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Marquette Literary Review, Issue 6, Fall 2013

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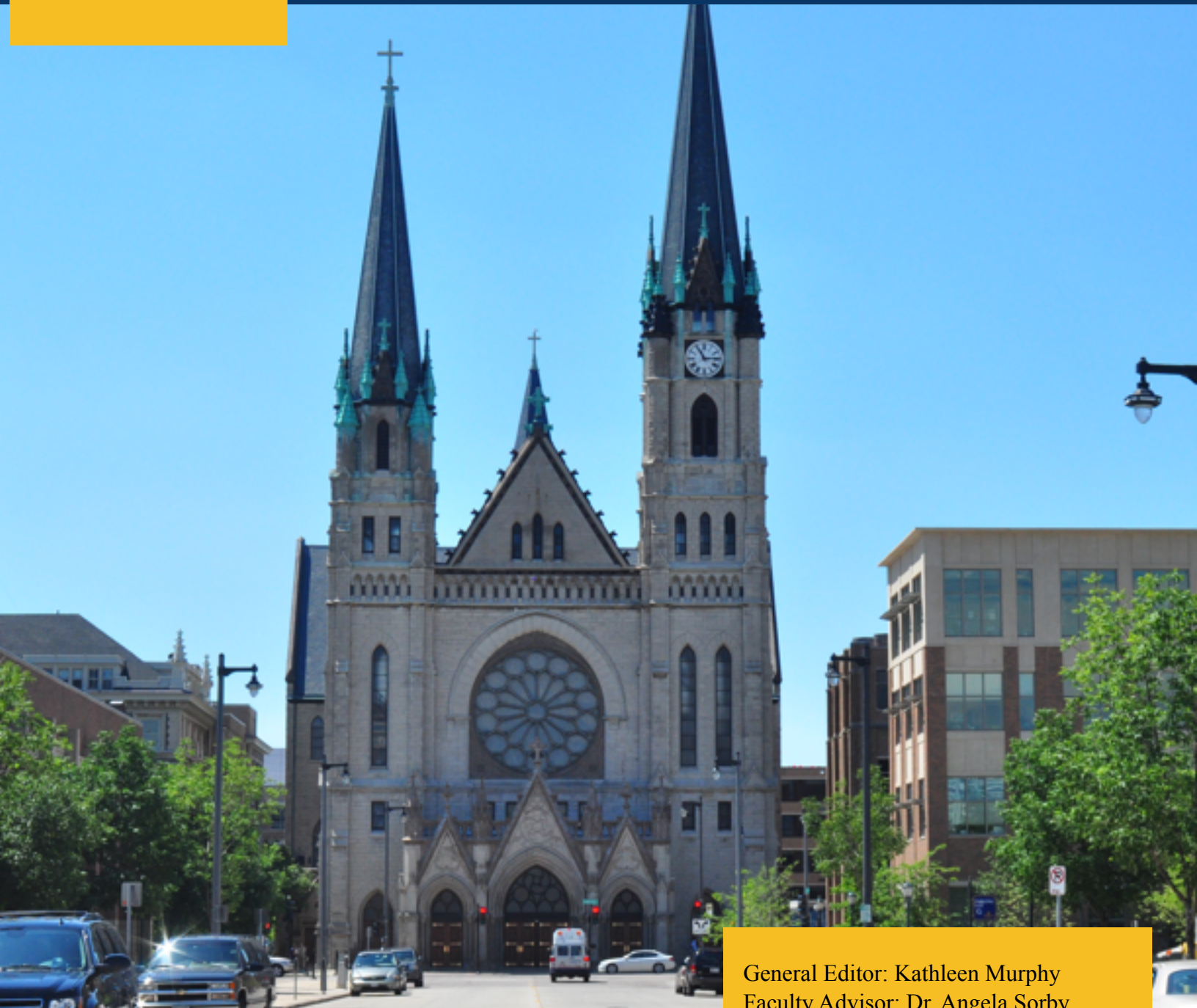
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Authors

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Gladiator by Alexis Worden

The thump of my heart hammering
against the bars of my ribcage mimics the thud
of thousands of dusty sandals scuffling
for an ideal spot to relish the spectacle.

I furrow my brow and clench my fists;
my dirt-caked fingernails prick
my clammy palms as I attempt
to barricade my senses from the crowd's roars.

Octavia stands in my mind's eye,
overlooking the arches and columns of her father's
empire from her marble balcony.
Her onyx hair cascades down her slender
back, and a tear trickles from umber eyes
as my judgment day approaches.

A disgruntled guard disrupts
my feeble peace as he chucks
a mangled iron helmet
and blood-encrusted sword at my feet.

With my body armored, I struggle to steel
my heart as the rattling of the prisoner's
shackles nudges me closer
to the oak doors of our cell.

I breathe in the scent of salt,
recalling the same saline bite
my father splashed a festering
wound with at the Tyrrhenian Sea,
while reminding me
that the weak are buried
like leaves beneath snow.

I lick my cracked lips
and remember what death tastes
like, the sickly-sweet bile that coats my mouth
when the gleam fades from their eyes.
I grasp the hilt splotchy with the sweat
of the defeated, as the metal lock clanks open.

The coliseum thunders as sunlight pours
into the cage, illuminating the despised.

I drink in the sensation,
the sun scorching
my leathered skin, and force
my feet forward.

Cilantro by Michele Furman

Ana carefully navigated the cobbled street of the market, weaving in the hot sun through the thick crowds towards the exit half a block down. On a mission to leave, she stepped quickly around cart wheels and skirted sprays of grease from fryers while clutching the bouquet of orange lilies that were her only purchase of the day. As she rounded the edge of a large cart filled with vegetables, the hot wind carried a whiff of fresh cilantro as it lifted the hair off her sticky forehead. The scent entered her nose with a familiar burn and she was no longer surrounded by the baking sun, bustling noises and pungent smells of the market but instead the quiet calm accompanying the white cabinets and soft yellow paint of her abuela's kitchen. She remembered the feeling of cool wood on skin as her small toes curled around the middle rung of the stool, the farthest down they could reach, then sprung off and kicked into the hard side of the kitchen island.

"Paciencia, niñita" would come the expected response in abuela's musical voice, "the more we wait, mejor será el sabor." Abuela stood at the sink, humming a soft tune to the running water as she rinsed the tomatoes for her salsa. That salsa was unlike any other; it burned in a good way, filling your mouth with spice and sweetness. It tasted like the sun and the rain and good earth falling through your fingers. Ana would watch as her abuela's expert hands, wrinkled with age and sun, lightly guided the knife through the tomates, the cebollas, the pimientos, the limones, humming all the while. She sat in her stool, small fingertips tracing the small section of brightly colored tiles in the sea of white marble, knuckles rapping impatiently against the island countertop. "It is time, niñita! Time for the esecret ingredient!"

This was Ana's favorite part. At her abuela's words Ana flew off the stool, whipping open the back door and letting it slam shut behind her. She ran through the rows of orange trees, sunbeams streaming through the branches. "This is el secreto, princesa, the cilantro. Todo el taste come from this, do you understand? Ves, hija mía?" Abuela's voice echoed with each bare footfall on the warm soil, "to be perfecto it must be fresh, fresco, you understand? Straight from the earth itself, de la tierra, so to still have inside it the earth, el sol, *vida*." Ana burst out of the orange grove and into the full force of the afternoon rays, lifting a small hand to shield her eyes and squinting towards the vegetable garden. She abandoned the usual careful manner of picking through the neat rows, slipping and kicking up dirt in her haste as she rushed towards the bed of small leafy plants.

Ana kneeled in the earth, closing her eyes, leaning down to inhale deeply and smiling when the sharp scent made her nose wrinkle. The cilantro was perfect, each stalk brimming with leaves. Part of the secret is in the growing, too, her abuela always said. She would sing to them as she kneaded the earth, "*con el sol vas a ser fuerte / darnos vida con tu muerte*

, " part of her growing song that spoke of nature's cycle. Ana slid her fingers under the earth, guiding them through the cool soil and carefully cupping the root in her small hands. As she pulled gently she felt the tension, all the little veins of roots straining in complaint against

leaving the ground. Finally, she felt it give and drew the plant from the earth, saddened to kill the plant but appreciative of what it would provide. “*Con el sol vas a ser fuerte / darnos vida con tu muerte.*”

A sudden jolt ripped Ana sharply from the garden floor to the crowded street as she stumbled backwards, losing her footing on the curb. “Perdóname, miss! I’m sorry!”, came a voice in her ear accompanying the steadying hand on her elbow, “Oh - y you have dropped su bolso, your purse, señorita, aquí.” He pointed as Ana thanked him and bent to gather her things. A single card had fallen out of an open zipper. She caught a glimpse of today’s date and abuela’s name printed under the image of la Virgen as she hurriedly slid it back into place. The noise of the market seemed oddly muted now as she neared the exit, swinging her bouquet of orange lilies in time to her humming. She walked down the narrow brick street, the sun beating steadily through the trees as she rounded the block. A figure clad in black waved to her from between the wrought iron gates from the cemetery. Ana walked to her hurriedly, reaching out to embrace her sister. “You were almost late!” Sofia hissed as she handed Ana her guitar case. Her expression softened as she saw what was in Ana’s other hand and then nodded towards her own bouquet, “I brought her favorite flowers, too.” They locked arms and walked down the path towards the rows of chairs. “Have you decided what you’re going to sing today?” Sofia asked. Ana looked down at her guitar, “I think I have something in mind.” A cool breeze blew past and Ana could have sworn it carried a whiff of cilantro. She smiled as hummed along with the melody echoing in her ears. “*Con el sol vas a ser fuerte / darnos vida con tu muerte.*”

Pendulum by Benjamin Schmitz

Inspired by Galway Kinnell's *Insomniac*

The car rolls gently to a stop in front
of our idyllic milieu, but we pause
before our exit—
listening to the last chorus
of Teenage Dream. The pearly gold of dusk
envelops the park.
Neither the walking trail nor memorial benches
nor tennis courts strike our fancy.
No, we simply long for the swing set.
Her hair seductively curls round the chain
as the words fall gently from her lips.
Our hands catch as we
sway back and forth concurrently
with the warm breeze.
Talk swells to the future, yet at the moment,
the present is perfect.
Entwined with each other so,
together we will outswing the night.

Perspective by Hannah Klapperich-Mueller

Big sky country--an accurate phrase.
A quilt of grass and sand flapped overhead,
Waves settling into a vast flatness
Nudged and softened by hefty bursts of wind.

From my vinyl seat on the speeding train, I see a house.
Grey and dry, a solitary structure in the openness,
A brief view of the holes and cracks where wind sneaks in,
Slowly pulling it down to join the flatness.

It should seem lonely, the bleak building in a bleak land,
A place of lost lives and emptiness.
But no doubt a field mouse has a family nestled in its southeast corner
And uses the holes and cracks as doorways home.

Public Transport by Kevin Foley

Johan reached over and shut off his alarm. 4:15 am. His girlfriend, Karien, stirred at the sound of the alarm, but fell immediately back to sleep. Their seven-month-old son, Anton, continued snoring lightly next to his mother, a small victory because she would be able to get a few more hours of sleep. The shebeen across the street made it hard for the small family to fall asleep until the early hours of the morning when it finally stopped illegally selling liquor. They had been asking the owner to keep the noise down over night, but he needed the business to support his family.

