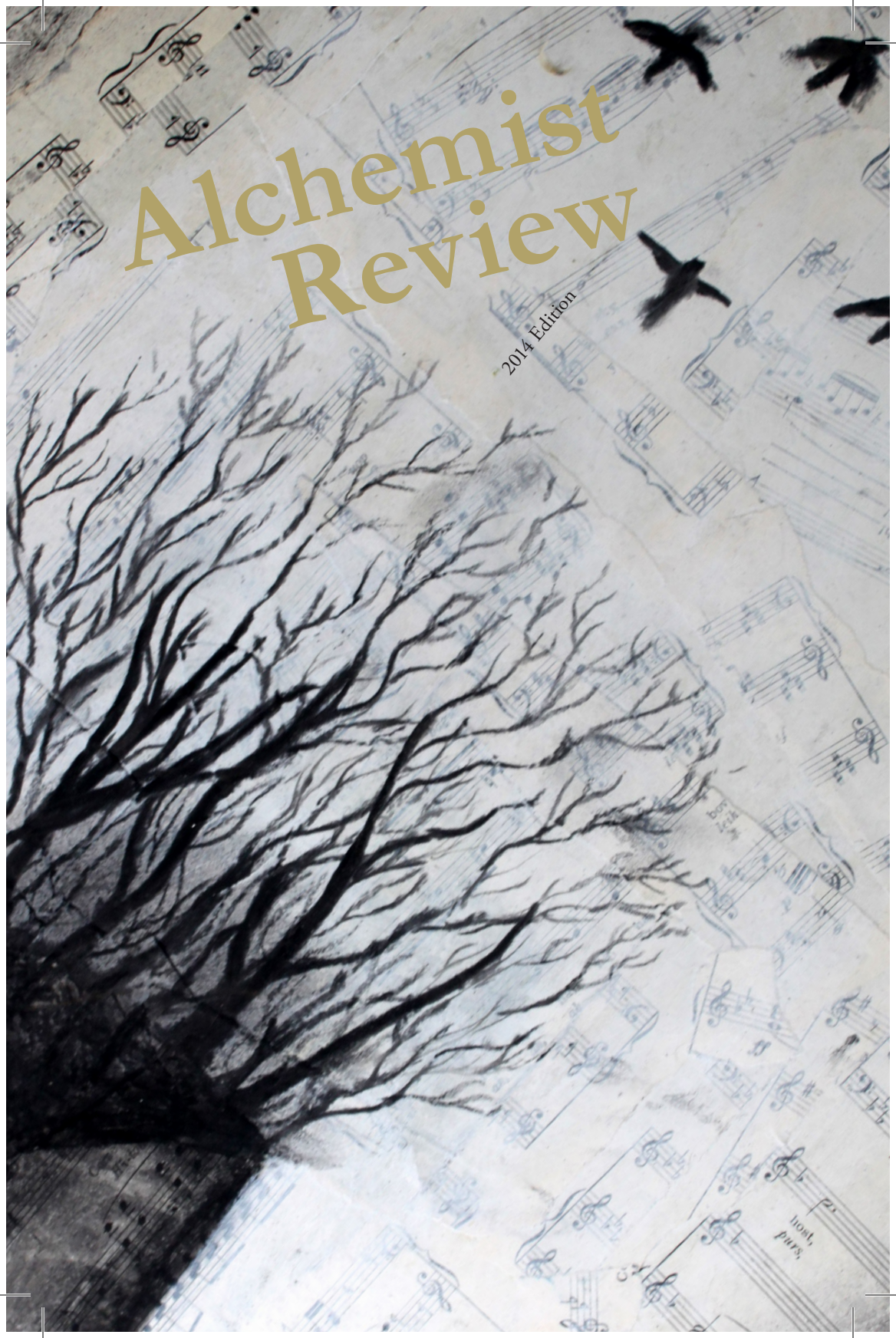


Alchemist Review

2014 Edition



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The Alchemist Review is a 30-year literary tradition at the University of Illinois Springfield and is an online and print-based journal of literary fiction, poetry, and visual arts dedicated to publishing dynamic works by emerging writers and artists in the University of Illinois Springfield community. With an appreciation for print culture, as well as digital technologies and mixed media, the Alchemist Review provides a forum for collaboration and exploration within the ever-evolving world of literary publishing. The journal is edited by undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Illinois Springfield. All UIS students are invited to share their creative writing projects.

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To The Reader: Editor's Note

Special thanks to Prof. Brytton Bjorngaard and her class Digital Media: Print for creating the design of the print issue. Thanks also to Dr. Meagan Cass, who made the collaboration between the Alchemist Review and Dr. Bjorngaard's class possible. Thanks to all of the amazing writers who were kind enough to share their work and who also made this issue possible. Thanks to the Alchemist Review staff, who helped select all of the great stories to be included in this year's issue. And lastly, thanks to the readers for their continued support.

Best,
Erich O'Connor
Managing Editor
Alchemist Review



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Summer Drought

P. Miller

So little rain
was predicted,
so little rain fell,
that suburban
lawns turned
almond, toasted,
in stoic heat that
stayed for days
in this summer, already
roasted.
Flowers drooped for lack
of drops.
Watering cans –pour, pour,
pour—
wept over petunias parched
in pots.
By dusk the cicadas sang near
the door.
Butterscotch tufts had been
scorched prickly,
except for one scrawny weed, stand-
ing tall
near long deep cracks of open earth,
where I listened for the devil's call.

Pudgy,
dusty, honey
colored pods
gathered on the mint
leaves,
pulsed their slithering
bodies,
sucked life from a flower-
ing tease.
Humidity gathered from a
hurricane
hung heavy, wetting the
walk
and filling the horizon
daylong,
until the atmosphere
oozed, then balked.
Drips turned to drops. The
heavens broke,
overflowing drains and
downspouts,
peppering the streets and
city folk,
punishing the plains
throughout.
And the pounding rhythm
subverted
air conditioners, ruling
thoughts and

sense,
until sleepless, in the wee hours,
I sat straight in bed to a silence.
One deep breath gave notice,
marking the start of the
second day,
with sound forgotten over
weeks of waiting,
with lungs, needing to
exhale.
Sputters turned to
swooshing waves,
rushing against the
glass pane,
filling, soothing,
lulling,
for it was only
the rain,
the rain,
the rain.



