

Shale

Undergraduate Arts

Journal

Fall 2012



Shale

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Shale has endeavored to accomplish many things with this edition. We have strived to continue to operate by a philosophy of opportunity: to publish, to gain editing and review experience, and to further engage in the creative writing community at the University of Kentucky.

The latter goal has led us to our two main initiatives that have been the driving force behind this edition. First, we wanted to incorporate the vision of another Gaines Fellow, Shady El-Maraghi, who started the journal *In fi nI* as a Jury Project intent on serving a community of foreign language creative writers and artists. We wanted to see the creative community come together as a whole, regardless of language, style, or medium. We wanted more of the University of Kentucky to be able to share a community, an identity, even a piece of self through art and creative writing.

Second, we wanted to create even more linkages across department lines in order to bring all of the opportunities available for creative undergraduates to one place. Our new sponsor, the Honors Program, has bestowed upon us a creativity grant originating from the Jane Gentry Vance Endowment Fund. The Jane Gentry Vance Endowment Fund supports literary endeavors taken on by Honors Program students. The Honors Program has made the printing and release of this edition possible.

Other partners include the English Department, who have been immensely helpful in the promulgation of the existence of our journal, and the Writing Center, with whom we have been partnered since our name

change last year. The Writing Center has also expanded its repertoire to include creative writing consultations— a useful service for those who might be considering submitting to our journal next semester! Our foreign language partners include the Office of International Affairs and the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. We hope to grow these two partnerships in particular as we continue to join our two creative communities into one.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank Dr. Ted Higgs, the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Classics, who is Shale's faculty advisor and one of the Jurors evaluating this edition on my behalf. I would also like to thank Jean Marie Rouhier-Willoughby, the Chair of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, for agreeing to be another Juror for this project. I would lastly like to thank Heather Nan Carpenter from Honors Program for assisting throughout the publishing process.

Please enjoy!
Sarah Hayden

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Junior
Journalism and History

The Collarbone Chronicles
An Excerpt

I can't help but envy her, even from afar. As she walks, her thin hips sway in time to music only she can hear. Her legs are long and graceful and her auburn hair hangs to her waist in soft curls. Over-sized sunglasses obscure her face but I can tell she's beautiful.

"Would those shorts fit you?" Daniel asks, his hand tightening around mine.

I pretend to consider the question but immediately know the answer: no. This girl looks like a small size zero, and I'm nowhere near that.

"Maybe."

"Probably not. If they did they'd look really good though." He says, nuzzling my ear playfully.

"They are cute."

"It's something to work towards." He says kindly.

And I feel it, familiar now, stretching and yawning, expanding and contracting, protesting inside of me, my hollow stomach quietly nudging me.

"I'll keep that in mind. Thanks Daniel."

... ..

I remember Daniel's eyes that day, how they shifted, a sea during a storm. They were sad, contrite, and full of pain. They were red edged and

watery. They were cold and dark. They were deep and compassionate. They were flashing and angry. He contradicted himself, or didn't. He comforted me and laid guilt upon me. He apologized and accused. He brought clarity and confusion. He touched me tenderly and pushed me away coarsely.

"You know I hate to see you cry, Calli." He said in a moment of penitence.

"Then why do you do this to me?"

"I'm sorry you feel that I hurt you when you take my humor the wrong way." His hand had caressed my knee gently as he'd spouted this pseudo-apology.

"Daniel, you told me I should develop an eating disorder!" My voice sounded shrill in my ears.

"Calli, that's not what I said. Besides, it was a joke. You know that. I think you're overreacting." He withdrew his hand from me then, in what I was beginning to recognize as punishment.

"I can't do this anymore."

I hated the strain in my voice. I hated that I sat with my elbows on my knees with my face in my hands, weak. I hated that I stuttered and sobbed and he was made of granite. I hated that I'd willingly walked into his games, my feeble mind intrigued.

I felt the mattress lift and heard it squeak and when I looked up, he stood by the door, holding it open for me.

"You know the way out."

... ..

I gaze at my reflection in the mirror, barely recognizing myself. My waxy, yellowing skin is stretched taut beneath my neck. My collarbones stand out harshly, skeleton against plaster. My eyes are sunken into my prominent cheekbones, the veins and sinews of my neck pulled tight, my sternum protruding between my breasts, revealed by my low cut dress. My once soft, vibrant hair is blonde straw hanging, stringy, down my back.