Johan quietly slipped out of the bedroom to make a cup of tea. The hot tea helped wake him up and warm him on the cool June morning. He ate a meager breakfast of a piece of toast and an apple and turned on the radio to listen to the weather. It was going to be 11 degrees C (50 degrees F) and sunny in Cape Town, a cool crisp day, but at least it would not be raining again.

Johan looked down at his watch. 4:30. Time to get dressed and catch the 4:50 Golden Arrow bus into Cape Town. He put on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt, kissed Karien softly on the neck and Anton on the cheek, and walked out of the room. He unlocked the front door and walked out into the streets of Mitchell's Plain.

His neighborhood consisted of mostly blacks and coloureds, a mixed race. The houses, although small, were clean and homey. They stood in stark contrast to the fenced in mansions of Camp's Bay, but remained a step above the tin shacks in the Townships of Langa, Khayletsia, or Guguletu. Still, Johan had to be careful walking the familiar route to the bus stop. He could be stopped at any point on the dark roads and have his bus fare taken from him by some trouble-making teenager, causing him to miss a day of work and the humble earnings he brought home to feed his family.

Johan knew bus route like the back of his hand. It was almost the exact route his kombi took every day of the week. Kombis are part of the public transport system in South Africa. Small vans, they are theoretically meant to fit 10 or 11 passengers, but are more often stuffed with 16 or 17 passengers. Kombis are often filled with an array of music ranging from Rihanna or Katy Perry's latest hits to the popular beats of South African "house" music to the rhythms of djembes and marimbas found in traditional African music. Johan's would hang out the window and entice people on the streets to fill his kombi and bring in as much rand as he possibly could.

He arrived at the bus stop and a few minutes later the bus rolled up. The irony never escaped him that he was taking public transport into Cape Town in order to work on public transport. "Môre," he greeted the driver in Afrikaans as he showed him his pass. He settled into a window seat to watch the all too familiar route pass him by. The bus would take him through Wynburg and Mowbry, two wealthy, mostly white neighborhoods. Along the way it would stop in Newlands, near the cricket and rugby stadiums, and in Rondebosch, where the prestigious University of Cape Town is. Next it would stop in Observatory, where many international students stayed because of its proximity to UCT. He thought of all of the rich, white students he would have to deal with on the kombi today from Rondebosch and Observatory. He knew he would have to hold his temper. Pieter, the driver of his kombi and his best friend since high school, was getting fed up with his tendency to kick people off. He had to admit, three times in the past two weeks was a lot, but he just couldn't get over how they thought the world revolved

around them. He and Pieter weren't there to think only about them. They had a business to run and money to make. But, that's not how Pieter thought. He was all for the "customer is always right" bullshit.

As he looked out at the tall fences, protecting the Observatory homes from the danger of burglars and the wandering eyes of passersby, he thought back to yesterday's incident. It happened not too far from the KFC they had just passed.

They had pulled up behind another kombi across the street from the Groote Schuur Hospital. Johan was going to compete for passengers, a practice common among experienced kombi callers. More often than not, Johan came out on top of these competitions, relentlessly pursuing passersby until they caved. He smiled to himself as he flung the door open and jumped out. It was show time.

"Sister, are you going to Cape Town?" he implored the woman standing on the sidewalk, now cornered by two aggressive kombi callers.

"Are you serious? The other guy was talking to her first. Let him take her." Johan looked back to see one of the students he had just picked up talking to him.

"Mind your own damn business," Johan spat back, distracted. "Sister, come with me."

"No go with him."

Johan's face flushed. "Alright, you little shit, get out of my kombi!" He had completely lost his focus. He couldn't believe that he was about to lose a passenger because some American student was coming into his kombi and disturbing his work. He never lost passengers like this.

"Whatever, I bet this guy'll let me go in his kombi for free," the student shrugged and hopped out of the kombi.

With that, the student and the girl jumped in the competing kombi and it drove off.

"I couldn't just let him distract me like that! We lost a passenger because of him! I had to get him out of the way!" Johan defended his actions during lunch that day.

"I agree," Pieter said. "He was a little punk. But you still need to learn how to control yourself. We lost two passengers instead of one and maybe some more who were standing by because you couldn't just swallow your pride."

Johan was relieved as the bus continued on into Woodstock. A little bit rundown, it was still a nice place to live because of how close it was to downtown. Here he would pick up mostly coloureds, with whom he was often able to have nice conversations in Afrikaans. The last stop would be Cape Town Station, in the middle of downtown.

The bus arrived at Cape Town Station around 5:40 am. He stepped off the bus and looked over to the empty lot separating him from Darling Street, where Cape Town's impressive City Hall stood. Although not as popular among tourists as Green Market Square just up the road, he knew that in a few hours this lot would be filled with a makeshift market. Street vendors would be selling anything from a pair of jeans, socks, or soccer and rugby jerseys, to a sausage off the braai (barbecue), or necklaces and bracelets made of African beads. He and Pieter would drive many of the tourists who would visit these stands into the city. Hopefully, they would drive some of the vendors home after they had packed up their stands that afternoon.

He crossed the bus rank and turned right to climb the stairs and cross the bridge to the taxi rank. Although quiet now, this area would be filled with people and kombis waiting to depart for Camps Bay, Khayletsia, Mitchell's Plain, and many other parts of the city. Johan met Pieter

next to their kombi, parked among hundreds of others over night. It was in this old, broken down kombi that Johan and Pieter would spend most of the day.

In 2010, in an attempt to improve the public transport system for the World Cup they were hosting, the South African government subsidized the public taxi industry. It was thanks to these efforts that Johan found a job. He had recently failed his matriculation exam, South Africa's version of the ACT or SAT with even more importance attached to it, and found that his options were dwindling. He was desperate for anything that would bring in some income. It was a Godsend when Pieter, his best friend from school, told him he had just received his kombi license and was looking for a caller.

Shortly after this breakthrough, he and Karien moved in together. They had planned to be married later that year, but the unexpected birth of Anton had brought financial strain and Johan wasn't able to afford a proper ceremony. Karien worked as a cleaning lady for two families in Observatory, but only had time for one family after Anton was born. Her mother looked after Anton in the afternoon, but she still worked part time as a secretary in a primary school in Mitchell's Plain. Johan was searching for a higher paying job so that he could marry Karien and maybe even move into a bigger house in Woodstock, but they would have to deal with the life they had for a few more years.

"Môre," Johan mumbled as he approached Pieter.

"Môre. You gonna keep your mouth shut today?" Pieter asked before starting up the kombi.

"Ja. I just hope the passengers do, too."

Pieter revved the engine a few times to make sure it didn't stall. He was used to this after years of practice. Pieter drove out of the station towards the Castle of Good Hope and turned left onto Victoria Road. This would turn into Main Road in Woodstock and lead them all the way to the taxi rank in Wynberg. Here, they would load up the kombi and head back to Cape Town Station. They would make this trip back and forth seven or eight times in a day.

[Space Break]

The kombi rolled into Wynburg's taxi rank around 6:40, dropping off the handful of passengers who were heading up town after working an overnight shift. Mark, an English speaking, white South African who lived just a few blocks from the rank, was waiting in the queue to head downtown. A recent graduate of the University of Western Cape, Mark was considered a progressive white South African. UWC was founded as a coloured school that had protested strongly against Apartheid. It remained a far more diverse university than UCT, which had much higher admission standards and tuition. Pushed by the diversity on UWC's campus and by the progressive teaching of his lecturers, Mark began volunteering in schools in the townships, something he had never thought to do while living with his parents in nearby Rondebosch.

Mark graduated in 2007 and was hired for a job teaching history and English at Cape Town High School. The school rests just outside the grounds of the Company Gardens, a beautiful green area located in the middle of downtown next to the National Holocaust and Jewish Museums, the National Library, and the National Parliament Building. His students were mostly coloured and Afrikaans-speaking and struggled with formally written English. He had taken the challenge upon himself to improve their competency, and was working particularly

hard with his grade 12 class, who would be taking their matriculation exam later that year in December.

He loved his job, but it was disheartening watching many of his students fail their matriculation and resort to gang violence and drug dealing. Tik, or crystal meth, was becoming more and more popular among the youths in South Africa, and he knew that some of his students used it already, especially the boys. They needed a positive male role model in their lives, and that is what he hoped to provide. But he knew that there was a disconnect between them because of his race. He hoped that someday soon the education system would be infused with coloured males willing to take some responsibility for the future of their children.

Mark had saved up enough money in the past three years to buy a small used car. He tried to use it as little as possible, though. The petrol was so expensive that he only used it for weekend hiking trips up Table Mountain, Devil's Peak, Lion's Head, or other mountains surrounding the city. Hiking was one of his favorite past times and one of the reasons why he loved Cape Town. Nature and city interacted in a unique way. Surrounded by skyscrapers in downtown, he could look up and see the beautiful scenery of the Table Mountain range. He would be just a short drive away from a hike with stunning views. Once on a hike, there were spectacular views of the city's buildings sprawling across the horizon. Mark found the most peace standing on a mountain overlooking the city.

Besides the cost of petrol, the main reason he chose to wake up early every morning to catch a kombi was because he enjoyed the unique atmosphere on each one. Some kombis played loud music and passengers would sing and dance as much as they could in their cramped seats. On other kombis, especially the ones he caught in the mornings while the passengers were still waking up, the kombi was silent as some passengers listened to music on their phones and others read the Cape Times. On some mornings, one or two of his students would get on the kombi in Woodstock and he would have the opportunity to get to know them better outside of the classroom. He might even get a chance to practice the little bit of Afrikaans he had picked up at UWC and while at the high school.

This morning Mark was running late and relying on the kombis' tendency to ignore most traffic rules. After arriving at Cape Town Station, he would still have a decent walk to reach CTHS. He would have to quickly cross the taxi rank and head down the stairs to the famous Adderley Street, where Archbishop Desmond Tutu once lead a march protesting Apartheid policies in 1989. He would walk towards the Company Gardens and continue on to Government Street, passing the National Parliament building and the South African Jewish and Holocaust Museums to reach CTHS. The walk would usually take him about 20 minutes, but he could do it in about 15 if he really had to. He continuously checked his watch, praying he could make it to school in time for his 8:00 am English class. It would be weeks before his students let him forget it if he showed up late.

[Space Break]

Mark entered the kombi and handed 12 rand (\$1.37) to Johan for his fare. "Môre," he said as he sat down on the raggedy front row seat.

"Môre." Johan had pegged him as an English speaker.

"How you doing today?" Mark asked the question in English.

Johan smirked to himself. He had guessed right. "Still breathing."

“Well, that’s the spirit.” That was the kind of attitude he hoped his students would avoid.

Mark looked around the kombi. It wasn’t as full as usual for his commute, probably because he had gotten there a little later than usual. This made him nervous. The more packed the kombis were, the faster they got to town because they wouldn’t stop so often to pick up new passengers.

“Think we’ll get rolling pretty quick here?” he asked Johan.

“As soon as we fill up,” Johan replied impatiently. “Here we go again, it’s like they think they own the kombi,” he thought as Pieter gave him a warning glance. He turned away from Mark and pointed a middle-aged black man in the direction of his Langa-bound kombi.