Solutions to Crossing Jordon: Getting to the Other Side

JC. Brown

Solution #1

Dive right in; even though you cannot swim, jump. Do not care about getting your hair wet or taking your shoes off, they are worn from walking anyway. Make a big splash as you descend toward the bottom. Feel what it is like to be weightless. Let the river carry you to the other side.

Solution #2

Take a nap at the place you called home before the fire. When you wake, walk to the nearest tree that you can't wrap your arms all the way around. Start by taking off the smaller branches and work your way to the larger ones. Chop the tree down and carve out the center, make sure there is enough room for you to lie down. Take the laces from your shoes your mother got you and wrap the larger branches forming a paddle. Gather leaves from the tree and line the bottom of the truck. Drag it to the edge of the river, call it a boat. Push your boat into the water, get inside and stretch out. Try to drift as much as you can, it will be hard to paddle. When you get to the other side do not leave the boat, take it with you. Show and tell friends and family this is how you made it, then curse them leaving you.

Solution #3

Place both feet at the edge of the river; dip your toes in. Take 3 paces back and make a mark in the ground. Take 16 more paces back from your mark. Stop. Take a deep breath and take off running as fast as you can. Charge at the river. When you get to your mark, jump.

Solution #4

Pray. Because grandma taught you that in times of trouble and peace, prayer is the solution. Call out God's name like when you woke up in flames. He saved you then, He'll save you now. He got you out. He'll get you over. For over is where love is and the people who left you to burn.

Solution #5

Sit near the river. Take your shoes and socks off. Mix dirt with water making mud. Gather rocks and pebbles, add them to your mud. By hand pack the mixture into your socks until they are heavy. Let them set over night while you ask for forgiveness, because maybe you can't be brave. Maybe you can't live on this side, alone. Early the next morning take off all your clothes. Tie your socks around your ankles. As the sun begins to rise sit on the edge of the river with your legs resting in the water. Close your eyes and leap, don't fight it.

Solution #6

Scream and do not stop. Scream until someone hears you, until God hears you. Scream until you lose your damn mind. Drive yourself insane, maybe you won't feel so much. Run naked, throwing dirt and splashing water from the river you can't cross. Cry your eyes blood shot red. Repeat aloud Bible scriptures that your grandmother taught you as a child when your mother didn't care to teach anything. Blame others for leaving you on this side and hope they will come get you

Solution #7

Breathe; lay your body on the warm riverbank. Reminisce on how things used to be, like you've wasted so much time doing before. When there were houses, children giggle in the distance, lingering hugs and family reunions, tears from hunger, bedbugs and missed days of school to let bursas heal. Stand up, take seeds from fruit trees, plant them. Take branches, clay and stone and build you a home. Take the shoes your mother got you off. Put aside the hope and dreams of being someplace you're not meant to be, with people who left you; who will leave you again. And make life and living possible where you are.

Fly Away

Felicia Olin



The Old Windmill

P. Miller

U^mber Rust sounds,
flutter-klunk of olden days,
hypnotic rhythm.

Gathered on a breeze,
carousel cadence dispels
swirling metal shadows.

Clouds billow,
churned by power unseen,
old faithful stands.



The Haunting of Hayward

Jason Fischer

The following correspondence was found on February 15, 1965 under a bed in a small farmhouse near Hayward, Wisconsin. It was contained in a black box with the initials B.S. on it, presumably from the woman who wrote some of the letters, Beatrice Schiebe. It describes a haunting encounter with a noisy spirit who wouldn't rest until its message was delivered. Beatrice's husband John, briefly mentioned in the letters, would later comment in a local newspaper that the events described below eventually "drove [his wife] to madness." Beatrice was institutionalized less than three months after the final letter and died suddenly less than a year later.

We invite you to read the letters below and decide for yourself. Madness or eerie premonition?



March 1, 1950

Steve,

Greetings again, little brother! I hope this will be the last time that I need to write to you. We received a letter from the phone company stating that they will be installing a line out to the house next month. It will be great to hear your voice! It can get pretty lonely out here on the farm, especially now that planting season is about to kick up again and John will be spending most of his days in the fields tilling and seeding. At least the radio works!

We are fine otherwise. Things don't change much around here, so I'm afraid this letter will be short. How are you? Have you decided on which college you are going to attend next year, or are you still considering joining the Army? I know you want to follow in dad's footsteps, but I hope you decide to go right to school. Either way, I'll support you!

I had something a little crazy happen last night. John and I had just gone to bed when I swear that I heard someone knocking at the window. We don't have any trees that close to the house (you should really visit sometime so I can show you!) and the balcony isn't close enough to the window where someone on it could reach to knock. I got out of bed to see if anyone was outside, maybe throwing a rock against the window, but I didn't see anyone. I know living in the city we wouldn't throw a rock against the window, but out here if one of our neighbors really needed help they might do that to wake us up, after all they can't call anyone...not yet!

Don't wait for me to call, write back and tell me how everyone is doing!

Love,

Beatrice



May 8, 1950

Steve,

Yet another letter! The phone company has still not run the line out to our house yet. I saw the phone company truck parked at the end of our road the other day, so it must be getting close. Not that I mind writing to you, but it would SO nice to hear your voice. Hopefully we can get together before Christmas this year. The planting season is over but John is still out in the fields a lot tending the crops, leaving little old me to roam the house until his return.

That strange noise I wrote about seems to have fallen into a pattern, every night now I hear it! I still have not caught the culprit and John doesn't seem to hear it. I know this sounds crazy but the other night I swear I saw something outside the window moving as I got up. I woke up John and he looked around the house but didn't see anything. He thinks that I'm just too cooped up and should spend some time in the fields with him. Maybe he's right.

We had the neighbors over for supper the other night and I asked if anything strange was happening to them. Mabel Finkelstein said nothing out here in the boondocks, but she said when she was younger there was a phantom cat who would visit her each night before bed. Isn't that crazy?

Thanks for that last letter and an update on mom and dad, but you still haven't answered my question about what you're going to do after high school is done! Just a few weeks left to make a decision, let me know!