I feel Daniel's hands cupping my arms, moving upwards, appreciating the sharp angles that are my shoulders. His touch turns my skin into Braille, my stomach to stone, the back of my neck into a cactus.

"You look beautiful." He whispers into my ear, his breath hot, his voice husky. My ear tingles and I shiver involuntarily at his words.

I continue to survey myself, unhappy. The silky, shimmering, silver fabric of my dress clings like a slip around my figure, hugging my hipbones, baggy around my narrow waist.

Daniel brushes my hair to the front, over my shoulder and his fingers play about my collarbones. I feel a slow simmer building inside of me. I meet his icy blue eyes in the mirror, the anger bubbling up. I slap his hand away.

"Calli, what is it...?" He asks, his voice soft, his hands moving to encircle me.

"Don't touch me." I reply. I don't know my own voice. It's a growl, a hiss, spitting venom and hate.

"But you're so lovely now."

My face twists into a gruesome sneer, tears welling in my eyes. I grip the neckline of my dress with talon-sharpened claws and yank, ripping, ripping, ripping.

“What are you doing?” He asks, the warmth gone, replaced with winter.

I stand with my dress in tattered fetters around my ankles, heaving, crying, gasping.

“Why can’t you just leave me alone?” I howl. I knot my hair around my fists and pull, trying to cover my ears.

“Just leave me alone, let me be. Go away. I don’t want to hear you anymore.”

Through my sobs I can hear him laughing.

“I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!” I try to scream, but my voice fades into its weakness and fails me.

“You hate yourself.” His voice is deep and strong with conviction. I look into the mirror again and he’s standing behind me, his eyes drilling into my reflection.

“I hate you.” I whisper, turning to face him.

But he’s not there. He hasn’t been for months.