Mark looked at the stuffing peaking out of the seat behind him and the floorboard peeling up underneath his foot. The door handle had fallen off and Mark knew that Johan would be jiggling the lever to get it open at each stop. There were small boards waiting to be laid upon two adjacent seats to form a makeshift seat once the kombi had filled up. Mark didn’t even see a radio. He figured that he had chosen a kombi whose owners were in desperate need for money—even more so than other kombis—and they would be stopping any chance they could to lure passengers in.

The kombi finally filled up enough that Johan and Pieter decided they could leave. Mark checked his watch. 7:00 am. He tried convincing himself he’d be downtown in plenty of time, but found it hard to do.

“About time,” he mumbled under his breath.

“What’d you say,” Johan demanded.

“I said it’s about time. You’ll pick up more people along Main Road than you will sitting around this station.”

“Don’t tell me how to do things around—“

“Alright! We’ll get you downtown in time. Don’t worry.” Pieter was playing the peacekeeper.

As the kombi pulled out of the station and headed down Main Road, an uncomfortable silence fell. Mark looked out the window at the familiar, yet still awe-inspiring site of the Table Mountain range towering over the city. Johan spent most of the ride with his head out of the sliding window on the kombi. “CAPE TOOOOOOOOOWNN!” He was yelling at every passerby, attempting to fill up the remaining seats in the kombi. He had picked up a few older women in Newlands and some students in Rondebosch, but there were still empty seats. He glanced over at Mark, staring out the window, probably thinking about some important meeting he was late to. Mark impatiently checked his watch and opened his mouth like he wanted to say something, but thought better of it. It was a good thing he did too. Johan didn’t need to deal with a self-important English speaker from Wynberg in a fancy shirt and tie telling him how to run his kombi. He didn’t go into this guy’s work—he was probably slowly working his way up the ranks at Absa Bank—and rush him along.

When they reached Observatory, Mark checked his watch again. 7:30. He was really going to have to walk fast to get to school on time. Suddenly, the kombi pulled to the side of Main Road, across the street from the Pick n’ Pay grocery store.

Johan jumped out of the van. “Where a you going, sister?”

The woman at the end of the block didn't answer. She continued to slowly make her way towards the kombi, in no particular hurry to get anywhere. Mark watched and wondered if she was even going to get on the kombi. She wasn't looking at Johan and probably hadn't heard him. Johan waited for her to get closer. Mark checked his watch again.

"Sister, are you going to Cape Town?"

"No, no, son, I'm just heading over to Pick n' Pay."

Mark waited for Johan to jump back in the kombi and slam the door, but Johan wasn't leaving without picking up at least one more person.

"CAPE TOOOOWN!" he pointed to a group of students crossing the street with bags of groceries in their hands. They shook their heads no and continued walking.

"CAPE TOOOOOOOOOOOOWNNNNNNNNN!"

"Come on, man. Nobody needs a lift. I need to get downtown to work." Mark couldn't hold his tongue any longer.

"Johan, get back in and we'll pick someone up somewhere else," Pieter pleaded.

"CAPE TOOOOOOOOOOOOWN!" Johan ignored the two.

"Hey, man, listen to your driver. Get in the kombi."

"Fuck off, man! I need to get some people in this kombi and make some rand. The big shots at Absa can wait for your presentation." Johan regretted saying the words as soon as they came out of his mouth. He knew that might be Pieter's last straw. But of course it was easy for Pieter to keep his cool. He wasn't the one who had to deal directly with the white passengers who thought they controlled everything.

"Johan, get back in the kombi and shut up!" Pieter was trying to avoid drawing a crowd.

"You know I'm a high school teacher? I teach coloureds like you what it means to be a man." Mark knew immediately that he shouldn't have said it. It kind of just slipped out. He wasn't trying to patronize him, but he spent all day trying to teach young men to make something out of their lives, and he couldn't just sit back and watch the people they look up to set bad examples. But as soon as he—a white man—questioned the maturity of a coloured man, he became a racist bigot. That was the problem with the new South Africa.

Johan couldn't believe the fucker's nerve. Did he know he was doing just fine supporting his girlfriend and child? "You calling me less than a man?"

Mark was in too deep to back out. It was a waste of time teaching his students with guys like this running their mouths. "I'm just saying you're acting like it right now."

"Fuck you! Get the fuck off of my kombi!"

A small group of students had gathered around the kombi, egging Johan on.

"I'm not going anywhere. I already paid my 12 rand and all I did was ask you to get in so I can get to work on time," Mark tried to remain calm.

"That's the problem, rich boy. You think you can come in here and tell me how to do my job. Get the hell off of my kombi!"

"I'm not going anywhere."

Johan jumped in the car and began to pull on Mark's arm. "Hey, take it easy!" Pieter yelled. He knew it was too late to get into position to physically stop the altercation, so he tried his best verbally.

Mark pushed Johan's face, but Johan punched him directly in his gut. Mark grunted, and the remaining passengers gasped. Johan grabbed Mark by his side and pushed him out the open door. Mark caught his foot on the curb, stumbled and fell forward, rolling onto the sidewalk.

"OHHHHHHH!" the group of students let out an amused cry.

Mark had to take the higher rode. He couldn't complain about others' example if he wasn't able to set a positive example himself. It just wasn't worth dealing with that jackass. He would eat the six rand it would cost to get downtown from there. A group of women standing nearby followed him and boarded the other kombi.

Johan stood triumphantly outside his own kombi. "CAPE TOOOOOWN!"

No one wanted to go anywhere near him.

"Get your ass back in the car, you piece of shit! Look what you did. We sat here wasting time and gas and now there's not a chance we'll get any passengers. You're done! Once we get back to the station, you're off this kombi. I'll call for myself."

Johan's heart dropped. "C'mon Pieter, I need this job. I gotta family to feed."

"You shoulda thought of that before you ran your mouth and chased away all our passengers."

Pieter wasn't messing around. He could tell. This was the end of his kombi calling days, and he was out of options. He closed the door and Pieter took off down Main Road.

"You're really gonna do this to your best friend?"

"You're damn right I am. You think you're the only one with a family to feed in this city? This is the fourth time you've kicked someone off my kombi in the past two weeks. I can't afford that kind of attention."

That was it. Pieter wasn't going to discuss it further. The rest of the ride passed without any stops. Johan sat in silence, his head spinning. The rundown buildings in Woodstock, which had once stood as a beacon of hope, passed by in a blur. He wondered hopelessly how he was going to pay his rent on the house in Mitchell's Plain. He thought about calling out to passengers. If he could just get one, maybe he could save his job. But he knew there was no hope, and Pieter would just get more annoyed. The kombi came to a stop at the edge of the taxi rank. Johan jiggled the door handle and let the passengers out.

He leaned in the open door. "Pieter, you can't do this to me. What am I gonna tell Karien?"

"Shoulda thought about that before you ran your mouth again. Shut the door Johan."

Johan softly closed the door, and slowly wandered through the taxi rank, back to the Golden Arrow busses.

Can We Talk? by Ashlyn Bailey

I wanna talk about spring, not fall
And I wanna talk about the Lord of the Rings
Can I be your precious?
Could I be your sweet thing?
I want an intellectual conversation so I can test our chemistry
Wanna talk about what's on TV? What about the recession?
What about Darfur or the Great Depression?
How about birthday or your zodiac sign? I wanna know what yours so I can see if it's compatible
with mine
I can keep it real
But I'm not good with dinners or really cheesy jokes
I'd rather sit at home alone and watch Diff'rent Strokes,
Or a Different world...
or the microwave, it slowly turns
My mind so distracted that my popcorn burns...
Let's not talk about the police or the fire trucks
Not even about the sirens that won't shut up.
For a million bucks, I wish you would speak, give me a response
Cause I wanna talk about you, where you're at? How you're doin'?'
What's new in your life...What are you pursuin'?'
Can we talk about the candy, the chocolate sweet?
The message, the hook, the chorus, the beat?
You wanna talk about the back of the car, behind the bars? My dog that's dead
How I got this scar?
You know where I was last night?
What? How do you not know that much about me?
You wanna talk about the questioning room, the tape recorder, the confession
The depression, the court, the jail, the letters....
Is this sounding any better?
The fire, the burning...the time, the date
Where you gotta be at? Why you can't be late?
You wanna talk about why I wait? Why I'm waiting? What am I waiting for?
Why not now?
Life's too short you say, just go ahead it will all be okay... You called me that night.
And I rejected it.
Cause I didn't wanna talk about it.

Better Together by Meredith Augspurger

Pete's arm that once acted as a safeguard from loneliness now felt like a tether, a forced connection. Draped over her body like chains, Kate interpreted the arm's weight as a burden, not as a comfort like she used to. As they lay in bed, he slept and she concentrated on his annoyingly audible breathing. Gradually throughout the night, Kate had moved as far to the right as possible without falling out of the bed, but he'd pursued her inching, retreating movements, and his body was pressed against hers. The sweat she felt between their touching skins she was sure was his and not her own. She made a mental note to wash the sheets later.

Kate couldn't decide what she wanted more: him to wake up so the leg that was wrapped around hers would retreat and she'd be free or for him to continue to sleep so she wouldn't have to see the way he looked at her. The admiration in his eyes, it made her sick.

His long lashes, longer than her own, fluttered and she was momentarily convinced he could hear her thoughts. But he continued sleeping and she continued to wonder how she got here. How did she become so confined, so rapt with restless energy? She wondered if she hid it well, or well enough, at least.

She shook off these thoughts and focused on the clock instead. Only four more minutes until his alarm would go off. Four minutes. She could do that. All she had to do was lie there for four more minutes. 240 seconds. That's all.

238 agonizing seconds later, the room was gradually filled with the painfully cheery picking and the guilt-inducing lyrics, "We're always better when we're together."

"Pete, Could you please switch up your alarm song every once in awhile?" she'd asked him once. "It's driving me crazy waking up to that same, tired Jack Johnson song day after day." "Why would I do that?" he said with that amused look. The one that said, "Oh Kate, it's so cute and endearing when you're irritated with me." Kate did not want to be cute or endearing. She wanted to hurt him, to make him angry, to make him react. "It's our song. I get to start my day thinking about my girl and how lucky I am." "It's making me hate that song. Change it, or your 'girl' won't be around much longer." That did it. The bitterness in her voice and the truth in her tone made the admiration scatter from his eyes, making room for pain.

He didn't change it, and, here she was, still listening to that same damn song every morning. He began to stir and, after silencing that dreaded song, she immediately popped out of the bed. He looked at her, love and admiration streaming from his eyes. Damn it, she thought.

"Where are you off to?" He reached out for her hand? Her waist? Whatever he was reaching for, it did not want to be touched. Kate crossed her arms and took a step back.

"I was going to make you some breakfast. You have that big meeting today, right? You can't ask for a promotion on an empty stomach."

The Mine by Alexis Worden

The clanging of rusted iron
implements resonates against the encroaching
ebony walls as the elevator creeps deeper
into the cavern, swallowing us
in perpetual darkness.

The screeching abates and the door slides
left. A rush of dank air envelopes me and the hair
on my arms prickles, as a sea of goosebumps
washes over my bare skin. I taste bitter
coal dust on my tongue and imagine it coating
my pink lungs like it did my Father's, year
after year. My eyes strain

in the dull corona cast by each
carbide light, as I trudge past
the caged songbird and pick axes
with handles too warped
to use. Crevices chiseled into cave
walls lead to a labyrinth of tunnels,
that my Father's former friends file
towards like ants or like my ungrateful
peers plodding toward school.

