the street there was -- there was a little girl's foot. Well, I think it was a girl because it looked like a little pink sandal, but there was a foot still in it. A little pink sandal with a little flower or something on it. The shoe was so small I'm imagining the girl was no older than 6...."

Drowning out the rest of the discussion, he thinks about his own daughter, sitting in school, six almost seven years old now. It's all the same shit, every week. War stories, horror stories. Something will eventually have to give he realizes, "I can't take much more of this shit" he whispers to no one in general.

After group he leaves the medical center and suits up for the ride home, it's beginning to rain. "Just what I need, a wet bike ride! Fuck my life."

He straddles his Streetbob and starts it up, the rumble of the exhaust enough to scare a passerby, putting in his earbuds he listens as the beginning of a Misfits song plays.

As he pulls out into traffic he sees the ever present dark figures, always watching, waiting for him to fuck up. "Maybe today will be the day" he thinks as he gets the bike up to 80 in just a few seconds.

As the rain pelts his face his phone vibrates, once, then again shortly after. Thinking it could be the school calling about his daughter he pulls over under a stone arch out of the rain. He takes his phone out of his vest pocket, he answers the call from an unknown number.

"Hello?" Silence, static, he can almost hear a voice..

"Fa....." Just the beginning of a word..more static..then silence...and a click.

The phone vibrates scaring him, almost dropping it. A text message, from the same number blinks on the screen. A simple message, just two letters, "Hi." He is unsure if it's a trick of his mind, but he feels a small smile creep across his face, texting back the same thing "Hi," he waits, wondering who is on the other end. "Hello, I know you don't know me, but I got your number from a friend..." The messages continued, there in tunnel with the rain pouring down around him.

He would ignore the malevolent grins, the charred specter would no longer sit at the end of his bed. It would be pushed out, beyond his sight, no longer waiting in the shadows to cause harm. The old pistol would be moved, into the house and locked away, not as reminder of his lowest point in life but to remind him just how far he has come.

Looking back on that message will always bring a smile to his face, something that had been missing for far too long. He will have his nightmares, but with a warm hand and soft words he will be assured that it'll be ok, that he's loved. On his bad days he'll be told to breathe and talk, not that he needs pills. He wants to live, to be a good father, to be a husband to the angel that saved his life with a simple text.

"Hi." ... ● ● ●

"I just want to be ok"

Sun Filled Dawn Amanda Cummings

The moon beckons
On dim lit nights
Shadows cross
As rain pours
Darkness surrounds
Light closes in
Fear heightens
As hope fades
Flashing light
Struck above
Eyes open
As sky brightens
Filtered light
Shines down
Renewed spirits
As sun filled dawn

GG EZ Wally Szarek

Five, seven then five
These poems are easy to write
I'm a lazy fuck



Two Dragons by Joichi Ikenoue

Change of Plans

Michael Sarpen

Steven got up from his desk. It was go time. He hit the light switch and went for the door just as his desk phone rang. Who would be calling at closing time? It continued to ring, so he stepped over and slowly picked it up. He waited and said nothing.

"I know who you've been talking to, Mr. Meuhler," said a low, curt voice. "You've made a terrible mistake."

The line went dead. Steven quickly hung up the phone, his eyes wide. He pushed his black-rim glasses closer. He didn't want to be nervous, but that sounded like the CEO. But there was no way, right? Glancing at his watch, Steven snapped out of it and left his office.

"Sixty," Steven thought as he looked at his watch again. It was a few minutes after five, and the last group of white-collar staff was exiting the modern, glass lobby onto the busy Manhattan street. Steven walked past the top of the stairs and then past a reception desk. "Forty." He was quite nervous, but this was certainly not his first high-pressure situation. He was a chemical engineer, after all. Steven rounded a corner and looked down a hallway. He had requested a meeting with the CEO that he had never planned to attend. It had been a long and nerve-wracking day, but Steven was about to close the curtain on the final act of a three year play. He had worked at Athena Pharmaceuticals for nine years now, but over the last three he had been helping the FBI track the company's shady, and now criminal, dealings. "Twenty." He slowly walked down the quiet, furnished hallway to the CEO's office. To the right of the door was a fire alarm. He looked at his watch again. "Three, two, one." Steven looked both ways, held his breath, and pulled the alarm. Instead of a blaring siren, a faint, low beeping sound accompanied a flashing red light. Steven stepped back from the door. At the other end of the hallway appeared Steven's boss, the Special Projects Director.