CECILIA AMADOR

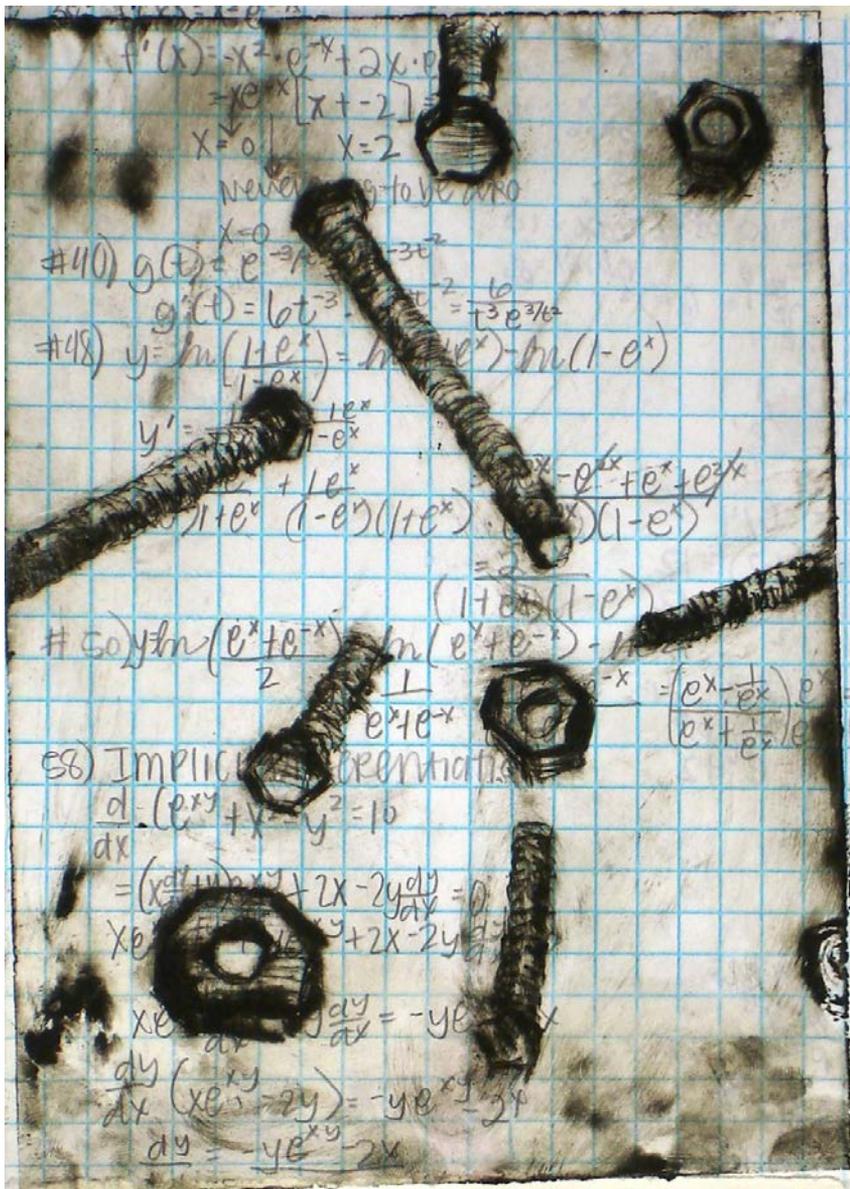
Junior
English

Silencio

Me muerdo la lengua
Sólo de pensar
Que lo que yo te diga,
No lo sabrás valorar.

Este nudo en mi garganta,
Lo sufre más mi corazón;
El miedo que una sola palabra
Será el comienzo de una explosión.

Entonces cierro mis ojos,
Y lo dejo todo a la imaginación,
Y le abro las puertas
A la eminente perdición.



Calculus
 by AMY HOAGLAND
 Freshman
 Art Studio, Psychology

LINDSEY LEWIS

Freshman

Undecided

February 2010

i am dreaming.

my body lifts from my bed and swims through the atmosphere
a fresh breath of rainwater strips the filth of life from me
i float high above foamy wisps
of cirrus that wrap like tendrils around my legs
fashioning a dress of the finest material
and starlights gather to curl into my hair
the moon fixes its focus on my body
seeping through the milky flesh to highlight my bones
orbs flash before my eyes and whisper my name in the purple
darkness
interstellar communications flow through my papery skin
hurtling toward their destinations, other planets, other
lifeforms
conversations held in long-gone households seep into my ears
screams and bangs arch over pathways of silence
to my left, a golden green nebula swirls in anticipation
stars clustered about, praising my arrival
a black hole gapes, ready to swallow me whole
and my fingers flex toward it, pulling through air – wanting –
i am finally home
but despite how high i drift
i can never escape this planet
the spaceship crashes and i plummet earthwards
dreams stolen by a flaw in the budget
i was bound to my bed the whole time
restraints tighten
a star flickers and dies in the distance

LINDSEY LEWIS

Goodnight, I Love You

Crawling back to the whispers
Of antiquated bedsheets,
Wrapped in the stench of our old conversations and
kisses.
Smoking is my only comfort, a twisted metaphor.
Cigarette burns hull out my insides,
Singed and still burning at the edges, just how you left
me.
Down the winding country paths we used to take,
I'm cowering under the phone lines
Tracing the path of your betrayal
As the golden field on the side of the road stretches,
Saying things in the flutter of ripped butterfly wings
That I never had the courage to
Because it didn't look right
Etched into the pixels of a text.
You tasted like home
When we sat on the porch and
Plucked blades of grass, dirt caked under our fingernails.
Late at night, when I'm lying above our old plaid blanket
Constellations of commercials and reality shows
Sing me to sleep.
I'm a million miles away from you
Counting the holes in the ceiling
As he sleeps next to me

Wondering if you ever think about me

While you're counting the holes in the ceiling
As she sleeps next to you.



Waiting
by MERYL B. SHAPIRO
Senior
Art Studio, Art History

MARY KATE ELLIOTT

Sophomore
English, French

Splinter

Madame Butterfly pumps tinnily through the cheap headphones, the voices overlaid with Jew-harp twangs and rhythmic thumping from the MRI. The nurse warned her of claustrophobia earlier in a cheery voice, but nothing could have prepared her for the terrifying closeness of the machine. Fear flutters high in her throat like laughter.

“Are you doing all right, honey?” the nurse asks. *Honey*. They’re the same age. She pushes the spiraling panic back, refusing to go cross-eyed at the mask hovering directly over her face – forehead, nose, chin.

“I’m fine,” she answers, breathing through her nose. “I’m fine.”

Fifteen minutes later, the nurse pulls her out. Together, they wind through a pale maze of tile and nameless blank doors until the nurse stops at one.

“The doctor will be with you shortly,” she smiles.

Alicia manages a faint pleasantry before the nurse whisks out of sight down the hallway. Alone, she starts to pull on her clothes in the sterile examination room, but pauses as her reflection stares back at her from the mirror above the sink.