Love,

Beatrice

June 11, 1950

Steve,

Still no phone line, otherwise I would have called to tell you how proud I am that you have decided to join the Army! I can't believe my little brother has grown up so fast. It sounds like boot camp will be exciting and I hope you are able to be a tank gunner like dad was. I'm also glad that you are thinking ahead of how the G.I. Bill will help you pay for college when your service is done. That's how dad paid for our house when he got back and I'm sure it will work for you as well.

Well the nighttime noises are getting stranger and stranger. It's every night now. Thank goodness it ends before midnight otherwise I'd never get any sleep! I've caught a few glimpses of whatever is making the noise. I still don't know how it is getting up there. John suggested I call the police to see if they are aware of anything else like this happening in the area, but I don't know. I mean, what am I going to say? How would I convince them that I'm not crazy!

Off to write a letter to the phone company asking where my phone is!

Love,

Beatrice

July 13, 1950

Steve,

Well doesn't it figure! I finally get my phone line and you're off at basic training. It was fun talking to mom and dad for a few minutes, but I really wanted to talk to you. You always tell me what's really going on. Mom and dad still feel the need to hide all of their troubles from me. I hope your training is going well and that the mess hall has the food you like. You were always such a picky eater!

I'm just going to dive into my ghost encounter now. I've decided to stop beating around the bush and call it what it is. A ghost. What else could it be? It's not a person or an animal. There would be some kind of evidence if it was and John would probably be able to hear or see it as well. It can't be an animal, it wouldn't be that consistent. So a ghost it is. Somehow giving it a name makes it less frightening. Not that it was ever that scary in the first place, more annoying than anything. I just want to get some sleep!

John is still busy in the fields, but isn't he always? There has not been much rain this summer so he's constantly adjusting the sprinklers to make sure they cover the most ground. He keeps fretting about the water bills, but I remind him at least we'll have a harvest to pay those bills with. Hope the weather is nice where you are. Take care!

Love,

Beatrice

August 24, 1950

Beatrice,

Sorry for not replying sooner, but boot camp has kept me too exhausted to do much letter writing. Basic is done and I've been

assigned to a tank division so I'm off to Georgia for tank training next week. I have a week's leave and I decided to hang around the barracks instead of going home. Training was tough but I made some really good friends here. I got your number from mom and dad, but decided to write you a letter just for old times sake . I'll give you a call in a day or two.

A ghost huh? You've never struck me as the type of person to go for that kind of thing. And I really can't believe it myself. Are you sure it's not just a bird trying to get in? Have John load up one of his guns and get rid of the damn thing. I ran it by a couple of the guys here during mess. I heard some crazy stories, mostly from the South. One fella claims to have seen dead relatives in front of them as clear as day. That got a pretty good laugh from the other guys.

I've got some other stories for you as well, but I'll tell them to you over the phone. TALK to you soon!

Love,
Steve





September 26, 1950

Beatrice,

I must have done pretty good in tank school, because I'm writing this letter in the belly of a ship heading to Korea. They didn't send everyone, just a few of us. It doesn't sound like I'll be going to front right away, but hanging out in the back finishing up my training. So don't worry!

Any more news on your ghost? When we spoke on the phone you said that you're now seeing what looks like a hand

rapping twice on the window before it disappears. Are you still seeing just the hand, or the arm now also? Sorry for making fun in my last letter about your ghost. That wasn't too nice of me and you sounded so serious about it on the phone.

Time for mess! I'll write to you soon.

Love,

Steve



October 29, 1950

Steve,

I'm very proud that you're serving our country overseas. I spoke with mom and dad on the phone and they were very proud of you also. I still worry about you, but I guess that goes with the territory of being a big sister. Watch yourself! I know you have a big tank surrounding you, but you can still get hurt.

The ghost is starting to give up some of his, yes his, secrets. I can definitely see the shape of a man, who is wearing green clothes, now outside the window. He knocks twice each night at 11:30 PM, then drifts away. John still hasn't seen or heard anything, but he doesn't think I'm crazy anymore. I can't even go to bed each night until after the knocking is done. I'm not as scared as I was when it first started, now I'm trying to decide if the ghost is trying to send me a message or something. It seems that he reveals more of himself each night, very gradually. Maybe in another month or so I'll have my answer!

Harvest time is finally done, so John is around the house more, which is nice. We had the neighbors over again for supper last night and they were very excited to hear about your deployment. Mabel's husband drove a tank in Europe like dad and he said you should be fine. That made me feel better. Take care of yourself.

Love,

Beatrice



December 10, 1950

Steve,

You're not going to believe this. I've written in my last two letters that the man has gradually revealed himself to me and last night I saw a glimpse of his face. It looks just like you! He was gone before I could be sure, but I cried out, "Steve!" and woke up John. I couldn't sleep the rest of the night. John was trying to calm me down. I'm calm enough to write this letter, but otherwise I'm a basket case. I called mom and dad as soon as I was sure they were up in the morning.

I hadn't told them about the ghost at all until now, but I laid it all out on mom. I don't think she believed me, but I'm so worried about you know. Please write immediately, or if there is some way you can call, please do so. I'm very worried about you Steve. Please let me know that you're okay.

Love you so much,

Beatrice

GENERAL HEADQUARTERS UNITED NATIONS COMMAND
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

9 December 1950

Dear Mrs. Weigand:

The untimely and tragic loss of your son, Steven, who met his death on the field of battle in Korea, has shocked all of us deeply. Some measure of comfort may be derived from the knowledge that he died in the service of his country and in the defense of a peace-loving people.

I am confident that his devotion to duty, at the cost of all he held dear, will hasten the day when ruthless aggressions shall disappear from the face of the earth and free men everywhere will live together in peace and harmony.

Our faith enables us to withstand the shock and grief of death. It is my earnest prayer that Almighty God will sustain and strengthen you in this hour of trial. While the loss of your beloved one will be a hardship, we know that no life is really lost for those who have faith in God.

Sincerely yours,
Douglas MacArthur

This story has been previously published in Morpheus Tales.