"Did you do that?" he questioned.

"No, did you?" Steven replied.

He realized he should sound more worried. The man ran down the hallway past Steven. Steven looked back at the office door for a moment, and then followed his boss. He went past the reception desk again and came to where his boss was standing at the top of the lobby staircase. As Steven had planned, two SWAT teams were entering the building. One proceeded through the lobby, while the other headed for the stairs.

"You know what to do," said Steven's boss in a hushed voice.

Steven nodded and walked quickly in the direction they had been going. He wanted to keep the facade up until everything was secure, so he

followed his boss's order. So far, it looked like everything was going according to plan. He went through more hallways and lab rooms, scanning his key card as he went. He finally came to a long, stainless steel hallway with a narrow door at the end. He came to the door and looked into the retina scanner. It beeped, and vents on the floor and ceiling pumped out a white mist. The door opened and Steven stepped through. The mist cleared, revealing a narrow room with empty shelves. Steven's heart rate sped up. Where were they? This morning, the shelves had held dozens of canisters of sarin gas, the odorless, colorless neurotoxin able to swiftly and silently kill mass groups of people. Steven had followed the plans flawlessly. How could he have been detected? At the end of the room was an elevator with a sticky note on the door. He cautiously walked over and took it.

"Get on the elevator if you want your fiancé to wake up tomorrow," it read. The door quickly opened.

Now Steven was legitimately terrified. Everything had fallen apart. He didn't know how. He just wanted to get out of here. Out of this city. He wanted to see Emma again. He wanted to marry her and start a new life somewhere else. If there was any hope of that happening, and he knew there probably wasn't, he had to do as he was told. He let the note drift to the floor before boarding the elevator. The door quickly shut, and the elevator moved downward without making a sound. A few seconds later, the door opened. He was in the lowest level, the empty parking garage. A box truck was parked in front of the elevator, its open back revealing a pallet of canisters. Six figures in white hazmat suits were facing the elevator. One stepped forward, bearing a silenced MP7 submachine gun like the others. He pointed at the hazmat suit lying in front of Steven. Steven looked at the suit, then back up at the figure, then walked to the suit. He put it on and zipped the multiple layers. Two more people walked over and surrounded Steven. Someone grabbed the back of his suit.

"Hold still!" one of them shouted with an accent. Steven could hear the sound of air rushing in. Suddenly, he felt dizzy, and his knees got weak. He tried to brace himself, but only saw the room go black.

Steven struggled to open his eyes. He was soaked in sweat, and his head felt ready to split open. He was lying on the floor, still in the hazmat suit. He tried to move, but his hands and feet were bound. This was obviously a high-rise in Lower Manhattan. It was nighttime, and the floor to ceiling windows allowed him to see across the Hudson into Jersey. Fireworks were exploding over the water below. "July fourth," he thought. Had it really been two whole days?

Suddenly, the legs of a hazmat suit were in front of him. A man in his late thirties knelt down and looked straight at Steven. "Mr. Meuhler!" The man had a slight Russian accent. "I was getting worried," he said with relief in his voice.

Steven was squinting and trying to think. The man appeared to be in charge, and continued talking as his associates came into the room carrying the canisters. "First, I must thank you for acting so swiftly and relentlessly. You forced your employer to sell to the lowest bidder!" Steven was unsettled by the happiness in the man's voice. Other than the man, the only sound was the faint pop of fireworks in the distance. The man stood up and stepped to the window. "Of course, it also meant you had to come with us," the man said, pausing briefly. "But I won't hurt you. You probably know what I need," he said as he turned back to Steven.

Two of his comrades wheeled a machine the size of a stove over to the window. Steven recognized it as a fumigator built by Athena specifically for the gas canisters. Two other suited figures attached large suction cups to the glass and began cutting with some type of circular saw. Steven felt his heart about to stop. The city was packed tonight. This would be the end of the world as anyone knew it. Whoever these people were, they were actually trying to start World War III.

Steven was well focused now. He didn't notice his head aching anymore.