Standing there in her slip, she watches herself move, remembers the way her limbs used to

slice through space back when she was eighteen. Slowly, Alicia steps into her tweed skirt. Next comes the silk blouse, folded neatly into the skirt's waistband, followed by the stiff blazer. Carefully, she removes six bobby pins from her purse and twists her hair back into a bun. There's no trace of who she used to be in her face now.

On the wall, there's a poster of the brain, lobes and cross-sections highlighted in lurid detail. Someone's uneven handwriting spiderwebs the "Must Wash Hands" sign pasted to the door: FUCK OFF. Alicia's steady hands smooth her skirt over her thighs, tuck flyaways back into her hastily pinned chignon.

Even though there's a cheery yellow reminder not to use cell phones, Alicia pulls out her Blackberry and calls her husband. The dial tone bounces off the blank tile, the white walls, the metal sink. It makes the room emptier.

"Mark DeSalle."

"Have you picked up the kids yet?"

Internally, Alicia cringes at her sharp tone, the clipped consonants echoing in the small space. There's a long pause. He breathes.

"I was supposed to pick up the kids?"

"*Mark*. We discussed it yesterday. I even reminded you this morning."

"I'm sorry, Alicia, I must have forgotten —"

"You always do," she snaps, cutting him off.

"One thing, Mark. I asked you to do one thing. How hard is it to remember your own children?" The silence rings out between them. He doesn't reply, and she hates him for letting her steamroll over

everything he says. Just once, she wishes he'd snap back, turn her sharp words back on her like knives. Just once, she wants him to hurt her, too.

Instead, he makes a soft sound through the phone. "Alicia," he murmurs. She misses being twenty-four and his hands moving over her skin like honey.

"It's fine," she answers too quickly. "Fine. I'll get them on the way home. We're having pot roast for dinner. Pick up some bread at the market."

In the resulting silence, she bites one fingernail down to the quick. She hates being in charge, hates it, but the control keeps her from shattering like thin ice over a pond in winter, cracks splintering the surface at the first sign of weight.

"Okay," Mark finally replies, voice heavy. "Okay. I'll see you tonight. Love you."

"Okay," she answers. Her cuticle begins to bleed.



Twilight Tide, (oil on canvas, 18" x 24")
by KAREN R. THOMPSON
Senior
Art Education

SHELBY MALONE
Senior
Agricultural Biotechnology

For Love of Mist and Twilight

Tonight is old and full of blinks
and breaths that crash through airways stilled with
wonder.
The edges of my fingertips graze the wall that seals
me
into a hazy moment of fear and content;
for the edge of the earth is not a precipice.
Waves rush forward from an imperceptible horizon
onto a beach with little more than a window for
framing.
The misty light cast upon the worn timber
smooths shadows to form a question as beautiful as
a memory.
Sitting there, with sand sucking down my warmth
and the sun swirling purple and gray,
I feel the end of everything everywhere.
And since a landscape without beginning holds my
form,
I must shed myself to procure passage from this
guarded room.
When I slip through the barrier, my head arches
back,
but the normal crags of a rocky coast cannot bely
the simple truth, that I dangled my feet on the end
of the world
and smiled.

SHELBY MALONE

Witness who does not see, does

Portraiture,
but of trees not men
hang in the halls of men
and women
who are too afraid to look at themselves
or the evil of the world reflected in their eyes.
At a distant thought, I open my fist
and let the sand return to coarse brothers
within earshot of wounded waves.
My skin reaches for sun
that does not want to be soaked up,
a blaze of fire nourishing forests I ignore.
As we all stare opposite ways,
beckoning
and dismissing different parties,
one star above the affections of a color or night
opens itself to the will of darkness
with desire
without plan
with control.
My form blackens light in the act of stretching
through looks of disdain and self-loathing
in hope
of feeling the entropy reign
(and it does reign).
In other words
to feel the soul of the universe contract
and scream
and die
before tide pushes foam back to sea.

ELLYCE LOVELESS
Sophomore
Hispanic Studies

Dust

Upon this lonely keyboard
the dust, of days past,
Of days when you and I knew.

Laughing at didactic men and hypocritical women
Who paraded their inconsistencies on our two-by-
two T.V.

Shouting at the field, not a football team
But a “bunch of girls.”
Not a coach,
But a “cotton-headed-ninny-muggins.”

You loved Christmas.
And in that vein, you loved me.
And in my veins, I felt you.