For P.L. Travers (not the Disney version)

Nancy Pistorius

They say that you were
rather rude
cranky and cantankerous
they say you could be heartless

much like her
with her parrot-head umbrella
self-satisfied smile
and snapping blue eyes

but one child
sitting alone in the school lunchroom
trying to swallow cold peaches
past the lump in her throat

watching the clock
spin seconds, minutes, hours
into motes of dust

past the swirling mist of oxygen tents
past big hands grabbing, shoving, hitting
past angry words twisting like cornstalks
in bitter Illinois winds

one child grabbed hold
held tightly to the handle of that umbrella
sailed out into the starry London night

was saved



The Violin and the Poppies

Felicia Olin



Shadow of a Memory

Austin Enburg

I was in a new place. A college. Springfield, Illinois. It was a nice place. Open. Green. Cozy. The only problem was that I'd only talked to my two roommates who truly didn't have much in common with me. One liked computer games – I like books; one liked basketball – I like disc golf.

Sure, I went out to explore a bit. I saw some guys kicking around a blue and yellow soccer ball. I went over and asked to join. I said that I had to get out of my room. They took a moment to respond, the four of them. After a brief silence, one guy wearing a red shirt and a healthy beer gut said, "You just get here today?" as he kicked the ball in my direction.

"Yeah," I responded. I didn't have much else to say. I'm not the soccer type, you see. These guys were. They were doing these fancy little quick steps around the ball to confuse the opponent, though there was none.

Every now and then the ball would roll to my feet and I would return the gesture. But I mean, shit, I could kick the damn ball, I just couldn't do all the fancy foot work, nor was I very accurate in sending it back. It would roll sheepishly to one of them and they would run up, kick it skyward, dribble it a couple times, and then kick it to the next person. They spoke to each other. What they said really didn't interest me. I could tell they had known each other from the preceding year, so most of what they said was relative of an inside joke.

It was getting dark. One by one the guys went into their townhouses until the owner of the ball was solo. There was an awkwardness lingering in the air. I didn't know his name and he didn't know mine. I could tell he wanted to leave without it being insulting. He wanted

the company of his friends, the familiarity of crude jokes—not some random guy with a pony tail that couldn't dribble a soccer ball.

To his luck, the darkness swelled. He picked up the ball with his hands, terminating the game and said, rubbing the back of his neck, "I think I'm going in, too." He turned around, opened the door, and disappeared into a room full of laughter and hollow voices.

I was alone, standing in the grass, under a dim street lamp. This was how my first night began. I turned around and headed back to the townhouse. I opened the door to my room and stood motionless for a moment. I felt lost. I had no idea what to do. It was still early, maybe 7:30, but the sun


was down. How could I go out and meet people when I was alone with the darkness swallowing my identity? I did anyways.

I rode my bike to the soccer stadium. What was it with soccer? I didn't have my ID. The girl at the gate said, "That will be eight dollars."

"I'll just watch from the fence," I said.

Standing behind the fence, I watched as the crowd applauded the dexterity of the players. I applauded in my head, but not for them. I applauded my shadow, my glowing awkwardness, my lost sense of who I knew I used to be at home.

I grew tired of standing and jumped



couldn't seem to give myself
shape. I looked for lights. Big,
bright, cooing lights. This is
where I would find people—peo-
ple who could see me. To my
left was a big dome of white air.

It was a Wal-Mart. Different
than the Wal-Mart in my town, but
a Wal-Mart all the same. I was curi-
ous to see what these people would
be doing at a Wal-Mart in Spring-
field. For some reason, I thought a

new town meant a new function of
living. I wasn't sure why, because
when I got there, all the people
were doing people stuff: getting in
and out of cars; arguing over who
gets to push the cart; talking about
what they did at their aunt's pic-
nic last week. All the same bull-
shit. It was kind of disappointing.

When I rode back to cam-
pus, I entered through an exit.
The soccer game was over, so
more clusters of giggling peo-
ple walked around. I slipped past
without them noticing. I felt like

I was becoming a professional.
I rode along the bike path
watching cars zip past me. I

Back inside. Roommates doing roommate things: cooking noodles, watching sports (not soccer, thank God), absorbing the air. I decided to do my thing and read. I was dipping into a Bukowski novel when the sports guy walked past and said, "You're a reader, huh?" "I s'pose."

He went to his room. I kept reading. He was a good guy. Hell, both of them were good guys. They were just stuck in a room with two other unfamiliar shadows like me.

I was turning the page when I heard my cell phone buzz in the other room. I answered to my dad—"Hello?"

“Hey! How’s everything going down there?” He said with tried enthusiasm.

“Hey. It’s going fine. Just been reading a bit.”

“Oh. There’s nothing going on tonight?”

“Nah, not really.” I didn’t want him to know about my shadow.

“How’s everything back at home?”

“It’s good. I don’t know if you’ve talked to your mother yet, but Grandpa’s in the hospital again. She’s pretty upset,” he said into the receiver.

My eyes narrowed, “Oh—what happened?” I was earnestly concerned.

“He’s having problems with his blood pressure. He should be okay, but your mom is worried that this will become a regular occurrence.”

“Oh.” What could I say? Here I was feeling bad for myself while my grandpa, my mom’s dad, laid in a cold hospital room.

"Yeah," he hesitated. "Hey, listen—" his voice quavered, squeaked, broke into an awkward jumble of sincerity, "—if your grandpa was still alive, he would be very proud to see where you are today. Remember that."

"I will," I said, "I wish I would have gotten the chance to meet him."

"Yes, Son," He paused and took a breath, "I know." His voice dropped again only this time I could hear the tears in his voice, "I wish—I wish you could have, too."

There was a moment of silence. I had never heard my father cry. Sure, I'd seen it at funerals, but hearing him cry was different. It was powerful, resonating, surreal. We said a few more words and said

our good-byes. It felt nice to hear from home. It really did. I felt better knowing that my shadow impressed someone. Even if it was someone who could only exist in a shadow of a memory. I slept easy that night. I slept and so did my shadow.



Acts of Kindness

Shawna Mayer

In Grandma's kitchen two
round pans buttered and floured await.
She lets me stir
pretending not to notice
when I dip a finger in.

Here she tells of her only sister, one of the
first telephone operators in Burkburnett, Texas,
the Jordan exchange named for her.

In her portrait, at 25, my Great Aunt was
statuesque, raven-haired with
a gaze of concentrated intensity
As if she knew—
but, I read too much I'm sure.

"She loved dancing with Robert – her beau.
How he cried at her coffin.
I wonder if he ever married—

We called it the consumption then,
and they wouldn't let her stay at home."