"No," he said, looking straight into the man's eyes.

"Mr. Meuhler, I'm not an idiot. I know how to open the machine and load the canisters," the man said, sounding flustered. "But the canisters are red on one side and blue on the other. I'm aware that loading the wrong end first will simultaneously deactivate all of them."

He was right. Sarin was composed of two constituent gases that had to be mixed to be lethal. The canisters would release only one of the gases, making the weapons useless. Apparently the man knew everything about these machines except the final step. That was why Steven was here. His eyes drifted back to the two people cutting the window, then to the fireworks.

"I won't," Steven asserted.

The man knelt down again. "Steven, please," the man said quietly, catching Steven off guard. "I have men at Emma's house in Stamford. She's a beautiful young woman and she loves you. She is almost finished with veterinary school. Tell me how to load these, and I will forget about the two of you forever. It is your government we are after."

Steven felt ready to throw up. The headache was coming back. For a moment, he considered giving in. He knew he couldn't. He wouldn't. There was a fifty percent chance this attack would fail anyway. He just hoped they would kill him afterwards. The two at the window finally pulled a large section of glass away.

The man's expression changed. "Mr. Meuhler." He wasn't sounding compassionate as he did a moment ago. "Red, or blue?"

There was an extremely long pause. The fireworks were slightly louder

due to the open window, and a breeze was coming through. After what seemed like minutes, the man stood up and barked an order in Russian. He turned to the machine. "Load it!"

Two men picked up canisters, while another pulled a phone out of a duffle bag and made a call. The leader took Steven's arm and dragged him to the window. "You might as well watch the festivities," he said. Steven's head was literally over the edge. He could see thousands of people on the streets. A concert was going on in Battery Park. There were several large ships in the harbor.

"It's red!" he shouted. "The red side!" Steven took an enormous risk as a last-ditch effort. It really was red. He hoped the obviousness of the color paired with his reluctance would psych these guys out, or at the very least buy him a moment.

Everyone stopped. The leader just stared at him, then shouted what was probably a curse in Russian. "That's what I was going to do!" the man said angrily. "You saw me doing it, didn't you?" he growled. He walked away for a moment, cursing in English. After a minute or so, he returned and stared at Steven again. He looked like he wanted to curse him, but he just turned to his men.

"Load blue," he ordered as he grabbed the phone and prepared to hit the call button. The men loaded four canisters into individual cells and closed them. The leader hit a green button on the machine. It began beeping rapidly, followed by hissing noises from all the canisters.

The man was beyond enraged. He kicked Steven several times and then pushed him flat onto his back. The man got into his face with the phone. "She will pay!" he roared. He hit the call button. Adrenaline was now surging through Steven. He had one more person to save. Steven rocked his head forward ever so slightly, then jerked backwards, kicking his feet over his body and into the man's arm. The phone dropped onto Steven's body as he rolled over the edge.

He caught a glimpse of the street as the phone fell past him. There were crowds and police everywhere. As the street neared, Steven felt hope. And that was the last thing he ever felt. ● ● ●

Out of the Woods

Michael Sarpen

Something about this day had seemed wrong from the very beginning. Ben had never looked forward to going to his grandparents' old Vermont farm to help his father evict the new tenants. The middle-aged couple had seemed nice, if somewhat odd, when he met them last year. But after three months of never seeing or hearing from them, along with the property now looking like a slum, it was time to force them out. Ben's father had brought two sheriff's deputies along to make sure there was no trouble. But as usual, no sign of life anywhere around. The sky was gray and a chilly wind was blowing, adding to the dark mood of the day. A girl's blood-curdling scream was when Ben knew this wasn't going to end happy.

Officer Mike Smith, a tall and burly former marine in his late twenties, bolted down the porch steps and around to the back of the house, where the sound had come from. Ben was still slightly frozen in panic. He watched as Mike's partner, Kelly Davis, a blonde mother of two, quickly followed him to the back. Ben's father went after them, but stopped to grab Ben by the shoulders.

"Ben!" he said, looking him in the eyes. "You alright?" Ben's expression slowly changed from fearful to an eerie, emotionless one. "Ben?"

"We've got to go, Dad."