The dust upon my desk is your dust.
A remembrance of hazy afternoons,
Of not understanding loneliness.



Treading Water, (oil on canvas, 18" x 24")
by KAREN R. THOMPSON

MARY KATE ELLIOTT

je regrette de vous annoncer que...

c'est printemps, et
je ne vous connais plus
vous m'avez dit
c'est fini

comme si nous pouvons jamais
être finis

en l'hiver, il fait froid
il neige sur nos têtes

ta main
dans ma main
tes cils effleurant ta joue,
sombre
je me souviens de tes mains
elles étaient très froides
je ne pouvais pas les chauffer

c'est printemps
il fait chaud,
mais vos mains étaient froides
encore

je vous regarde
je ne comprends pas
comme l'hiver s'insinue dans vos os

c'est comme vous avez dit

c'est fini

je ne pouvais pas vous chauffer

pas à ce moment-là
pas maintenant



Blue Brushes
by AMY HOAGLAND

JOPLIN RICE
Freshman
English

The Towel Paradox

→ *The Towel Paradox*: In which the concerned college student, having matriculated mere weeks earlier, freshly plucked from high school and its luxurious comforts that until the day of move-in at the dormitories seemed endowed to each human by his/her creator (luxuries such as **a.** The ability to shower w/o footwear, **b.** The never mentioned but much relied-upon monies which once flowed endlessly from the hands of loving parents, **c.** The privilege of sleeping in a bed that isn't parallel to a similarly occupied bed in such a way that the two occupants must face opposite directions in order to avoid the intensely uncomfortable sensation of staring at someone whose face, obscured by the awkward darkness, may or may not be staring back, and so on and so forth), finds that the true source of embarrassment and consternation within this completely new and nervously exciting lifestyle is not, as he had imagined it would be, the close-quarters showers or even the fact that he cannot yet wash his own laundry, but rather the image of the university's mascot emblazoned on the bath towels which his mother bought for him months earlier "while they were on sale." The embarrassment being a result of the older, second- and third-year boys on the student's floor incessantly making fun of the towels for being *pathetic, righteously lame,*

and *the sign of a true freshman*, among other things, while at the same time chastising him for allowing his *mommy* to do his school shopping for him, which she obviously did (see: the towel in question), this being a sure sign of a *momma's boy*. The resolution to the towel problem is obvious: the student must rid himself of the mascot-covered bath towels and replace them with plainer, simpler ones, whereupon the harassment would ostensibly end and the student would be able to focus more closely on his academics; however, upon discarding the old rags and replacing them with new white towels, the student is again berated by his peers, but for the obverse reason: he is now regarded as a *dork*, a *queer*, and a *homo* because he is apparently *that kind of guy* who would make a special trip to a bath supply store—the particular chain in question known for its feminine array of scented candles, perfumes, and lotions; bath supply shopping apparently an females-only enterprise—to satisfy his unmanly need to have the best, *softest* towels on the market, which is an outwardly *girlish* thing to want, seeing that a *real man* would truly not care about the kind of towels he used at all—texturally, aesthetically, or otherwise—and would just *suck it up* and use whatever was at hand. After his second week of classes the inexperienced college student buys a yearlong membership at the nearby off-campus Y.M.C.A. and showers there exclusively, drying himself with the supposedly sanitary tan-colored towels available for use to those who pay a small fee at the time of their membership purchase.