As they bake, we sit.
I licking the bowl,
she with her tea.
The fragrant garden flowers between us
and embroidered napkins—
such tiny perfect stitches,
this too she will teach me.



“We visited her at the hospital
and brought our Guinea pigs.
They darted around her bed squealing and
she kissed the warm bare spots behind their ears.”

She goes quiet, tempted, I suppose,
to leave the story there, forever unfinished,
But when the cake is cool and frosted,
and the first rich slice sits between us,
she confesses the small tragedy
before the wretched heartbreak.

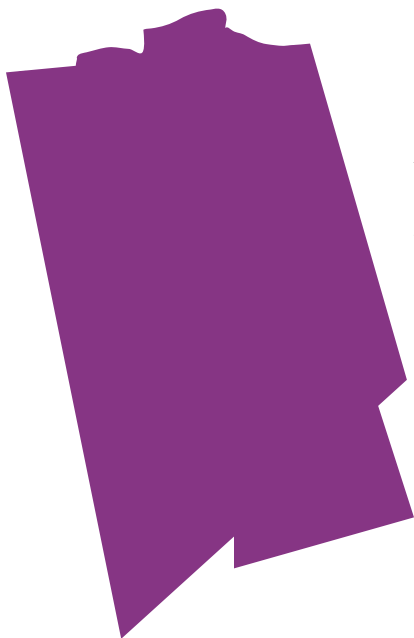
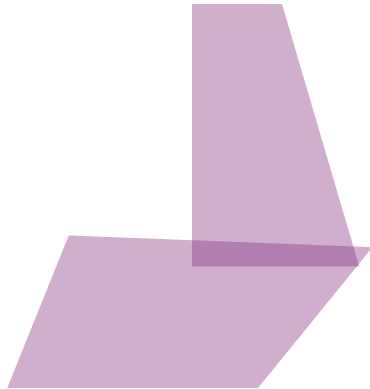
“Right after the visit,
the Guinea pigs all got sick and died.
But, of course, we never told her.”



Great Grandpa Jesse

Austin Enberg

There was a fire. The bean field raged
Like an angry inferno, fangs
Flaming, tearing into the great
Dawn. Jesse fled straight down the throat
Of the beast. He fell to the Earth,
Swallowed whole. I still struggle to
Comprehend the consummation
Of bravery's cruelty. But
I'm certain Great Grandpa Jesse
Decided on the raw conversion.
His lungs filled with soot, his heartbeat
Slowed, and his brain failed to connect.



His body felt no more, his clothes
Melted to his skin, and his blood boiled.
My life began changing as his
Cocoon turned to dust and his soul
Released into that great dawn, free
With the smoke. He became the fire.
He became the Earth. He became
The Bridge to that which cannot be.



Perch

Felicia Olin



XXX

Grief Relief

Shawna Mayer

I was sleepwalking
my way through Wal-
greens, letting the bottle
of whiskey in my hand hit my
calf each step. It was the cheap-
est bottle they had at that proof.
I figured it'd taste like rubbing alco-
hol, but at least I'd sleep if I swallowed
enough of it.

After watching me stand in front of the
painkiller display for nearly five minutes,
the clerk finally called, "Honey, can I help
you find something?" She and I were the
only ones in the store, not surprising,
since it was just after 2 a.m.

"Well," I said, walking over to
the counter and presenting her
with the bottle of whiskey,
"They don't make the kind
of painkillers I need.
This is as good as it
gets."

Her name
tag read
"Marie,"
and she

leaned toward me, her elbows close to-
gether on the counter and her hands
clasped at her chin and asked, "Bad break
up?"

I sighed and shook my head, "Death in the
family."

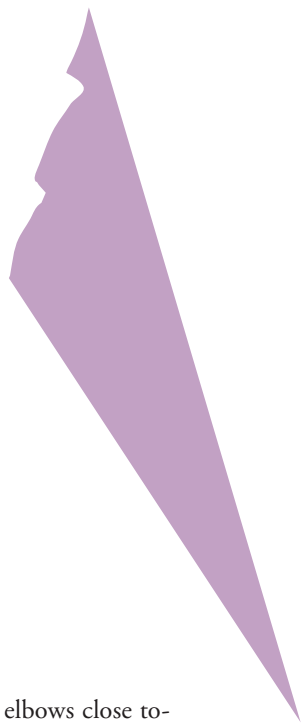
She winced, "Oh sweetheart, I'm sorry."

I nodded.

"You wanna talk about it?" Her eyes widened.

I shook my head. It had been six weeks ago. She was at
rest, but I hadn't slept through the night since I got the phone call.

"Insomnia," I finally said.



"The doctor gave me enough Ambien for a month, but I ran out of that. Now..." I shrugged. Now, I just don't sleep.

"We've got something," she said confidently.

"I don't need any more sleeping pills," I said.

"Not sedatives." Marie stepped out from behind the counter and motioned for me to follow her. "We haven't even unpacked this stuff yet, it's so brand new."

She held up a finger as she stepped through the door marked "Employees Only."

A few minutes later she slipped back out carrying a green jar. "Here," she whispered, reverently handing it to me.

I read the label, Grief Ease Soothing Rub: Maximum strength. I read the directions on the back: Apply to chest no more than 3 times a day to relieve the discomfort associated with the grieving process.

"Oh." I chuckled softly, "I get it now. This is a dream." I braced myself to be whisked away, once again jolting awake in my dark bedroom.

Marie reached over and pinched me. It hurt.

She led me over to the blood pressure screening machine and urged me to sit.

"Here, let's call this a free sample. Unbutton your shirt a little."

It was her flannel shirt that I was wearing, a blue plaid. It hung to my thighs, and I had the sleeves rolled. When I first got it, it had smelled like her—cigarettes, sweat, and Jergens lotion. It was lying wadded up and collecting dust on her bedroom floor, but when I saw it, I knew I had to have it because it had been the shirt she was wearing the last time I saw her.

The clerk unscrewed the top of the jar and held it up to my nose. I smelled eucalyptus and camphor but there was another note beneath that, something spicy and medicinal I didn't recognize. She dipped two fingers inside as I opened my shirt to the bra line.

Her fingers were warm and she spread the salve from cleavage to collarbone. My eyes wandered, landing on the frozen food display and

seeing the ice cream varieties they carried.