The stone before me glistens
as water trickles down crags
and drips from cracks. I heave my axe
to my shoulder, gripping the haft
with calloused hands.

In one sweeping arc,
steel collides with coal,
The thwack reverberating
through every muscle fiber. Crumbling
coal settles by my steel-toed boots as my ears
perk at the silence that surrounds
Me, the absence
of the canary's chirp
echoing throughout the mine.

Less Wild Love by Lauren Gilbert

Although she knows her worth,
 She settles for these quiet imitations
 Of what she thinks might get rid
 Of her ghostly shadow.
 The shadow that follows her, yet doesn't diminish
 When her flesh separates from her soul.
 She believes that perishing encounters
 Give her some value, because she
 Holds, grooms, and controls
 What she thinks her
 Less wild lover desires.
 Yet empty each time, she believes
 There's a different stimulation,
 Concoction, or combination
 That will at last fill up, and quench
 That burning desire
 Desire, desire, the desire.
 But one day she will realize that abstract barrier
 She thinks is holding her hostage
 Is actually, herself.
 Creating solace, allowing things to be
 Too easy
 Is where the shadow dwells
 Most frequently.
 Hollow yet reliable impostures
 Allow her to continue,
 And convince herself otherwise.
 She questions whether she is worthy of such a wild love.
 One that never burns gray after the flames
 Departed its spark.
 Yet she catches glowing glimpses
 Of what could be everlasting...
 Yet she has chances to divide herself
 From the shadow.
 The BIG BLACK BOTTOMBOUND
 Shadow.....

A Dream by Jonathan Puccetti

A man appears, the gloom around him solidifying into stone walls and a small wooden table, lit by a single wavering candle, starlight streaming through an open window. The man is familiar, older, wearing the same old chainmail he has worn proudly for the past twenty years of service. His hair, now entirely white, is cut short in the military fashion, a sharp contrast to his darker skin. His short white beard, trimmed to exact precision, is the only vanity he allows himself, grooming it each morning. In part, he keeps the beard in tribute to his wife, now dead for 5 years, she had always liked it. The man's eyes were a comforting grey blue, like his father's eyes before him.

The man sat, reading his favorite book again, enjoying it as much as he had the first time he had read it, so long ago now. Its characters are now old friends, its jokes still able to bring a smile to his face, even in these troubled times. As he read, he remembered the first time reading the book to his daughter, then only eight years old. She would sit in his lap as he read aloud in their old rocking chair. His wife would bring milk and fresh baked cookies over and sit by the fire watching him read, a smile playing on her face and lighting up her deep green eyes. He would smile back and mimic the characters voices, roaring to match the warrior's thunderous cries and making his voice very small to play the part of the little girl asking for help finding her dog.

The man's nostalgia was interrupted by a noise from the corridor. He set his book down and stood, stretching. He grunted at the end of his stretch and his bones ached from the cold. He was getting a bit too old for the soldier's life, he thought, maybe he should retire soon, go home to Bishop and let the younger generation worry about the world. He grabbed his favorite halberd from its resting place against the wall and walked into the corridor to see what had caused the noise. The older man looked down the hallway in time to see a young man slip into the lower stairwell. Was he lost? The old man thought, those stairs are never used anymore, they are a dead end, leading to the foundation of the wall. Well, he thought, I'd better go help the young fool before he gets lost down there. He picked up a torch with his left hand off the wall and followed, leaning on his halberd like a walking stick. The old stairs are dusty with disuse, and condensation on the cold flagstones made them slick.

At the bottom of the stairs the passageway split into three directions, but light was coming from just the rightmost branch. The man followed the light, knowing it lead to an old storage room. As he entered the room he saw the man on his knees, intently focusing on drawing something, and recognized the younger man as Roy, a new recruit. "Roy, what are you doing down here at this late hour?" the older man asked, confused. Roy sprang to his feet and spun around, panic on his face, but when he recognized the older man he relaxed. "Oh, hey Bear, just came down to have some time to myself, clear my head." Roy said a light smile on his face. The older man had always liked his nickname, given to him for his tendency to roar at the trainees to get them out of bed. He smiled and stepped into the room, leaning on his halberd for support. "Well nothing wrong with that I suppose just don't be late to work ..tomorrow." the older man trailed off as he saw the writing on the floor.

It was a large circle written in red paint, and filled with symbols and glyphs. "Roy, what the hell is all this?" He said, looking back at the young man. Roy's smile was gone, and his eyes

were filled with hate. “Nothing for you to worry about old man” Roy said, as his knife stabbed deep into the older man’s stomach.

Cold and pain raced up his spine and then were replaced by numbness. The old man looked into the lad’s hate filled eyes and spoke in a low, quiet voice. “They don’t call me the Bear for just my voice”. Then, taking his still burning torch he rammed the burning pitch into Roy’s left eye, blinding him and scalding his flesh. Roy reared back clutching at his face and roaring in pain. The Bear ripped the dagger from his gut and tossed it to the ground and took up his trusty halberd in both hands. With a roar he charged the betrayer intending to cut him in half. Roy, recovering from the pain, held his left hand out and hissed out a word clearly not meant for the human throat. Hundreds of barbed needles shot out of the outstretched hand and struck at the older man, gouging and ripping his flesh. The Bear’s charge faltered and he sunk to the ground, blood pouring from countless injuries.

Roy breathed a sigh of relief, and stood up straight. “Had me worried for a second there old man, who would have thought you had so much pluck.” The young man’s gloating was interrupted as a wordless, inhuman roar poured from the Bear’s throat, so loud that it echoed in the small room and down the disused corridor. The Bear lurched to his feet his halberd in his right hand, blood pouring from wounds all over his body, glared at his enemy, his blue gray eyes like the ocean in a storm, and pointed with his blood soaked left hand. “Die Traitor!” he screamed and he raised his halberd above his head with both hands.

Roy, completely panicked, uttered a string of gibberish and disappeared in a red brown flash of light. The Bear’s blow struck the stone wall where the mage had stood, cracking the thick stone and shattering the steel head of the halberd. “Well fuck” the old man muttered, looking at his ruined weapon, his foe gone. He limped over to the entrance the room using the remaining shaft as a crutch and leaned against the stone wall. He slid to the ground and sat there, bleeding his life blood out onto the flagstones. With his shaking right hand he dipped his index finger in the pool of his own blood, and slowly wrote on the cool wall next to him. Finished, he settled back, the shaft of the halberd falling to the ground. He heard the warning bells ringing on the surface and smiled, knowing his last war cry had been answered. “Oh Brynne” he whispered. “Take care of yourself sweetheart, I’ll say hi to your mother for you, be a good girl now. I’m sure you will make us very proud.....Hell I’m already proud....what father wouldn’t be...”. The old man’s heart stopped beating, and the light in his blue grey eyes dimed.

Next to his body, written in blood and with an unsteady hand, but clearly legible was one word. Roy.

The world faded to black and swirls of grey.

Fence Brew *by Meaghan Patterson*

I am a witch.
The other yard is my cauldron.
Over the fence and into the potion.
I chant spells.
I use voodoo.
I gather my ingredients.
Grass, leaves, twigs, rocks.
I toss in whatever I can find.
The irritable neighbor gets in the way.
He doesn't appreciate my magic.
"I'm going to call the police!"
Go ahead Dave,
I'm sure they'll arrest a 3 year old.

He Loves Me Not *by Kathleen Murphy*

I play with the curls in her hair,
carefully dodging the tiny bald spots
left from stressed afternoons
when she pulls her hair out in tufts.
Her neck relaxes against my thigh.
"I think God hates me,"
she says to my hands.

I wrap a curl around my fingers,
and marvel at the stark contrast
between the black of her hair
and the white of my skin.
"Why?" Her eyes follow the lines
of the rafters on the gym ceiling.
"Because I like girls."

We sit listening to the echoes
bounce off the walls,
while I feed her M&M's
from my backpack.

Saturday Morning Bus *by Min Roh*

Where are you going?
Smiled back at the sweet chocolate
"school"

Where are you going?
Are you going to Day care?
Are you?
Grey Brown Windows are fidgeting
Turn and stare at his left side
Smile –

Where is your mama?
Home
Oh!

.....
Where is your dad?
Home
Oh!

Where are you going?
Where are you going?
Wiggle wiggle little five echo
The warmest farewell ever

The Graveyard by Jacob Simmons

The boys sat, laid back, their elbows propping the upper half of their bodies up. They each had a chilled glass of homemade root beer in hand that Joey's mom had made to get them out of the house.

"Take this and go outside to drink it," she had told the three young teens as she proceeded to clean the house.

"Man, this sure hits the spot Joey," Matt said as he shifted his weight to one side and lifted his glass to take a swig of the brown liquid.

"Yeah, we should bug your mom more often!" Doug concluded.

Matt and Joey laughed. They sat in silence for a bit, watching the clouds tumble through the sky, bending and shifting and spitting out new wisps of creation each minute. They listened to the wind combing through the leaves in the trees, causing a slight rustle to ripple through their ears. The street was lively, children played jumping games with a rope and chalk. Parents talked with neighbors, knitted immaculate quilts as lively and boisterous as the streets themselves or issued a curt warning to their sons and daughters to stick away from the street. Every house seemed to be dancing with excitement except the house directly in front of the boys.

"It's funny," Joey noticed. "There is excitement everywhere 'cept here and there," he indicated the two story wooden house across the street.

"That's silly," Matt told Joey. "Everyone knows that house is haunted, it's s'posed to be abandoned and boring. No one ever goes inside else they come out all changed and dead. We ain't anything like that place."

"How can anyone know it's haunted if ain't no one's ever been inside?" Joey replied.

There was a moment of silence between the three boys as they considered Joey's words.

"We know it cause that's what the grown-ups 'ave told us, that's how we know," Matt decided.

Joey appeared to be satisfied with that answer. He took another sip of the bubbling nectar that lay in his glass.

"Still," said Joey. "It's funny that my house is the only other house doin' nothin' exciting."

"Y'all want excitement?" Doug asked, sitting up and setting his glass to his side.

Joey and Matt nodded, copying Doug's actions themselves.

"Let's go into that house, just us three," Doug suggested.

"Don't be stupid Doug," Joey said, leaning back again to stare at the clouds.

"Yeah, we a'int doing that," said Matt. "They say that place is a graveyard."

"That's the point!" Doug shouted. "'Ave you ever been to a graveyard?"

"Well, no..." Matt conceded.

"'Nd what about you, Joey?"

"No, I s'pose I haven't," Joey said.

"Then we gota go! My mum always tells me I ought to try some new things," Doug explained.

"So does mine!" said Matt.

"Mine too," Joey concluded.

"It's settled then," Doug told them. "We'll meet here at Joey's house later tonight, dressed in black with our torches and anything else we can get our hands on!"

"Woah, why at night?" Joey asked.

"Night's the best sorta time to try something new! All the exciting stuff happens at night," Doug said.

Joey looked around the street again, breathing in all of the excitement he saw taking place.

"Doug's right," Matt said. "Besides, ain't nobody goes to any graveyard at night."

It was true, Joey thought.

"Alright," Joey decided. "We meet here tonight."