AYNA LORENZO

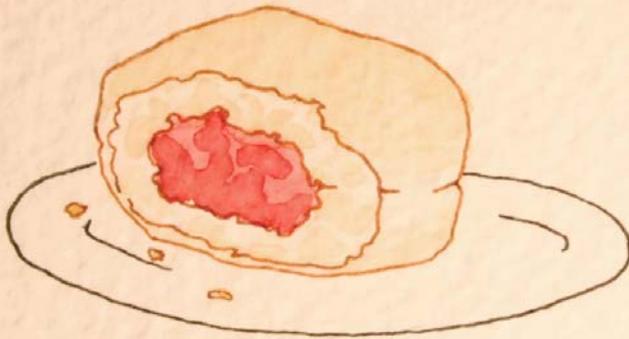
Junior
English

Pensieri Ardenti

Ardent thoughts

| | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Mangio | I eat |
| Pane | bread |
| come un leone. | like a lion. |
| Ringhio nelle croste. | Growl in the crusts. |
| Sbriciolare. | crumble. |
| Spalmo il burro | I spread the butter |
| Come il leone stende | Like the lion lies |
| La sua zampa sul petto | His paw on the white |
| bianco | chest |
| Della pianura. | of the plain. |
| Io lo lacero | I tear |
| Con una zampa ruvido. | With a rough paw. |
| Le miei erano tenere, | Mine is soft |
| Di solito. | Usually. |
| Taglio il pane pieno | Cut into round loaf |
| Lo apro. | I open it. |
| Lo smembro, | Dismembered, |
| come un addome | As an abdomen |
| sensibile. | sensitive. |
| Apro, gli permetto | I open, I allow it |
| Di esalare. | To exhale. |
| E' colpa tua. | Is not your fault. |
| Tutto il tempo | All the time |
| penso questo di te. | I think about you. |
| Mi hai dato il pane | You gave me bread |
| E poi, | And then, |
| Mi hai detto | told me to eat it |
| di mangiarlo | Alone. |
| Da Sola. | |

ICH BIN
EIN BERLINER.



IT'S WHAT'S ON THE
INSIDE THAT
COUNTS.

by SARAH WAGNER
Freshman
Architecture and English

EDUARDO BALLESTRO
Non-Degree Seeking
English

How to Fall in Love with a Straight Man

at first pretend
he isn't more than a good friend
even though when he isn't looking
you stare at the strawberry blond of his beard
tell yourself you don't want
to know the sensation of your hands roaming his hair
when you imagine how good a father he'd be
remind yourself your childless
lie
when he asks you what kind of guy you like
don't meet the pity of his gaze
when your friend reveals how badly you want to be
with him
stomach your vulnerability
when you look at him sleep on your couch in the
morning
be prepared
to let the soft muscle of your heart be torn
like a strip of cloth
ripped from a bolt of fabric by a wayward cut

EDUARDO BALLESTRO

Soundbar

after Spencer Reece

It's more like a house. In the corners
are dark leather seats, black drapes
hang in the windows, up the stairs, plastic
chandeliers with dim lights in the shape
of candle flames adorn the ceiling.
The bartenders wear white.
Their shirts say *Team Soundbar*,
and stick to them like skin.
The men here are what I expect.
Most are young, either thin and effeminate,
or more muscled, more masculine.
The older men are coupled.
They hang on to each other
and sip their beers.
I have come here with my friend.
He's supportive, but straight.
He says, *We're gonna find you a man*.
But in the men he picks, I've little interest.
We down Jager and gummy bear shots
like it's candy. I'm in love
with my friend, but he doesn't know it.
We step outside and run
into a beautiful woman he knows.
I imagine him as a fisherman of people,
his social circle—a wide net.
What he catches, he tags and releases.
Only rarely does he keep.
During a private moment, he leans close
to tell me he doesn't have many close friends.

Eventually this woman ignores us.
So we go inside—and dance.
The Jaeger and music cut through us.
The dance lights paint us neon.
I don't know any of the songs,
but my friend recites every word.
The bass pounds me until I'm dizzy,
but his hand gives me balance.
A guy I'm interested in comes by
a few times. We end up dancing together.
When the song is over he goes out
to smoke. I go talk to him.
He tells me his name.

He works at another bar, Crossings.
He gives short answers to my questions.
I realize my interest is one-sided.
When my fisherman finds me,
He pulls me into a hug .He anchors me.
I don't look him in the eye.
He knows, I think.
He gives me a sloppy kiss
On the cheek, leaving a wet spot
I almost touch. It cools and he says,
I'm gonna dance with you,
Let's not make anything of it.
My tongue is a rock.
He guides me inside, to the dance floor.
Where he puts his arm
Around me, presses himself
Against me, the way I want him to
Want me. It's the best thing that's happened
To me. It's also the worst.
After the bar closes, we stumble
Down Main. My friend shouts drunken nonsense.

He asks strangers for hi-fives or cigarettes.
In the parking structure, when we're alone
My friend holds me and kisses me
Again on the cheek. He says,
I love you man. You're the best.
And I want to brush my lips
Against his beard run my fingers
Through the morning yellow of his hair,
Tell him how strongly I feel
About him, but I don't.
Because it wouldn't be fair
To offer a man a heart he couldn't love.

SARAH J. PARROTT
Freshman
Secondary English Education

The Umbrella

With little hands
the child took the umbrella
the sword
the flower of the birds
that Father so adored
and kept Mama dry.