A friend had once told me that eating an entire gallon of ice cream produced the same effects as taking a Quaalude. I considered it. Couldn't hurt. At least I won't be hungover tomorrow.

Then as I began to think about a polite way to extricate myself, there came a feeling so delicate that I thought I was imagining it, but after another minute I was certain: the grief was beginning to recede.

"It makes sense," Marie said as if talking to herself. "If science can find a way to stop headaches, why not heartache?"

I
breathed in
deeply, and for the first time
in a month and a half I thought
of her, not with guilt and re-
gret, but laughing, biting into
a chocolate cupcake, vanilla
frosting smeared across her lips.
“Better?” Marie leaned back
and smiled.

More memories flooded
through me—the two of us
jumping on the trampoline
singing Bon Jovi at the top of
our lungs; hunting for Easter
eggs in the tall grass, the pup-
pies running ahead and sniffing
them out before we could.

“Yes,” I gasped. “I’ll take it.”

She screwed the lid back on
and held it out. “It’s on me.”

“But I want more,” I insist-
ed. “I’ll take the whole case,
whatever it costs.”

“Don’t be greedy,” Marie
said gently. “Leave some for
others.”

I clutched the jar to my
chest and stood.

“Thank you,” I said, blink-
ing back tears.

“When you work the over-
night shift in a drugstore you
see a lot of sick people, but
you’re the most
soul

sick person I've seen in a long time.
No offense, honey. I'm glad I could
help. Now go get some sleep."

When I got home, I opened the jar and
breathed in that rich aroma again. Then I
rubbed a thick dollop right over my heart.

I brushed my teeth, got into bed, and waited.

In those minutes before sleep finally washed over me,
another memory came: the two of us on the back porch,
the sun setting purple and red between the trees. A citronella
candle burned between us. Our shoulders and backs were freck-
led and pink from a day spent jumping in and out of the pool. We
were eating watermelon and spitting the seeds at one another. A seed
landed on my arm and stuck.

"Ewww," I picked off the seed, flicked it back, and it landed on her nose.
At that, her giggles dissolved into full-fledged hysterics.

We collapsed then, onto our sticky watermelon slices, our laughter echoing
out into the warm night, laughing until we cried.



To Save Yourself or Others

Bradee Campbell Final

Solution Number One:

You could leave your brother with your mother. He is almost seven now, he's strong enough to with stand her slurred cruel words and fast enough to escape her whipping at him with the wooden broom handle. Her referring to him as a worthless piece of shit won't phase him. He's heard it all of his life, he doesn't know any different. He doesn't remember the days when dad was still home protecting us from her. You could just off yourself with the handgun you bought eight months ago. You could leave your brother the three miles to the homeless shelter on West Harrison Street. You can take with as much money as you can find in moms shoe box in her bedroom closet and all the clothes you can carry in your backpack. You're eighteen now so you can adopt him and save him from ever being taken back to her home. You can get a part time job at the McDonalds on North Clark and save up money to get a place of your own soon. Maybe being away from her will make the barrel of a gun less appealing.

Solution

Number Two:

You could take your little

Solution Number Three:

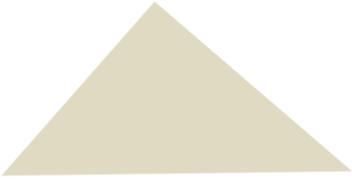
Kill yourself and your little brother. Use all of your money to buy a hose and use the rest of it to fill up your mom's '96 two door Camry. Tell your little brother mom needs to be alone for a while so you're sleeping in the car tonight. This wouldn't be the first time for this to happen so he won't think anything of it. God will surely forgive you if you're saving you and your brother from this earthly hell.

Solution Number Four:

Kill her. Take your hand gun and bust it over her head to wake her up from her drunken stupor. Then when she's looking you in the eyes with confusion blow her head off. Wipe the gun with a kitchen towel and put it in her hand and make it look like she killed herself. The welfare checks and child support she already had coming in will keep you and your little brother safe from being homeless and hungry. Then with her gone and your little brother safe you'll finally be happy. You two can live together in the apartment the same as before because you won't take handouts from the man who left you if he even offered.

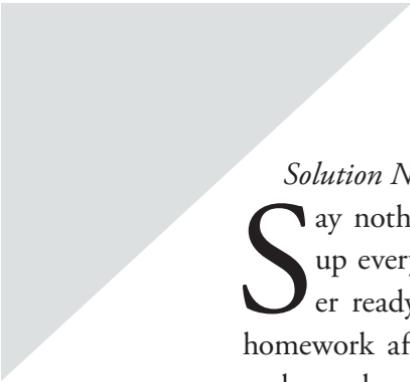
Solution Number Five:

Late one night go up to mom on the couch where she passed out hours ago. Your little brother is safe asleep in your bed with the door closed. Put the black switch blade your father left behind on your mother's neck and slightly press it against her skin. Yank her by her hair to wake her up and keep her head controlled. When she realizes what is going on threaten her life. Tell her if she doesn't sober up, get a job and put the damn broom handle away you are going to kill her in her sleep before she has the chance to hurt you or your brother ever again. You and your brother won't just leave her like everyone else in her life you will put an end to it.



Solution Number Six:

Buy pills from the drug dealer Paul you know from school. Anything he can get you a large amount of. Pour all of the pills into one of mom's plastic vodka bottles. Put it on the living room table within reach of the couch where she lays one day before school. She'll have finished the bottle by dinner and she will be finished as well. Make your little brother wait at school so you can go home and call the cops to come get her and he won't have to see any of it.



Solution Number Seven:

Say nothing and do nothing differently. Get up every morning and get your little brother ready for school and help him with his homework after. Make mom her ramen noodles and pour her another glass of her poison. Continue to cut your wrist in private late at night with the black switch blade your dad left behind the day he left for good. It's the only way he can help you now. Your only feeling of power now from the man who became powerless and left.



You, I, We

Roberto Sabas

They're like an algorithm for
each other;
Heat-seeking missiles of mind
Ferretting out the randomness in the
press of bodies in
the city looking for each other
in an unacknowledged fervor
of live-wire love.

Seething numeric strings of possibilities
find their purpose when
the proximity of like minds
attend to the song,
the song of
live-wire love.