"Great!" Doug said gleefully as he sprung to his feet. "I gotta go home and get ready."

"Me too!" Matt agreed.

"Right, we'll see you tonight Joey, don't chicken out on us!"

"Yeah! Thanks for the root beer!" Matt said as the two boys walked off down the street towards their houses.

Joey snatched each of the empty glasses and finished the last remaining bit of drink in his own glass. He carried the glasses inside and set them on the counter for his mother to clean then climbed the stairs to his room where he would spend the rest of the day searching for the objects he would need later that night.

Joey sneaked out of his bedroom, dressed stealthily in black with a torch secured firmly in his hooded jacket pocket. The hood served to cover a good bit of his white head and as a good carrying compartment for the torch. He tiptoed down the stairs and opened the door to the outside, carefully carefully he walked outdoors to be greeted by the laughter of his friends.

"Ah, well look who showed up after all," Doug said as Joey approached.

"You ready?" Matt asked.

Joey nodded, "Let's get this over with."

The boys snuck across the street and crept onto the front lawn of the graveyard. As they approached the concrete steps that led to the old door of the house, Doug hashed out his plan to the other two.

"Right, we don't know what's in there, so I say one of you heads 'round back and comes in the back way, just in case," he and Matt looked at Joey.

"Well why has it got to be me?" Joey remarked as he looked back and forth between his friends.

"You're the neighbor. If there is anyone in there they won't think as much about you."

Joey grunted.

"Like that will make a difference," he said.

The other two boys continued staring at Joey until he finally relented and shaking his head started back down the steps to walk around the house, mumbling all the way.

"Count to twenty, then go in," Doug whispered in a high enough pitch that his voice was able to pierce the air and penetrate Joey's eardrum. Whether Joey had actually heard though he

did not know as the boy continued on his way mumbling, shaking his head and brandishing the lit torch in his hand.

“Right, you been countin,” Doug asked Matt.

“Was I s’posed to?” Matt asked.

Doug punched Matt in the shoulder.

“Course you was s’posed to! I told Joey to!”

“Well why couldn’t you have counted?” Matt defended himself whilst rubbing his shoulder.

“Forget it,” Doug said. “Open the door.”

Matt pushed open the door and they heard a piece of glass shatter on the ground.

With both persons safely inside the door, Matt quickly pushed it closed and the two boys yanked out their torches, flipping the power switches to on. A beam of light was cast out from both of their illuminating sticks to display the destruction that lay on the floor next to their compatriot.

“Joey!” Doug scolded.

“It wasn’t my fault! It’s been way past twenty seconds! Where ‘ave you two been? You scared the living daylights out of me!”

“SHHH!” Matt called.

“Oh what are you shhning?” Joey asked.

“Don’t use the L word in a graveyard! My mum says that’s bad luck.”

Joey twisted his face into confusion. He didn’t even know there was an L word. It took a moment of thought before he discovered what Matt was talking about. Living. Of course! How could he have been so daft? You can’t say the word living in a graveyard, it angers the spirits of the dead.

During their exchange, Doug began to walk up the wooden stairs that occupied nearly the entirety of the room. Creaking, creaking, the boys on the ground floor heard their friend’s footsteps treading heavily on the old and rotten wood.

“Doug! Can’t you walk any lighter?” Matt warned.

Doug simply waved his hand, beckoning the two boys to follow him up the stairs. At the top of the stairs was another wooden door, fit roughly in the polygon that had once been a rectangle. Seeping out from under the door and slithering all along the loose fitting door frame was the unmistakable orange of candlelight.

“There’s someone in here,” Doug whispered.

Matt and Joey crept up the steps behind Doug. They stood at the top the three of them, listening to the dull, deafening, drum of their hearts as they beat out into the graveyard’s air where the sound would hover for seconds, as though the air had become so thick it was capable of suspending the most minute of sounds. Indeed, the air did seem thicker. The boys were gasping, quickly, breathing and breathing, sucking in as much of the precious oxygen that they could take.

“Who’s gonna open it?” Doug whispered.

Matt and Joey, standing on either side of Doug both looked at the man in the middle.

“Ah come on, why’s it gotta be me?” Doug groaned quietly.

“You’re in the middle,” Matt gulped.

Joey nodded agreement.

The boys switched off their torches and stored them back in their respective carrying locations. The only light they had to show them where they were going, where they had come from, was given in the form of the slender splinters of light protruding from the room beyond.

Doug reached forward and took hold of the brass door knob. He twisted and pushed.

The street was on lockdown the next morning as the parents of Joey, Matt and Doug stood crying together, with their neighbors huddled around them. The three boys, it seemed, had disappeared in the night without telling anyone where they had gone. Police patrolled the streets now, flagging down all the neighbors and interrogating them for any sort of information they might have. It was eleven in the morning and no information had been discovered.

"They didn't say anything about wanting to go somewhere yesterday?" One of the policemen asked.

"No, no! They just played! Like children are supposed to do!" Cried Joey's mother, lifting her head away from her hands just long enough to answer the man's question.

"I think it best we all went back inside and let the police do what they need to do," said Joey's father, embracing his wife in a hug. "We aren't doing any good standing out here."

With that he turned, pulling his wife with him. They went indoors and he sat her down on the sofa then left to fetch her a glass of water. The crowd outside dispersed, going away to their separate houses where they would remain. It wasn't until nearly three in the afternoon that Joey walked in the front door of his parent's house.

He was rather surprised when his father nearly tackled him to the ground.

"Oh, Joey!" His mother squealed.

"Where have you been?" Asked his father.

"We've been worried sick. There are cops all throughout the town looking for you and your friends."

"We've just been across the street, at the graveyard," Joey struggled as he squirmed out from under his father only to be embraced by his mother seconds after.

"What were you doing over there? I thought we told you not to go there? Do you want some water or something? Some soup? Are you alright?"

"I'm fine mum, really. It is an incredible place, that graveyard," Joey said.

"What do you mean?" Asked his father, an arms length away and a stinkeye gracing his countenance.

"Go sit down," his mother suggested. "I'll get you some water."

Joey's mother went to the phone and snatched it up. Dragging the cord with her she walked to the refrigerator to fetch some water and pour it into a glass for her son.

"Yes, officer. He is back! He just walked in, he appears to be fine!" Joey heard his mother say.

"Yes, yes. That would be fine. See you soon!" She hung up the phone and brought the water to her son.

"The police are coming over, they would like to hear your story and understand what happened so that they may close up their case."

“Alright,” Joey said calmly, accepting the glass and swallowing some of the water.

The time until the policemen arrived was filled with countless inquiries by Joey’s mother trying to be assured that everything was okay followed by numberless assurances by Joey that he was. At last, two officers knocked on the door and Joey’s father let them in, beckoning to the chairs in the front room for them to sit in.

“Hello Joey, my name is Officer Conrad,” one of the men said. “I’d like to hear your story, just to make sure that there is nothing more that I need to do.”

Joey sat forward and placed his glass on the the dark chestnut colored coffee table that stood between the couch he and his parents were on and the two chairs that accompanied the officers. He sat back again and began his story.

Doug walked in first, Joey and Matt flanking him.

The room was a massive rectangle stretching nearly one hundred feet from end to end but you would never have known it. The walls were lined with shelves and in the shelves lay books books and more books. Books by the tens, books by the fifties, they filled the walls, all different sizes and colors and titles. The floor looked the same: piles and piles, books and books, papers and papers, they all lay strewn on the lightly shaded wooden planks, illuminated only slightly by the light of many dwindling candles. The books cast shadows, throwing their bountiful works into life on the walls, dancing as though they were acting out the stories that lay within them.

“Hello boys.”

The three young teens looked to their right. Nestled away in an alcove was an old fellow seated in a large, red, cushioned chair. He had spectacles on his wrinkled face and was peering over the top of them now to see the boys standing in the light of the candles. His head was filled with a mop of grey hairs and there seemed to be a permanent smile that graced his features. To the side of the man was a small round table and on the table sat a typewriter, trailing yards of paper out the back of it. Piled high behind the man were books, piled to his left more books and scattered lightly out in front of him like fertilizer were more books still.

“Hello,” Doug replied tentatively.

“What brings you up here?” The old man asked.

“Our parents said it was a graveyard and that no one ever comes out alive,” Matt spoke up.

The old man chuckled. He pushed his glasses up his nose and laughed some more.

“So you’re out looking for adventure?” The old man asked at last.

“That’s right,” Joey said. “Is this not a graveyard?”

“Oh it’s a graveyard alright,” the old man chuckled again. “Come, gather round. I’ll take you on a few adventures.”

The teens walked hesitantly forward.

“Move some of those books to the side so you may sit,” the old man directed them.

They did as they were told and sat down, forming a sort of circle between them, the walls of books and the old man in the chair.

“I know just the one to start with,” the old man picked up a small square book from the ground. He opened to the first page and began reading.

"How it began with the children, old Mrs. Bentley never knew. She often saw them, like moths and monkeys, at the grocer's, among the cabbages and hung bananas, and she smiled at them and they smiled back."

The man continued reading and when he finished the story the boys stared at him in wonder.

"How did we like that one? It was always a favorite of mine, from the mind of the great Ray Bradbury," The old man said then appeared to stare blankly at the flickering candle beside his typewriter as if remembering something.

"It was fantastic!" Doug replied.

"Do you have any more?" Matt asked.

"I do indeed," the old man grinned. "What would you like to hear?"

The old man began to finger through the books within his immediate reach, calling them out by author as he did so.

"We've got Poe, Hemingway, Twain, Chaucer, Shaw, Dante, Hawthorne, Doyle, Steinbeck, Cervantes."

"Who was that?" Joey asked.

"Cervantes?" The old man asked back.

"Let's hear that one!" Joey replied.

"Very well!" The old man grunted as he heaved himself ever so slowly out of his great red chair. He limped closer to the pile of books that he was looking through and began to lift them, one by one off the top, slowly descending to the book in the middle: Don Quixote.

"Here let us help you!" Joey said, bounding up to his feet.

"Yeah, don't hurt yourself old man!" Matt said, he too bouncing up.

The old man chuckled. "I cannot imagine a more phenomenal feat than hurting myself whilst trying to read. One can never grow too old to read."

"Still, you gotta let us help you," Doug said.

"Oh, very well. Get around this pile and steady it," the old man told them.

The three boys moved about, positioning themselves on the other three sides of the pile.

"Have you all got your hands on it?" the old man asked.

The boys voiced that they did and the man ripped the book from the pile. The mountain began to sway, back and forth as the boys tried to steady it, then it came down in an avalanche between Matt and Doug, not harming anyone but leaving a mess of books strewn on the little remaining wood.

"Ah gee, sorry old man," Matt said and the old man chuckled.

"Not a problem!" The old man said gleefully. "The only way you can damage a book is to never let it be of use. To never pick it up and smell its pages and the crisp, dark ink that has been printed upon them. Now come back around and let us begin our adventures with the good knight and his companion, Sancho Panza."

The boys gathered back around and the old man read from the book. The rest of the night was more of the same, the old man reading and the children listening, seeing, experiencing the lives of the characters in the stories and the authors who had written of them. They felt themselves be lifted and brought to the sea where they sailed, a tiger by their side. They traveled

down a massive river, running away from the evils of the world. They fought in wars, they loved, they battled windmills. They lived.