In a flurry
of bloomers, pin tucks, and petticoats
the child raced down the stairs
and brandished the sword
the flower
the umbrella.

Disregarding bad luck,
the flower bloomed
the sword sparked
the umbrella opened
in the parlor
painted in Mama's favorite shade
of pearly amethyst.

The child giggled
scared the dog
stared longingly at the rain
that was forbidden.

And the longing that filled
such a small heart
caused the flower to wilt
the sword to lower
the umbrella to fall to the floor
like tears.

Father's footsteps found the flower,
the sword, the umbrella,
and Mama found the tears
adding in her own
only in private,
away from the sickness
so as not to upset the cure.

In the wintertime,
the flower was potted,
the sword hung over the fire
and the umbrella stowed away
on the day the gravestone was carved
and the Earth upturned
to welcome in
a small treasure
dressed in a shade of pearly amethyst
like tears.

EMILY NEVELS
Freshman
Agricultural Biotechnology

The Visitor

A soft rap at the door brought Mind to the front of the house. "Excuse me," the caller said. "Is your mistress here?" Mind squinted at the hot spring sun, a cool sneer on her red lips. "I am mistress here." Opportunity adjusted his hat, the blue fabric stark against his white tendrils. "Is Heart home? May I see her? There's something I'd like to speak with her about." Mind tutted. "Heart is busy." Opportunity swallowed. "May I call again later?" Mind reached for the elfin oak door with a lace hand, strong and solid. Opportunity bowed his head. "I see." He shuffled a dusty boot, the sole scraping the grey stone of the porch. A silence. "Who's at the door?" A voice chimed high. Heart appeared at Mind's side, cheeks rosy, grin wide. "Hello!" She turned a smile upon the visitor. "Return to your room," Mind pressed her sister within. "Go. Do not return." Opportunity sighed and shoved a grey hand in his tarnished bag. He withdrew a notebook, leather and new. A purple ribbon folded between crisp pages

fresh as cream. Opportunity held the book like an offering.

"What is this?"

Mind turned up her nose. Opportunity heaved his shoulders against the flakes beginning to fall.

"Hope."



Grey Day
by ALI LUDWICK
Senior
Art Studio, Art History

RICHARD HENRY
Junior
English

AUNT VIOLET

Aunt Violet had a maid named Evelyn, and according to Violet she was a “real find.” Then Auntie was very likely to accentuate her point with something like: “No doubt about it, Evelyn is the cat’s pajamas,” or maybe: “Yes sir, old Evelyn sure is one of a kind.” Then she would lean across the table and position her hand next to her mouth in the posture of a whisperer and would let me know sotto voce that Evelyn was a bargain at—then she would quote a salary figure, so low, that I knew it was a disgrace, even though I was only thirteen or so and not really versed in the ins and outs of wages and such. Aunt Violet would then continue relating how all her friends were so jealous that she had obtained Evelyn’s services at such a real steal. I wondered why Evelyn didn’t just seek employment elsewhere since she was in high demand. Maybe, I thought, she was afraid if she inquired about alternative employment someone would tell Aunt Violet and she would end up without a job at all.

I was convinced that the driving force in my auntie’s life was the accumulation of services, goods, and people at, “a real steal.” The more I visited her home the more obvious it became that Aunt Violet exhibited the actions and thoughts inherent in one that my dad would refer to as “a grubber.”

My Pop didn't mince words when he was letting me know exactly what it was to be a grubber. He would discourse with raving homilies, defining these individuals; sermonizing on topics such as a grubber's only objective in life was to accumulate as much wealth as possible, always at the expense of others. According to Dad there were many other definitive signs that would inform one whether one was in the presence of a "grubber." "Watch out," Dad warned, "or they will be patting you on the back with one hand while removing your wallet with the other."

After being educated by my father on the tenets of grubberism, I felt pretty sure that I was capable of discerning who was a grubber and who wasn't. There was no doubt in my mind, old Aunt Violet was a grubber's grubber.

Aunt Violet would brag to me about Evelyn's audacious remuneration— on the QT, of course. Her crowing would get me to thinking: Why wouldn't Aunt Violet, who obviously was loaded, pay Evelyn at least enough money for her to live somewhat comfortably? Poor Evelyn didn't even have an automobile—I happened to know that she rode the bus to and from work, and everywhere else she went. Why didn't Violet see to it that Evelyn had a car? Foremost, I was quite curious as to why my aunt treated Evelyn as if she were a second-rate being instead of a "real find." There was little doubt Violet considered Evelyn to be in a much lower class than herself, if one observed the disparaging glares of disdain and haughtiness she shot Evelyn from time to time.