His father looked at him in confusion. He was about to say something, but Mike called his name from the back yard. "We will, son. We will, let's just go see what's going on. Come on." Ben slowly started to follow. His father was a good man, and had always taken him seriously when he felt something was wrong.

Still, Ben knew something bad was going to happen. When these tenants had moved in, a boy at school had said that he knew of the people and their history, and within days, rumors had spread that "doomsday psychopaths" were living in Ben's grandparents' house. It was said that they moved from farm to farm every couple years, always preparing for an apocalypse. Now a high school senior, he had dismissed the ridiculous jokes. After all, the kid who started it all was some country boy who nobody talked to. Ben was a handsome, straight-A student who was likely to go to college on a basketball scholarship. But now, the last thing that the boy had said to him was at the forefront of his mind.

"Just don't look for the girl. There isn't one."

Coming to the back of the house, Ben stared along with everyone else. The usually empty backyard was now littered with cattle and bird skeletons. There was also a minivan and two sedans, stripped of everything from tires to hood. The sedans appeared to have been burned, but the minivan was still its

original turquoise color. The large white scratch on its rear door caught Ben's attention. The van used to bring a twin brother and sister to school, until they simply stopped showing up a couple of months ago. The only other familiar thing here was the large, old flatbed truck the tenants had first arrived in. It was heavily loaded with scrap metal, some kitchen appliances, and many barrels.

"Something's burning," Kelly said, sniffing the air.

Mike looked around, then grabbed his radio. "Ten twenty-four, requesting backup at address—" he stopped. "Dammit, radio's dead. Kelly, call it in. Tell them to send a fire crew, too."

Then the piercing scream happened again. This time, it came from the woods next to the house, and seemed to be getting rapidly closer.

"Watch out!" Mike shouted.

At the last second, Ben looked up to see a stereo speaker hurtling through the air towards him. Before he had time to react, it crashed onto the ground only a couple of feet away. It appeared to have a car battery attached to it. The screaming had stopped.

"We've got to leave, now!" Ben demanded. As he said it, he heard a faint, distant clap. The next second brought the sound of an impact, and Mike dropped to the ground.

"Get down!" Kelly screamed, drawing her pistol.

Ben's father rushed to help her drag Mike behind the minivan. Without pausing, Ben ran as fast as he could around to the front of the house. More shots were being fired, but he didn't stop until he got to the front yard. There, he saw both his father's truck and the police Tahoe behind it engulfed in flames. He looked at the keys in his hand. Now what? Ben really didn't want to die, but he was scared out of his mind and descending into panic. He didn't realize minutes were passing, until he turned to see a large, mangy, feral-looking dog coming towards him. It was coming from the woods where the speaker had come from, and appeared to be starving.

Ben stepped back. The dog was probably some sort of mix, but it only looked like it wanted to eat. Slowly, it kept moving towards him, showing its teeth and not blinking. Ben suddenly realized there were four other large dogs coming behind it, all in the same condition. Looking back, he saw his father, who was bleeding, helping Kelly carry Mike.

"Ben, get the truck here now," his father yelled in pain, before realizing the fire. With that, he stumbled to the ground, and Mike with him. The dogs broke into a run towards the four of them, barking viciously. Ben fell backwards in fear and desperately tried to get back up. The lead dog was locked onto him and sprinting full force. Kelly fired off her last two shots, dropping the dog and giving Ben an extra second to get to his feet.

The other four dogs didn't seem to be deterred, and only ran faster towards Ben. He knew he had to draw them away from his father and the

officers, so he made for the burning cars. He ran as fast as he could, shouting at the pack. Luckily, they followed, and three years of suicide drills in basketball had finally paid off. When he got to the truck, the flames were not as fierce around the bed, so he reached in and quickly grabbed the shovel that had been there. He clenched it and turned around. The dogs didn't stop, so Ben took a massive swing which knocked two of them down. Another one leaped for his face, but he used the handle to block it. The fourth one sunk its teeth into Ben's knee and pulled violently. The pain was excruciating, but he had no breath to scream.

Ben grabbed the shovel again and tried unsuccessfully to beat the dog away. He could hear what was probably his kneecap cracking as the dog pulled harder. Just then, Ben's father came up behind the dog and grabbed its legs. It immediately let go and turned to him, but Kelly was ready with a boot to the side of its head. They had left Mike behind, which Ben assumed could only mean one thing.