The time passed by unknowingly and soon the old man closed the book he was currently reading, ending on a cliffhanger of course.

“Well what’ve you stopped for?” Matt demanded.

“Yeah, what gives? Keep reading!” Doug agreed.

“No, no. You’ve been here too long,” the old man said. “Look outside, the sun is more than halfway through its journey. Go to your homes and come back later, we will finish the story then, once I have had some time to rest.”

Unwillingly, the boys walked back down the creaking wooden steps and traveled to their respective homes.

As Joey finished his story, the policemen nodded and stood up. They walked to the door with Joey’s father and stopped before leaving.

“We will go and talk to this man he speaks of,” Officer Conrad said. “Thank you for talking with us, Joey.”

The men walked out the door.

Joey hiked up the stairs and into his room, reflecting on the experiences of the night before. When he reached his room he closed his door and jumped on his bed. Kneeling, he looked out his window. Across the street was an ambulance and there appeared to be a body being rolled out to the boxlike car.

“That’s strange,” Joey said aloud.

He laid back on his bed and stared at his ceiling. *They were right*, he thought. *That place is a graveyard, a graveyard for the living, for those who have never truly died.*

Joey closed his eyes and drifted quickly to sleep, giving his tired eyes some rest at last. Before he had drifted too far he had one last thought.

No one ever comes out of that place alive, he thought, as he pondered the new life he had discovered.

A Dinner Engagement by Hannah Klapperich-Mueller

Not particularly new, not particularly different,
Crouching behind doorways, in the cracks in the sidewalk,
Underneath rugs, on the top shelf of the cupboard,
There he lurked.

Like dust on the keys of my keyboard,
Flattened between the stacks of paper in my folder,
Among the leftover strands on my hairbrush,
There he lurked.

Between my pillow and the pillowcase,
Past the curve of the drain in the bathtub,
Just beyond the corner of my eye,
There he lurked.

Fear, they called him. He dressed up as Doubt on holidays.
I met Fear the other day. He had on his best suit.
He came home with me for dinner.
We walked over the cracks in the sidewalk,
Wiped our feet on the rug. I swept behind the door,
Did some dusting and a load of laundry,
Called the plumber and fetched my glasses.
Spring cleaning for my guest.
For dinner, I served my biggest Dreams, piping hot.
Then Fear went home, and I realized something.
He hadn't touched his meal.

The Intercom by Hazel Dehn

Brandy Marks was proud of her name. It had been her daddy's favorite drink. She had bright purple nail polish and fake bleached hair. She wore an atrocious, thick perfume that made one's eyes water and pearls embedded in her thick neck. She worked for Mr. Howard Price at Price Boxing Industries as a secretary, and had a desk right in front. On her desk sat a stuffed teddy bear and so many angel figurines that it was almost impossible for her to do any work. So she usually didn't; instead, she gossiped. It was her favorite activity in the whole world, next to baking and clipping coupons from the Daily Saver catalog.

Today she had cornered Mattie Maddox from accounting. Mattie didn't like Brandy Marks all that much, but then no one did. It was hard to get her to shut up, but even harder to try to escape. So Mattie sat on the edge of the desk, careful not to knock over any little angels, and listened patiently, unaware that everyone in the entire plant could also hear Miss. Brandy Marks's nasal voice.

Donna hated boxing for ten hours a day, but it was putting food on the table for her two children. That was all she really cared about now since her asshole of a husband had run off with the whore that used to do her hair at Bee's Beauty Salon. She tried to shake that thought from her mind as she pulled yet another wrecked box from the machine used to tape them. *Jesus*, she thought, *not another one*. This machine was a piece of shit.

She heard the slightly musical beep of the intercom overhead and she, like everyone else, stopped to listen. As she expected, Miss. Brandy's nasal voice echoed out. But something was wrong. Her co-workers began quietly whispering. Donna strained to hear over the clashing of machines, and felt her mouth falling open.

"I found them. Right in the middle of his office floor! Black lace and not cheap either. It was La Perla. And you can bet they weren't his wife's!"

Mr. Howard Price stopped and listened as well. He was breathing hard, and sweat covered his brow. Surely, he had heard the intercom system go off? Yes, he knew that high-pitched, nasal voice. What was that idiotic woman blithering about? He hadn't told her to make any announcements and that was the only time the intercom was to be used, for official announcements.

The leggy brunette pushed a lock of hair from her face and sat up, smoothing her skirt.

“What is it?” He shook his head and motioned for her to be quiet. He got up and went over to the intercom system on the wall of the storage room.

He pushed the green button and leaned in close, thinking that he really needed to get these replaced. He’d have to ask Lois. God how he hated that, but without her, or more, importantly, her money...all those thoughts faded away as he listened, with growing panic.

“I’ve heard some rather odd noises coming from that office. I mean, I can’t say for ceeeeeertain there was any hanky panky, but....when I go in there, I can actually *smell* it. Isn’t that just the nastiest thing you ever heard? How could he? I mean, in his own office?! Where do they do it? On the desk?! Ugghh!! Makes me sick that a man could do that to his own wife! She is an angel! An honest to God angel!”

Mr. Price couldn’t listen to it anymore. He had to shut that woman up now.

“Is everything ok, baby?” the brunette asked , placing a hand on his chest.

He slapped it away.

“Get out.” He hissed.

“But Howard, baby, we were just getting started and....” He whipped around, almost slamming her in the face with his elbow in the process.

“I said *get out* and don’t come back! Leave! Go out the back door and make sure no one sees you!”

He threw the door open and rushed toward the front of the building. As he hurried along, he was aware that the people, people who worked for *him*, who ranked *below him*, were staring. Many looked horrified, some looked amused and some just looked at him with what could only be described as....pity. God, why were the offices all the way on the other side the building? He was puffing hard now. He hated them all. Thankfully, he couldn’t hear Miss. Brandy’s voice anymore. That cow....when he was through with her, she wouldn’t be able to talk. He found her alone, filing her nails, but she looked up when he came in, and even had the nerve to give him her ridiculous fake smile. As if she hadn’t just been telling all of his most intimate secrets to the world. He would barely contain his rage as he looked at her.

But then she said, “Oh Mr. Price! Your wife is waiting for you in your office. I told her you’d be right there. I was actually just about to call you on the intercom.”

He had stopped listening. He walked to the door of his office and stood before it, steeling himself for what lay ahead. He’d tell her it was a misunderstanding, that the fat bitch at the front desk had no idea what she was talking about. Yeah...that’s what he’d say. He opened the door and

went in. His wife was sitting behind his desk, looking through a file, but she put it down when he entered the room.

“Hello, Howard.”

He never liked the way she spoke to him, in that flat way, like he was some stupid child who needed to be dealt with patiently.

“Hello Lois.” He came up to the desk, but she stayed in the chair. “This is a surprise. You don’t usually come in during the week. How long have you been waiting?” He wanted to know how much she’s heard. Maybe she hadn’t heard anything.

Her beautiful face gave nothing away. He remembered at that moment, though he thought it odd given the circumstances, why he had married her, why he had loved her. Or something like love anyway. She had never loved him. She was smarter than him and they both knew it. She lived on a whole other plain, one he could never hope to reach. She stood up now, tall and graceful, and walked around the desk to face him.

“Long enough.”

And that’s when he saw the gun. In that frozen moment, he recognized it as a Beretta .32, a small gun, one that was easily concealed. He hadn’t known Lois owned a gun. He wondered vaguely how she had gotten it. He realized, suddenly, that he had known she’d had it before he walked into the room, though how he knew, he couldn’t say. This marriage was a mirage, a sham. She’d married him mostly to piss off her father, who had wanted her to marry one of his younger partners in the company. Lois, however, would never have gone along with what she thought of as an “arranged” marriage. She did what she pleased and that was the only reason, Howard knew, he had ended up in her bed in the first place.

They had gone to the same Ivy League school, but he had drunk the glory down, depressed at his scuffed shoes and worn out jacket. She had simply glided through without a thought, never a sleek hair or Louboutin heel out of place. They met at the home of a mutual friend, a friend who had no cares about the social circles imposed by such surroundings. Lois had been warned though, that perhaps Howard was not the best guy to be messing around with. That was all she needed to hear. She had quickly tired of the country club boys with their parents’ money and the bulky football stars who spent every second of their day in the weight room. They were all rough and piggish, especially in bed. They were “go-getters”, take charge type of men, but in this, they reminded her too much of her father and that was...disconcerting.

Howard had sparked her interest, though, on the surface, he didn’t seem much better. He was a loser who drank to feel good. He had never been told he was better, so of course, he didn’t think it. When he was in bed with her, she could tell he was savoring it, knowing he would never get another chance like this again; and that had made her feel good. It had made her feel wanted.

The sex had been the best she'd had in months and when they actually started talking after, she found he wasn't the drunken loser everyone had made him out to be. She had liked him more than any of the others, but hadn't thought much about him after that night. However, there were times in the following weeks when she remembered the feeling he had given her. So after a few more quarterbacks and trust fund tools, she gave him a call. They never dated exactly. Lois didn't want that. Not because she was embarrassed of Howard. She could have cared less what her stuck up friends thought. She just didn't like sticking to one thing. The way she looked at it, Howard was good enough for now, nicer than most, and certainly better endowed in other areas as well. And she was curious what her father would think of him. She had brought him up to their place in Connecticut over Christmas for her family's annual Holiday Ball. To her delight, he hated him. He thought Howard was lowly and underbred, just as she hoped he would. She married Howard a year later, without her father's blessing.

Howard was just along for the ride. He couldn't believe a woman like Lois would ever even look at him. He'd been swept up in her. He never knew someone could be caught up in a person, but that was what had happened with Lois. He had a good 200 lbs. on her, but she said one thing, and he was at her side in a second, like an adoring dog. He would have done anything for her. He had even taken *her* last name when they got married. Sometimes he felt indignant about how much control she had. It crossed his mind that this was not the Natural Order of things, that he should be in control, not her. He was the man after all. He didn't think she loved him, not the way he wanted to be loved anyway. When she suggested they get married, his first thought was, '*She is far better than you deserve...rich, beautiful...*' and he hated himself right away for it. But he had said yes, hell yes in fact. He knew that he was an experiment, a device merely to piss off her father, but he found he could live with it, in his own way.

Three months in, he had started sleeping with Lois's cousin, Selma. She was not nearly as gorgeous as Lois, but she was decent looking and did things in bed Lois would not even consider. He felt like this made them even. She didn't love him and now she would know how much he didn't love her. He didn't know what she did and over time, he cared less and less. At last, he had everything he felt he deserved; a huge house with his Corvette in the driveway next to the Audi and the Jag. He no longer needed the petty little compliments she gave him, which he had worked so hard to get when they had first met. He didn't need them. He was over that now. And when her old man died, she gave over control of his company, Price Boxing Industries, to Howard. He couldn't believe it. Maybe she was dumber than he thought and this idea made him feel great. He finally had power over her. He ignored the fact that it was Lois who had handed it right to him, without seemingly a second thought. He ignored the snickering behind his back about how he'd only made it this far because of his 'old lady.' He slept with the young college interns who came to work in the office over the summer, and tried never to go home. He would show her. He could live without her.

“I hate waiting for you, Howard.” She said, looking at him with an expression he could not read, was it sadness? Anger? “You just never...” she paused and for the first time, Howard Price saw his lovely and intelligent wife lost for words. And it was to be the last time.