I explained my curiosity to my dad, and mentioned that I intended to question Aunt Violet in an attempt to discover what was going on between her and Evelyn. This announcement elicited a glare of total incredulity from my father, trailed closely by a humongous horse laugh. Pop let me know in no uncertain terms that the area I was seeking to delve into was strictly taboo. If there was one thing that grubbers absolutely would not tolerate it was inquisitiveness. So I decided to leave everything alone and “tend to my own knittin” as Dad put it, and let Aunt Violet tend to hers.

On my next visit to my well-healed aunt’s I was introduced to her collection of what was referred to in our area as commodity cheese and the enterprise involved in its procurement. This cheese had an excellent reputation as being “the best in the west”, and it was. It was particularly smooth and creamy and had just a slight tangy, cheddary taste that sort of evaporated on one’s taste buds leaving a savory flavor of tartness. Once a month local indigents would line up at the rear of a county truck and, if they possessed the proper identification, were awarded their monthly commodities. Upon receipt of the cheese, which came in five pound boxes, several of the recipients would march directly to Aunt Violet’s back door and receive one dollar for their box of cheese. Aunt Violet would be well prepared; she answered knocks with a fistful of one dollar bills and a big smile as she relieved the poor of their monthly dole of cheese. I was sitting at the kitchen table taking it all in as she marched from door to pantry to store her contraband. It was

illegal, of course, to purchase and sell commodities. This slight technicality didn't seem to deter Aunt Violet in the least, though. She was determined to accumulate as much manna as possible regardless of the risks.

One day, after just replenishing her cheese hoard, she told me to follow her into the pantry. I did and she exhibited her rows of cheddar cheese. It was absolutely amazing! There was row after row of the stuff. There must have been at least five-hundred boxes.

“What in the world are you going to do with all this cheese?” I blurted without thinking. It grew very quiet as she glared at me. You could have heard the dust settle. I realized I had crossed into forbidden territory. A niggling thought way back somewhere reminded me of some advice Pop had given me about not questioning grubber's motives, and I realized that I had messed up. So there I stood, embarrassed, with my mouth hanging open, as the seconds ticked off, until things reverted to normal and we resumed our other activities.

Sometimes, after the pantry incident, I would be at Aunt Violet's and I would imagine that the interior of her home smelled like commodity cheese. I was certain it had to be the reaction to some kind of associative process since there was no reason for her home to retain the odor of cheese, unless one was in the pantry, of course.

She put me in mind at times of Charles Dickens's commentary on the wealthy and their never-ending quest for “more, more, more.” Despite her greed I have to admit that Aunt Violet was quite

generous with me. I could never really understand why she treated me so well and others so shabbily. My dad told me to consider myself lucky and not to question things. Well, he actually said, “Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

The years passed and Aunt Violet sustained her accumulation of fodder and also she continued in her generosity towards me. She even helped me pay for some of my college education. As a matter of fact I was away at school when I received the news that she had died. I learned at the reading of her will that I had failed to learn one very important characteristic of grubbers.

I was right there at the reading, trying to act as if I was bereaved at the passing of Aunt Violet, when my only real concern was how much loot she left me. I needn’t have worried, though, she bequeathed to yours truly a big fat zero. All her money, property, possessions, everything, she left to her wealthy nephew, Rodney. My dad said that that’s the way grubbers operate. He explained that Aunt Violet had nothing against me, but she knew that old money grubbing Rodney would make her money grow, and, above all else that’s what grubbers like, alive or dead.

MARY KATE ELLIOT

Ablutophobia

My mother once told me
of a woman made to drink
water each time she nursed
her newborn.

Eight ounces, the doctor said.

So she drank until she died.

My mother was there
when they brought her body in.

Water
leaked from her pores like tears
as they touched her skin.

Who took the baby?

I don't know.

Somewhere,
a grown-up child
terrified
of water.

Shrouded by steam,
I stare
at my fingers --

barely seven minutes and already
the whorls that define me
are bloated,
swollen.

Water pools at my feet,
laps at the edge
of the curtain,
grimy with
age.

Water drips from my
eyelashes
like tears of a different kind

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