Electricity and insouciance,
the twin yin-yang of
compatible incompatibilities
(you can't make up this stuff)
guide our seek, seek, seek
and ye shall...
(It's all in the mind,
my ever-lovin'
soul-partnerin'
second half of the
complex equation.)

When at last they met up
on the bridge at 62nd,
snow caked their soles
but live-wire fire
like cosmic wind,
a ramayananana
a-singin' in hi-c
all taut in the...
(So see.

We.

I.

You.

Let's
con time, let it stop.
Now is our
time to
trip the...
Well c'mon
we haven't got
eternity, just
the here, just the now.
An assemblage
of chemical logic
pressin' all
the...
stop.
see.
You, I, We.)



The Fawn

Felicia Olin



A Ghost in the Room

Lori Beckham

Peter started coming out of the wall six months ago. He opens an invisible door and seeps into the kitchen like fog through a screen. He opens the refrigerator's freezer door (but not really), peers in and grabs food she no longer carries, and he puts it in the oven. He turns the timer. Only he will hear it.

Julie watches him. Pressing the phone hard against her ear, she tells her best friend, Rachel, about her dream, describing it as it unfolds in front of her, in the form of Peter.

He folds his pale arms and slumps against the fridge, his dark eyes staring into the black glass on the oven door, seeing an orange glow of life when there is none.

It doesn't surprise her anymore. She has given up trying to understand why her dead brother returns to the kitchen—at any time of the day and night—to fix himself a ghost snack. A ghost means there is unfinished business, right? But he's just hungry. He has never made an attempt to talk to Julie; he doesn't look at her. He's just going about his business, like usual, like he has a body and a stomach and taste.

"Maybe that's his sin; he's a glutton," Rachel tells her over the line. "Maybe you thought he wasted his life living with you, spending all his time in his room and only coming out to eat or go to the bathroom? Maybe that's why he's on your mind."

Peter also makes trips down the hall and into bathroom a few times a day. Thank God this tiny house has two bathrooms.

"Actually, his sin would be sloth," Julie says.

"Right, sloth. He didn't do anything with his life. Maybe you're feeling guilty for not pushing him enough?"

If only she knew. He walks over to the oven and opens its invisible latch, peering into it. "I pushed him," she says. "I really did." Rachel's silence was that of awkwardness, and guilt of her own. Julie sighs with a soft hum; here it comes.

"Julie, he has only been gone for eight months. He lived with you, for what, two years? The dreams will stop." She pauses in thought. "Just remember the real Peter is in Heaven; you know that, right?"

God bless her, she's trying, but Julie can't help but say, "Doesn't your religion send their suicides to Hell?" Another awkward silence. "No, I'm sure you're right," she says with a forced, crippling smile, brushing her hair back as Peter fades into the wall, dissolving.

Later that night, she seeps into a real dream. Julie is absorbed by a ball of light, like the sun. It is warm and feels like liquid to the skin. Peter's voice echoes in the distance and the liquid turns cool. His voice is clearer now. She shivers. Peter.

She wakes up, laced in cold sweat. She heard his voice. "What?" Julie throws the covers off and stumbles out of bed. "What? Peter?" Entering the black atmosphere with bare feet on cool tiles, she flips the light switch on and he is putting something in the microwave. "Peter, did you say something?"

He ignores her.

"I thought I heard you say something." She wipes sweat off her brow and watches him, waiting for something different. He never makes eye contact with her. He never makes a sound. The air squeezes out of her lungs as if they are being crushed, and a chill sweeps up her bare arms. She folds them against her chest.

"Goodnight, Peter," she mumbles, using her shoulder to flip the light switch off. The woman walks back to her bedroom door, leaving him as he waits patiently for his invisible food to thaw.

He is her brother, and she loves him, but damned if she doesn't hate his intrusions. When people die, they are only supposed to exist in memory. When dad died, he stayed just a memory. When mom died, the same. But Peter? He was in her life so much that even in death he wants to stay under her roof.

It would be nice if she wasn't the only one who could see him. Once she brought Rachel over and held her

breath when Peter walked in in his pajamas. She asked Rachel to get her an apple from the kitchen. Rachel looked at Julie with a crinkled nose, but she walked over, and Julie asked if she noticed something strange about the room. Peter was next to her, getting some utensil from the drawer. Rachel never could figure out what was different about the kitchen. Julie also called her brother Sam over once, but even he couldn't see his own brother eating a bowl of soup at the kitchen sink.

Not being able to share this extraordinary happening is just an annoyance though. Julie can deal with annoyances. That is not the part that cuts deep.

When Peter started coming out of the wall, she did everything in her power to get his attention: slamming pots, screaming at him, and stomping on the floor. After the third attempt of awakening Ghost Peter from his haze, the police arrived at the door for a domestic abuse call from the neighbors. Apparently, the couple next door thought Peter was her husband, and they didn't know then of his passing. She told the police she was alone, that she had a rat problem and was scaring the varmints away. She stopped screaming. For a while Julie tried

talking to him, pleading with him for a response. She has stood in his way and he walks through her.

Rachel is wrong; her brother is in purgatory. There must be a reason why only she can see him. That phone call must have concerned her, because Rachel shows up with no warning today.

“Let’s go out and do something. Let’s see a movie.”

Julie shakes her head.

“Let’s hit the bar,” she suggests next.

“I’m just going to be bored out of my mind.” She looks at Rachel with a tilted head. “You like going out; I don’t.”

“Yeah, and I think that’s a problem. You’re in the house all the time.”

“Not true: I grocery shop every week.” Rachel grimaces. “And I sometimes go on walks and shop—I leave the house when I need to.”

“You need a guy.”

“Shut up.”

“I’m serious; when was the last time you went on a date? I know it was before—” She stops.

Julie smirks and scratches the back of her head. “You can say his name.”

“My point is it’s been a few years. Get out there.”

Julie thinks for a while before speaking again. “You think if I start dating, it’ll take my mind off of Peter?” She couldn’t stand the thought of bringing a guy home, kissing him by mistake in front of her brother, who never had a girlfriend.

“You, like other people in grief, need a distraction. Men are good distractions.”

“I’ll say,” she adds, seeing the pale form enter the kitchen as if his ears were burning. She watches him and Rachel looks over to where she stares.

Even though she couldn’t have known Peter was there, she sensed her mind was on him.

“Maybe you should move.”