Lois Price raised her gun and fired. The bullet tore right through his brain and he thought no more. Mrs. Price just stood, looking down at her dead husband. She gave a little sigh,

“You never did the right thing, Howard, my love. You should have stayed in the storage room with that little intern.”

She stepped over the body and made her way to the door. Miss Brandy was waiting for her. Wordlessly, Mrs. Price handed her the Beretta and Miss. Brandy took it with one of her lacy handkerchiefs. Mrs. Price then peeled off the expensive leather gloves she was wearing, even though it was the middle of a particularly hot July. Miss. Brandy nodded, “Thank you Mrs. Price. We’ll see you back here again soon I expect.”

“Probably. It can’t be helped I’m afraid.” She glanced at the closed office door, with its glittering name plate bearing her dead husband’s name. Then she turned back to Miss. Brandy, “Well until then, Brandy, and remind me later so we can discuss your new position.”

Miss. Brandy nodded and watched Mrs. Price walk to the front doors and disappear beyond them. Then she sat back at her desk and cleared a few angels from around the intercom.

My, she thought to herself, *if someone wasn’t careful, they could bump the ‘on’ button, and how easy it stuck*. She looked at it for a moment, thoughtful. Yes indeed, how very easy. Then she smiled. She turned her attention to the desk drawer, where the gun was now nestled between a stapler and her teddy bear notepad. Well, Mr. Price shouldn’t have told her to get rid of her angels. He had been such a *terrible* man. And that little skanky intern, Miss Brandy smirked, she would be going away for a very long time. After all, she was the one Miss. Brandy saw go into Mr. Price’s office and then heard her fighting with him over a pair of black lace panties. She left in a hurry and after a few minutes (she wanted to give Mr. Price some time to cool down), Miss. Brandy went in to give him some paperwork and found him there, dead as a doornail. And sadly, no one else could have seen what happened because the rest of the office was out at the customer service seminars at the Radisson down the road. The only reason Brandy hadn’t gone is because *someone* had to stay and hold down the fort and she had very important paperwork to get that down for a big order that was going out the next day.

And the gun? Mrs. Price had already told her what to do with it. The girl’s purse was neatly hidden in the cabinet next to Miss. Brandy’s desk. She pulled it out (knock off Chanel naturally, a tramp like her) and placing it on her lap, she slipped the gun inside. There were no serial numbers on the gun, Mrs. Price had told her; she had acquired it from a ‘friend’ who didn’t feel there was a need for those sorts of things. Miss Brandy put the purse off to the side and went

back to filing her nails, daydreaming about the new cushy PR job Mrs. Price had promised her as a reward for all her service. That was when the brunette came through the front doors.

She felt nervous and edgy. Howard had told her to leave, but she needed to get her purse. It had her wallet and phone and everything else. He couldn't expect her to just leave without it. The only thing she couldn't figure out is where she had left it. She thought she had left it in her cubicle, but when she'd crept past it earlier, she hadn't seen it there. So where could it be?? Then she saw it, sitting squarely on Brandy Marks's desk. Shit...she'd probably left it in the office when she'd come to give Howard that problem 'shipping order' and they'd had to go to the storage room so he could 'look into it further.' Oh lord, not that bitch...probably had been going through all her things. She had condoms in there...that would be the talk of the office tomorrow if Miss. Brandy had nothing else to blab about. She hurried up to the desk, trying to smile and be polite.

"Oh my purse! I've been looking for it everywhere! Silly of me to leave it up here. Thanks so much for keeping it safe for me, Miss. Marks." Miss. Brandy just smiled.

"Why of course, my dear," she said, her annoying fake Southern accent coming out, "anything I can do to help." The brunette smiled and hurriedly snatched up her bag. "Goodbye Miss. Marks! See you tomorrow!" She didn't see Miss. Brandy's smile get a little wider as she ran back out through the double doors and out to her Firebird. It was stifling in the car. She had missed her chance to park under the only tree in the parking lot this morning, and to make matters worse, she could smell Miss. Brandy's awful, cheap perfume all over her. She looked down at the skirt she thought had looked so sexy this morning, now all rumpled and sad looking. She had gone to the most expensive store in the mall to buy it. She had bought it for Howard, to look good for Howard. He had barely looked at it, just pulled it up to push his hand between her legs. The boys had school had more manners. She sighed. Well things could be worse she supposed.

The heat was making her mouth feel dry and rough, disgusting. She stuck her hand in her purse, rummaging around, trying to find her Winter Mint gum, when her hand closed around something cold...something smooth.

Donna and her co-workers had gone back to work. It didn't really surprise anyone. Affairs were more common in the work place than people liked to think. Donna didn't like to think too much about it and tried to put the whole matter out of her mind, which became a great deal easier when her supervisor, Rick Monroe, came onto the floor. He was one of the best looking men she had ever seen and a good boss. It was almost a crime that he already had a wife. All the female workers allowed at least a glance as he passed by, many doing more than just that, Donna noted. Many looked like they would have preferred to see more of Rick Monroe than just his tanned, muscular arms in his Price Boxing work shirt. Donna knew he always came from his manager's

meeting through the assembly area on his way to his office at the other end of the floor, but today he stopped and motioned for everyone to gather round.

“Everybody, I just wanted to tell you that Miss. Marks’s little....episode just now was not something that should be spread around, alright? We all know she’s....well...a bit of a gossip. We also all know, I would hope, that gossip often leads to misunderstandings and this, in turn, can lead to people getting hurt. I can only say that I know you’re all good people and that, for the good of this team and for the good of the company, you should not continue any rumors you may hear. I count on you and I can’t have a team that’s its own worst enemy. Now,” he looked around at the circle of faces, “can I trust you all to do this?” Every head nodded eagerly and he smiled, “Excellent. Then I’ll leave you all to get done what needs to get done.”

Donna watched him as he walked on toward his office. Now that, she thought, was a fine specimen of a man. She then turned back to the boxing machine and glared as it destroyed yet another box.

He met her at the back entrance, which was fairly quiet on that particular afternoon. They kissed and then he held something up to show her, grinning as he did so.

“You left these in my office the last time you visited.” She frowned and snatched the pair of black lace panties from his hand.

“Why have you still got them? You should have gotten rid of them.” He shrugged, unconcerned. “They looked expensive and besides,” he pulled her close, “you look good in them...and out of them.”

She playfully punched his arm, but then her face grew serious.

“We need to go. I told Brandy to call the police about now or it’ll look suspicious. I have to go back to the house.”

He nodded.

“Are you going to be sad, Lois?” he asked, suddenly. She stared at him for a moment and then she laughed. God, Rick thought, that laugh really lit up her face, making her even more radiant, more so even than usual. Then in the next moment, he shrank away from such thoughts. What was he thinking? Joking about panties and staring at her like a lovesick school boy? A man is dead, he thought, and this woman in front of you is the one who did it, the woman you love, the woman you’re leaving your wife of five years for. What was he doing?

“Well?” he asked again. Lois wasn’t looking at him and she wasn’t laughing anymore.

“No. Because I’m not sad. He was a son of a bitch. Granted, part of that was my fault and I take responsibility for my mistakes. Most people don’t. And I’ve never pretended to be something I’m not.”

“Lois...” he touched her arm, as he had so many times before and with one hand, he took her chin and tilted it up so she was looking at him. “Do you feel bad about this at all?” Her eyes flickered, but they stayed clear and sharp as she replied, “As long as I have you, I’m happy, Rick.” He could feel himself giving in, believing the sweet words, willing to ignore the horrible things behind it. But he could feel bitterness there too, like adding spoonful after spoonful of sugar to an already cold, greasy cup of coffee. He stepped away from her again.

“Lois....maybe we should at least tell the police about this...about us...” he gestured hopelessly at the air between them, which was thick with the smell of boiling blacktop and sweat from the both of them. His words just hung there, like the smells, and he watched her face, hoping she would see. Hoping she would say something, anything that would make this all ok, make it all justifiable. But she didn’t. Instead, she closed the space between them, pressing her slender body against his, and kissed him. His mind swam, he was losing himself. Her kisses were like nothing else. They left him giddy, like he was drunk. His first kiss at eleven, his first time in Jamie Lyon’s bed when he was sixteen, and his wife, whom he thought was the love of his life...none of those kisses felt like this. This was all Lois. Beautiful, incredible, amazing Lois...she moved away from him suddenly, pulling a glittering ring of keys from her purse.

“I have to go *now*, Rick. The police will be here soon.” He looked at her and he could feel something trying to fight its way through his haze, trying to tell him something, something important. But it was drowning...the more he looked at her, the less he heard it. He didn’t deserve her. She was out of his league...”I’ll see you later.” She smiled and hurriedly kissed him again, “I love you.”

“I love you too.” She pulled open the door of the shitty beat up truck she’d bought off her gardener and hopped inside. She smiled at Rick through the dirty windshield and pulled out of the parking lot. She took the back road behind the plant, along the chain link fence that separated Price Boxing Industries from Ello Electronics and Lighting. She noticed with some relief that the road was empty today, without even a shipping truck blocking the way as was usually the case toward the end of the week. She pulled out into the busy street then and into a rush of other cars, the old rust colored truck unnoticed by the several patrol cars that sped past.

Lois watched them in her rearview mirror as she waited for the light to change. There were so many of them. She thought about Brandy, gullible, selfish and willing to stab just about anyone in the back if it meant more gossip and less work. It hadn’t been hard to convince her. Then she thought about Rick; handsome, sweet and kind...she did love him and now that she thought about it, she supposed she had loved Howard too. She knew this because she had asked him to marry her, an idea that had previously repulsed her so much she couldn’t even speak of it, let

alone suggest it. Certainly her father's disapproval had moved things along and yet...she returned to the night they met, when they were in her bed, and how he held her to him after, caressed her. He had kissed her forehead and mumbled things into her hair, and told her she was the most incredible person he had ever met. She had fallen in love that night. She hadn't known it; she hadn't known what that odd sensation was that had started building up inside her from that night onward. But she knew now.

She had tried to save the marriage. She knew he hated and resented her for the money she had and cared nothing for. To Howard, money had been everything. She had tried to make him feel like a man of the world, but he had thrown it back at her. She didn't know how many affairs he'd had. After her cousin, she didn't want to hear about any of the others, but she knew. He never came home and she slept alone every night. She made one last attempt to save them by giving up her father's business to him. But she miscalculated that as well. Howard couldn't run a business. He knew nothing about boxes, even though he seemed to be stuck in one of his own making. The stocks had been dropping steadily the last few months and the condition of the factory itself was getting deplorable. He had started drinking again, a lot, judging by the large number of bottles accumulated in the blue bin whenever he was home. God only knew how much he drank when he wasn't.

She had started the affair with Rick three months ago, right after a particularly brutal fight in which Howard told her he hated her fucking guts and couldn't stand the sight of her anymore. That night, they had to attend one of the company's cocktail parties and she had burst into tears in the coat room. That was where Rick fond her, slumped against the many fur coats and wiping her eyes with an already well used tissue. She had grabbed onto him like a life raft, like something to be a balm on burns that would never go away. But over time, she came to love him as well. He was big and gentle and he helped her along.