"Come on, son, we're getting out of here," his dad said, reaching out his hand. He and Kelly helped Ben get up, and they started making for the road. As they walked past the burning Tahoe, a tall figure came from behind it, wielding a police shotgun. The person had a paper bag with eye slits over their head and what looked like a dog whistle around their neck.

"Oh sweetie," the person said in a woman's voice, turning to Kelly. "You're the only one not bleeding." She raised the shotgun at Kelly, whose face turned white.

Ben realized in horror that this was the renter's wife. Out of the woods came the husband, who was also wearing a bag. He came carrying a hunting rifle with a crude silencer on it, and stood next to the woman.

"If you'd just given us a couple extra hours, Parker," the man said to Ben's father in a gruff, mid-western accent. "We'd have been long gone." He raised the rifle at him. "Sit down now, we don't have all day."

The woman inched closer with the shotgun. "Come now, sit together you three," she said in her creepy voice. They reluctantly did so. "That's it. Good, good."

The couple stood over and took aim at the two adults. Ben just stared at them and waited. After a nerve-wracking moment of silence, a shot was fired. The woman jerked backwards and fell to the ground. The man looked up, raising the rifle, but quickly met the same fate. Ben whipped his head around to see Mike propped up against the house, lowering his pistol. It was two amazing shots, even for a combat veteran. Kelly threw her hand over her mouth, fighting back tears. She quickly got up and ran towards Mike.

"You better not give me any more crap at the range, Davis!" he shouted with a pained smile.

Ben turned back to the two bodies and stared in amazement. He looked

at his father, who was about to cry himself. They looked at each other for a moment, and then hugged. ● ● ●



The Man Within the Animal Without by Junior Johnson

The Wrong Lover

Chloe Decker

I thought that I was in love with you but instead I was obsessed
 with the idea of being loved by you
 Like a loose flower through the wind I was lost in the unknown
 struggling to find my roots
 I feel you were the one who helped pluck me from my stem
 Though I can't blame you entirely
 I was corrupted in the mind even before two
 But you were a major Factor
 You knew I was weak, already snapped when I came to you
 I expected you to fix me, like a normal lover would
 Instead you deflowered me without me knowing
 You were the wrong lover
 Which is why I had to leave you
 And I hope one day I'll find my roots again

What is Sown

Tom Stock

Floating on the river, in a sun induced trance, the lone boater strains his ear.
 A phantom radio somewhere on the shore competes with the cicadas to be heard.
 "Don't Fear the Reaper" seems like easy advice coming from the oldies station.
 So easy on a summer day to sing along
 When mortality is academic and uninteresting.

On winter nights, when he visits the bedroom,
 Humming that haunting tune
 While perched vulture like next to an insomniac TV,
 Those blue sky summer day dreams are now miles away.
 The faint overly sweet smell of flowers hangs in the dark still air;
 These are not summer flowers.

His neutral nature is unhurried and not at all impatient.
 Time is one of his specialties.
 Cavalierly hanging at his side,
 His timepiece steadily and silently let's slip the measured grains of sand
 Thru the narrow space in the glass we know as Today.
 The razor scythe edge, ever ready to harvest, will take wheat or weeds.
 His blank eyeless face cannot tell the difference, has no preference.
 What is sown is what is grown and will be taken, ripe or green.

The river traveler has to review the yield of his crop.
 It is what he planted and nurtured, or not.
 The fruits of a life's labor play like a surreal movie in the still of some nights.
 The observer weaves in and out of the plot while joy and sadness trade punches.
 What wins, what perseveres cannot be changed after a certain point.
 The Reaper, not to be feared but perhaps offering a lesson,
 Will harvest what has been sown and will show remarkable indifference.

The Dull Student

Cailey Dosztan

On a dark, foggy Wednesday morning, an 8am class was just beginning. The students began to fill the psychology classroom when a particular individual made the dark room feel even darker. She walked in, a black Nike bag slung over her shoulder, her gray iPhone case in one hand, a clenching fist in the other. Her brown hair was up in a ponytail, the blonde streaks showing from the messy up-do she threw together to make it to class on time. She wore white Converse sneakers that were untied and heavily covered in mud spots; a black pair of leggings with several small holes throughout; and a black, grey and white tie-dyed tank top. The entire back of the shirt was jaggedly cut open, exposing the only brightness she had on that day: a pink tank top. She had on a dull pearl necklace, the kind you would get out of a toy machine as a child.

Around her neck, she also had a thin grey necklace chain with no pendent attached, as if she had lost it along the way. She threw herself into a small, uneven seat, against the wall in the back, whipping her book-bag onto the floor next to her. Wondering if she had smashed something in the bag, she ripped it up off the ground and began to search through it. First came a crinkled up ball with a man's handwriting: it read, "Meet in Johnson Hall, room 228 for psychology Friday morning." She tossed the paper into the garbage can in the front of the room and continued shuffling through the bag.

After about seven minutes, she grew bored with it, and threw the bag back onto the floor and took out her phone. The iPhone screen was shattered, and she carefully scrolled through her Facebook feed. She began watching a video and the phone slipped out of the woman's hand, crashing down onto the desk, and then the floor. She moaned and reached down to pick up the even more cracked screen. Again, she went back onto Facebook and was reading the news feed. This time, however, her eyebrows close together, eyes squinted, and nose shriveled up. Her lips tightly locked together, not even the slightest breeze could pass through. Her ears were sharp and pointed, listening for the instructor to walk in. This is when I noticed two tiny holes in the bottom of each ear: she had her ears pierced. One ear contained a black, diamond shaped stud and a small gray dot. The other ear contained nothing but two empty holes, she had lost the earrings on her chaotic rush to school this morning. She began to rub her scalp and forehead just as the instructor walked through the door.

The man began taking attendance, calling each student's name. When he got to this student, she mumbled a faint, "here," and he moved on. Next he began to teach his lesson for the day, but began with a class discussion. The woman takes out a black pen, jamming the cap onto the non-ink side. The

students began to chatter, causing the woman to again rub her head. She began furiously tapping her fingertips on the desk, and tapped her foot on the floor. She then spoke up, adding to the class discussion. Everyone stopped and looked at the woman. She added input on the subject, stating everyone was wrong and she knows this because her mother works as a pharmacist. The entire class erupted and began to yell at the woman, telling her she didn't know what she was talking about and that she should go out and do the activity and come back and tell the class who was right.

The woman closed her black and gray notebook, jammed it into the bag, slammed the cover onto the pen, threw it in the bag, and stood up. She whipped the bag onto her shoulder and shouted, "Screw all of you," to the class of freshman. She stomped out the door, not looking back. Under her breath, she mumbled a choice of profane language and continued out the door and down the hall. The student appeared to have tears in her eyes when she left, but balled up her fists at the same time. The class laughed it off, as they were only making a joke that the student took too far. The class continued, and brightened once the dull student left. ● ● ●



Cheetah by Gabrielle Bridgewater

Like a Bar of Soap

Tom stock

Sometimes I feel wore down.

Like a bar of soap
That has washed too many pairs of hands,
Cleaned too many messes
And has melted down the drain.

Sometimes I feel worn smooth.

Like hard worked sand paper
That has shaped so much coarse wood
Making it ready for stain and finish
Only to lose its grit in the process.

Sometimes I feel worn away.

Like last year's calendar with all its pages torn off.
All the holidays, birthdays, vacation plans re-
moved.
The spiral spring sits empty on the nail
Where last year once hung.

Sometimes I feel worn weak.

Like a battery in an old car that will not start,
That has no spark to give
Just sitting in the driveway waiting on rust,
Parts dripping fluid in messy puddles.

Sometimes I feel worn dry.

Like a pen that has written too many words.
Words that were never read or understood fully
Or heeded.
A pen that was not mightier than the sword.

Sometimes I feel worn excessively.

Like a favorite pair of shoes
Which once made my feet smile
But were taken to inappropriate roughened places
And should have been saved for the big dance.

Sometimes I feel worn threadbare.

Like a Welcome mat taken for granted
By many visitors who meant well
Wiping their thoughtless feet
With so much extra dirt.

Sometimes I feel worn away.

Like a shady smooth short cut path
Taken at my expense across my private property
Out of lazy disregard by others
While I always took the long way around.