He hated what she had done. She could see that in his face as she stood with him in the lot, but he would never turn her in. He had had that look in his eye she had seen with many men when they looked at her, with Howard; the look of some spell she was able to cast, a spell that she did not wholly understand. She knew it had been wrong, didn't like it herself. Perhaps she had lied to Rick when she said she wasn't sad; that she didn't care one way or the other. Maybe she did still care...Suddenly, she heard a loud blast of a car horn behind her. She looked ahead and saw the path through the intersection was clear and the light green.

Three by Sofia Ascorbe

Pounds in my Pocket
 Heavy, like the feel of my thick wet hair as it whips around
 My neck; sweet and musky
 But his sweet not sweet-sweet
 Because there's a difference

Releases the smell of testosterone
 Oozing out of my skull the notes of sweat
 Faint deodorant and breath
 And Pantene Smooth 2 in 1
 Leaving my head is the scent of him
 Escaping into the steam, and into my nostrils
 How I inhale it like a drug
 Disappearing forever and how I wish

I could capture it in one of those bottles
 That sit almost empty in a corner of the shower
 In a foreign country, in a strange home
 With traces of mold wedged deep
 Between the etchings of the tiles
 Like my body in yours
 In the middle of a thousand blank Iberian faces
 Like a riot, like a riot oh!
 Fog, confetti, blasts of light-- a sense of urgency
 I could feel in the palm of your sweaty hands
 As if every second not spent
 Glued to each other in sweat and saliva
 Was a second missed
 And how I wish

Paris was for lovers—
 But your shirt,
 The one you found somewhere Underground
 A sign of relief and so
 Into your arms I wanted to go and be and stay
 But you wouldn't let me
 And how I wish

I had more Pounds in my Pocket
 To insert into the payphone slot
 To reach you, midair somewhere

Between your two ancestries
One forgotten
30,000 feet up in the air
I wonder if you wonder about what should be said when
We meet in a land of lovers who say yes
And their hearts were going like mad
And yes they said yes they will yes

And in the metro station
Looking at you looking at me through the invisible glass
A layer of metal and wide gap of electrical wires
Separating us (how trivial I thought)
The look in your eyes across the platform
I knew, I believed, I prayed I saw your soul through them
As two trains paused in front of each other
Headed opposite ways
I in one looking through at you in the other
And I wondered if God made those walls
Transparent just for that moment, just for this reason
For us, worn out and spent from putting these thoughts
Into incomprehensible and messy diction
As if being on Spanish soil, cut out of a common vein
We were forced to articulate
The Pounds we carried, weighing heavy inside
Your eyes as my train moved passed yours
I will never forget

How you never held my hands anymore
But you did on that bus ride
And I should have known you didn't love me

Under the brim of a large hot chocolate and a kiss goodbye
Both bought with your leftover
Pounds of Illusion that I gained
Not in my hips, but in your heart
For I knew where my home was
Inside your heart

And I felt like your girl for a moment suspended

In time you changed

But I had once found you

And you me, and we were made to build
Given a task more arduous than we anticipated
And no one ever said anything
Not a damned thing about anything

A mix of your lips and hot chocolate on mine
I smiled
The beginning of my end
A missed bus stop
And how you'll never know this part

Riding into the night
Tired thoughts, inexhaustible heart
Lights dimly emitted from
Oxford Street and our souls that night
Still lit at five in the morning
Because the moon exists for us both
Whether on English ground
Or Spanish air

Light rain dark cold desolate
One of the busiest streets in the world
Baring its lonely soul to
Me and it, so intimate
Us alone, just me and it
Love drunk
But glorious in that moment
I stayed as long as I possibly could
Walking and staring and feeling and
him, him, him, as if he shared this moment with me

The N13 to Finchley Road
Bathed in newborn sun as I walked
To the second floor to my room
That seemed now lacking

Back in the country that gave birth to us both
With chicken wraps and chap stick, like his mom
And all the clams he could eat for 9.99 on a Wednesday
He helped me build a brown bookshelf
With nails and screws and the Shins
And just as the shelves were flipped
In all the wrong positions, backboard compromised

Our foundation crumbled
 These tools we were given
 These tools we did not know how to use
 He helped me build a brown bookshelf
 And so why did he leave me to shoulder the rest
 Of the Pounds that constituted us
 You helped me build a brown bookshelf
 And so how could you?

No call on Christmas or New Years'
 Or when we lived in the same building
 So we spent more time together countries apart

And how I almost threw up when
 I loved, loved, loved him
 And so I told him that day
 Easter day 2012 and I loved him
 And he sighed 'I love you so much'
 Later on the phone with my mother on the other end
 Because I love love love him so
 Whatever I was unsure of
 Whatever it was that I wasn't afraid to leave behind
 Whatever the question even was
 Was answered in him and only him and so it was

The heart with the arrow through it I let you draw on me
 Lying on a multi-colored floor, not ours for the keeping
 People with their own likes and hates and passions
 Have all passed through
 And I loved you and so I let you,
 And so that's why I did

And then I did because mmm
 The electric zing of your fingers in my mouth
 My tongue rolling around them
 Reached into my soul
 Surrendering, giving in, drinking you up

And if he could just let me in
 The passenger seat
 But he kept his doors locked now
 So I held on to the bumper instead
 Flailing and hitting potholes and it hurt

And him, not even looking in the rearview
And I finally let go
Because it hurt so bad and so that's why I did
And if only time could cease to exist
And for everything else to come alive

And so now my Pockets
Once heavy with your Pounds,
Now heavy with new tools
And I will learn to use them

And I will build.

Marquette University 50-Word Short Story Contest
October 2013

To celebrate the National Day on Writing (October 20), Marquette University's Ott Memorial Writing Center sponsored our first-ever 50-word short story contest. We were delighted by the number of submissions that we received from the entire campus. All entries were read by the writing center staff—who admired the ability of so many writers to capture surprising turns and beautiful images in very few words. What follows are our three winners as well as a handful of honorable mentions. Thanks to everyone who entered; we look forward to reading more stories next October!

First place winner: Jack Lawinger; *Junior; Mechanical Engineering*

I grabbed my telescope and set it up in the backyard. It was the perfect evening to gaze up at the night sky. Admiring the familiar constellations, I noticed a small, pale, blue dot. "Dad, what is that?" I asked. "That, son, is Earth. It's where we all came from."

Second place winner: Nora Hochstetter; *Adjunct Assistant Professor, Office of International Education*

"And that concludes our historic tour of Wilbur Residence Hall." Randall rolled his eyes. "He doesn't actually expect us to believe this dorm is haunted, does he?" "Maybe," the boy next to him shrugged and floated through the wall toward the cafeteria.

Third place winner: Christopher Stolarski; *Senior Communication Specialist, Office of Marketing and Communication / College of Business Administration*

French Quarter sun shower.
 Casually clad and undeterred, he propped the silver tuba against the edge of the doorway. He'd wait out the squall there. Raindrops like baubles bounced on Chartres Street; steam rose. It would stop soon, and he'd continue on his way home. Home, the place where he and his horn-mates play.

Honorable Mentions

Valerie Beech; *Research & Instructional Services Dept., Raynor Memorial Libraries*

The rain drummed on leaves and dirt, and a bird or monkey shrieked. At 3 am, I am groggy: it was raining in my dream, yes, but also in the basement! A very grumpy building supervisor checks and closes a boiler valve, and I dream again of the rain forest.

Emily Bryant-Mundschau; *Tutorial Program Coordinator, Office of Student Educational Services*

I would rather be doing magic than math. Everyone knows homework is just a formality, busy work...something to validate the teacher's existence. I like magic. I like to entertain. So today when Professor Rutledge snapped my magic wand in two I was furious. Now I want to make her disappear.

Cathy Dante; *Residence Hall Minister*

Strings of blood flow from between my legs as I squat on the toilet. My eyes screw shut to stop the tears. I know tears mean grief, and grief means freedom, someday... I call to my beloved. "Hon, I'm not pregnant. Again."

Gregory R. Frederick, Ph.D.; *Associate Director, Educational Opportunity Program*

"Is he all right?" his sister asked.
She held her brother, trembling already, anticipating the answer.
"No," he whispered, and she fell to the floor, sobbing, screaming repeatedly, "No!"
Tomorrow will be three years later. The family will gather to send balloons skyward.
In our dreams you travel, smiling.
David.

Caroline Galluzzi; *Senior, History*

The doctor found me happily spinning in his chair when he entered the room. "Are you ready?" No, thank you. My whole perspective had already been spun around. "You know, most people prefer to lie down on that sofa, over there." I smiled as I staggered to the door.

Jared Golub; *First-Year MA student, Communications*

"But it wasn't love at first sight. People are supposed to marry the ones they love at first sight, and it wasn't you." She buried her face against my shirt. I could feel the tear drops bleed through. Love and acceptance overwhelmed me. I often tell my wife this story.

Mary Klauer; *Junior, Social Welfare and Justice / Writing Intensive English*

She anxiously shifted her eyes to her father's face. She saw her life—her Christmases, her nights breaking curfew, her lazy days at the kitchen table. She then turned forward and saw her new life—her forever—at the end of the aisle. And with that, they walked forward.

Ben McCormick; *Junior, Writing Intensive English and Secondary Education Major*

Cashiers behind bullet-proof glass still surrender to a gun. I'd done it nine times. Easy money. Last night was funding my first Keurig. I'm sorry you were an off-duty cop in line behind me. I'm sorry I fired. If you get this, know the new coffee doesn't taste any different.

Agust Ingvar Magnusson; *Doctoral Candidate, Department of Philosophy*

"What happened?" I said, looking at the TV. A building was on fire.
My father told me to go to my room.
When the second plane hit I saw my father put his arm around my mother, holding her close. That is the only time I remember seeing them touch.

Krystal Morales; *First-Year Student, Digital Media*

"Dearest Ellie,
I've found your letter. Why hide it in my old sketchbook? Why not give it to me? It's been eight years since we met, and three since your death. I've always loved you too, Ellie. I miss you. I'm sorry I never told you. I'm sorry I'm late."

Tatyana Pashibin; *Sophomore, Exercise Physiology*

I put my headphones in. I just need to shut out the world for a minute. I felt my face sink into a scowl.
The music, the lyrics, the song- they stirred something inside of me. I looked up from the ground and saw colors flood the world again.

Sheila Schindler-Ivens; *Associate Professor, Dept of Physical Therapy.*

Arrived safe in Somerset.
Just had a beer and a bowl of gumbo at a Cajun karaoke bar with Hawaiian tablecloths. I like beer, but let's be honest, I was afraid to order wine. Plus, the beer was called Cougar

Bait, and I thought, “Sure, I like animals.”
Miss you.

Brian Sigmon; *Adjunct Professor, Theology Department*

“Where do you go now?” Jill asked.
Big Sid ignored her question. “God I’m tired,” he said, heading off to sleep. “If they come lookin’, tell ‘em I said something about Mexico.”
Jill grabbed a glass. “Have some milk first.”
...
Jill crept into the bedroom and quietly put Sid’s gun to his temple. Her eyes were dry when she pulled the trigger.

Ben Teich; *First-Year Student, Mechanical Engineering*

How does one escape the mind? There is no running or hiding, just sitting and waiting, waiting for the chance to be completely awake. Confronting the demons of the past and burying them even deeper is a temporary fix; true freedom comes from facing raw fear and welcoming its presence.