Sometimes I feel worn out.

Like a glib expression
Which everyone is overusing,
Tiring, trite, becoming obnoxious
Offending the ear.

Sometimes I feel worn thin

Like a new moon that reflects no sun
But understanding phases do change
And orangey full moons, pregnant, are hugging
future eastern horizons
Waiting to open eyes wide like copper pennies.

Swing

Lora Andela

I sit alone on the swings, watching as a group of teenagers played some game across the park. I know each and every one of those kids yet none have invited me to play. Instead, when they see me they turn away, giving looks of disappointment and disdain, whispering amongst themselves.

Things were not always like this, in fact not too long ago, I was one of the group leaders. I didn't lead just in our antics but also was there to help anyone who needed it. It was said I had an old soul and they would ask me for advice with all sorts of situations.

I don't know what came over me the day it all ended. The day I snapped. Nobody knew how it was at home, all the fighting and yelling. I was selfish and I didn't think how my absence would affect my friends. So a few months ago, just before my seventeenth birthday, I left.

Of course I was found and brought back but I was different. No longer could I help them, I had become a wild card in their eyes. They didn't trust me, their parents wouldn't let me near them. Nobody reached out to help me



Dragonfly by Mingjing Li

though and that is what stuck with me. In a time when I was so distressed that I couldn't stay, couldn't help but think there was only one way out; nobody helped.

I weep inside when I see them but it also comforts me to see them carrying on. This may have been a way to help a few of the quieter ones as they must find a new confidant, make some more friends rather than hiding behind me. I wish I could've done it a bit better, a less heartbreaking way. It's amazing how much I relied on them, I feel lost without anyone to protect and guide.

I've learned from this too, that no matter how many times you help someone it doesn't guarantee they will return the favor. And for that I am bitter. I miss them with all of my soul but I do not long to have them back under my wing.

So I sit on this swing and watch them play, trying to purge my heart of any negative feelings and hoping they might do the same. We all know I'm not going to return but I long for it to be on good terms. I tried to guide them towards valuing a good reputation and always being respectful, polite and courteous.

I stand up and turn to leave but something catches my eye, glancing up I see somebody waving. I grin and wave back, they return to their game as I walk away with a feeling of slight satisfaction and a glimmer of hope for us. I will be able to walk alone until I find a new start of friendships, they will carry on and flourish as they find deeper connections with one another. Everything will be alright. ● ● ●

Logo Concepts



For my logo, I chose a fitness business. I tried to incorporate weights into my design, while also giving it a sleek, professional look. I chose a sturdy shape to represent the foundation you form when exercising. I also tried to keep my symbol as symmetrical as possible to make it appealing to the eyes.

Austin Green



I started my design by making the hardest part of my logo-- the scissors. I used the font Helvetica to write the title of the hair salon "The Grooming Club" because the owner of the salon wanted the design to be neutral and didn't want to lean toward any style meaning neither classic nor modern. Helvetica rides the line between classic and modern designed specifically not to give an impression or have any inherent meaning.

Rajiv Lama



BAKING COMPANY

I designed this logo for a startup baking company in Mohawk, NY. I had a lot of logo concepts originally but what I wanted the bakery to stick out in comparison to other bakeries which led to more of an artistic concept. I chose a bold red to once again make Evans Baking Company stand out from other bakeries but also because red is a very bold color.

Sharon Howell



I chose to create a logo for a wedding and event company. Hello Beautiful Weddings and Events wanted a "beautiful image that engaged couples will love" and wanted a more modern and feminine logo while being sophisticated, luxurious and organic. I used these descriptions and came up with what would best represent that; a serif, cursive font and I built my logo around the font style. I saw a flower with sophisticated petals and I thought it would fit this company's wishes. After creating the flower I followed their color preferences by incorporating pink to represent intimacy and love and purple to represent luxury and spirituality.

Taylor Manley

I'm Not a Poet

Wally Szarek

I don't like writing
I never have
Whatever skill other people possess that lets them create
I do not have
Whatever inspiration they have
I don't have
I can't spin words into complex metaphors
Or personify every tree, rock, and animal I come across
Writing is not my passion
It's just a stranger on the sidewalk