“No.”

“Why not? Your lease is up. You want to move to the city. It’s a good time. I have a friend, Jodi, who has a cousin who works in real estate in West Loop. I’ll hook you up.”

“Let’s switch back to talking about guys.”

But they don't. She stays quiet as Julie gets up to make a pot of coffee. She enters the kitchen and tries to stay out of Peter's way, but he becomes close to her a few times. After evading him and still coming into contact with him, she gives up. "All right, let's go to Drake's Cafe."

"I thought you were making coffee."

"I'm out. Let's go."

When Julie comes back from the coffee shop, upon reflection, it was nice. They didn't meet any guys, but being out of the house has exhilarated her.

Unfortunately she has to spend most of her day in front of the computer, doing freelance work. It can be exhausting researching and writing three to five articles every day. The work is probably more than the average seven hours a day, and it just barely pays the bills.

Dad left them plenty of money though. She or Peter could live off of it for a few years if there was no income. It's a nice safety net, in case work gets scarce or she just gets sick of it. Yes, Dad's inheritance came in handy, especially when she accepted a roommate who has never worked a day in his life. Mom, sadly, died a poor woman, because she had a full-grown boy to feed and clothe when she should have saved for retirement. She—

Did I really just think that? She pinches her eyes and leans over the keyboard; her brain stings from that private insult she just laid on Peter. She wonders if the dead can read her thoughts. If he could, perhaps that is why he doesn't speak to her. Ghosts can read minds, can't they?

This morning she makes a pot of coffee without a ghost. Every once in a while she'll think he has dissolved for good, but then he shows up at some point and that idea dissipates. One time he didn't show up for two days and it was weird. As much as she would like him to stop haunting her house,

maybe she would miss seeing him around; does that make her sick? The whole situation is a mess.

Before Julie leaves the kitchen, she looks over to the wall, half expecting Peter to seep through. He doesn't; she is only left with that pale splotch of dried paint on the wall, a reminder of how things were before. The construction guys had said it would look nicer if they re-did that entire wall. But she told them no; just patch it up. Perhaps rebuilding the wall would have made a difference.

After Peter died, Julie couldn't stand the sight of the door being so close to the kitchen. She was so used to him coming in all the time to make himself a snack that she always expected it after his life. It drove her insane, and the only way she could instantly remember he was gone was to relocate his door to the other side of his room, toward the living room. She could have demolished his cubicle instead. It was cheaply made, built in when mom died and he asked if he could live here.

Demolishing it, however, would be like he was never here, and she couldn't bring herself to erase his entire existence from this house. And so the thin walled room stayed, like an awkward object that has worn out its use and remains as wasted space, an appendix.

How could she have known removing that door was going to open a passage between this world and the other? That's what probably happened. Too coincidental he started coming out of the wall after the door's removal. And where does he go?

He doesn't return to his room. Countless times she has raced into his room in the new doorway just as he returns to the wall. Convincing herself she wasn't quick enough, she would sit on his dusty bed as soon as he emerged into the kitchen, waiting for his return with food. He never shows up.

Maybe if she tore down that portion of the wall, she could follow him. Or maybe something bad will happen, like he drops into Hell or she gets trapped in a dimension she was never meant to be a part of. Perhaps putting the door back will change everything to normal. Or maybe mom and dad will return with him.

Damn it; if only he had a job and left her house, he may have not been a ghost. He probably wouldn't have put a gun to his head in the first place. God, that image. That horrendous mess that was her little brother.

It's strange, but as time passes, Julie can no longer recall the details of that scene. She can't remember any more if he was slumped on his right or his left side in the chair. Or which side of his head. Or what was on the screen of his computer at the time. He didn't leave a note.

That's right, he had a blank word document on his screen; she remembers that much, barely. He was about to type something on there, but he

changed his mind at the last minute, she supposed. A change of heart. The bastard.

Peter comes down the hall from the bathroom, returning to the counter. He makes himself ice tea while he waits for food in the microwave. She stands with folded arms against the counter, near the sink.

"You know what?" She says to him. "I think you realized you had no way out."

Peter keeps his eyes forward. Sam has "Dad's dead. Then mom died. I was the only person who could take you in. After me, it would be a wife and three kids. I was the only person who could take you in. After me, it would be a homeless shelter or an old folk's home, if you had lived that long."

She lifts herself up and sits on the counter, dangling her feet. She doesn't look up at him because she knows their eyes won't meet.

"Was that it, Peter? Did you just realize I was the only one left? That must have been a lonely feeling." She squints at the floor. "But I wasn't dead yet. I might have Rachel and—

maybe I'll start dating again—but I had you too. You were supposed to be my brother, be there for me. You let me down. You let me down before you—."

He leans toward the fridge, dipping his head into the door.

"I've come close to offing myself, you know, when I was younger. I know you thought about it too, well, obviously." She clears her throat and glances at his bare lily feet. He was almost always barefoot.

She looks at her feet, in socks. "Haven't we always been a broken, unhappy family? Sam was already grown when the divorce happened, so he didn't go through the great divide like we did. It's funny; I always thought we lived the same life, but we came out different, didn't we? Maybe because you were younger."

Peter stands up straight in a stretch and yawns. The old Peter would look solemn right now. Ghost Peter yawns once more.

"Am I boring you? Nothing I say holds your interest?"

He turns away from the fridge and tends to the microwave, his back facing her.

"That's right; you just keep busying yourself over there. Ignore the situation; you were good at that. God, why am I even talking to you?"

He prepares something and hurries to the wall.

"Nice talking to you, Peter. You hurry on now."

He's gone.

"You just play your computer games! Chat with your online friends. Spend the next five hours in front of that computer until you get hungry again."

She jumps down and faces the wall. "Jerk off! Eat! Play! Sleep when you want! Jerk off some more!"

A knock thuds on the front door, and every bone in her body locks up as if rusted. She looks to the wall and back to the front door: it has to be a coincidence. Surely it isn't him.

The knock gets louder and she peers through the front window; air escapes her throat. It's Rachel.

"What's up?" She asks in the open doorway.

Rachel looks pale in the evening sun.

"Who are you yelling at?"

"Yelling?"

"Yeah."

"A squirrel—outside the window." Her thumb points back at the kitchen.

She squints at Julie. "You were yelling at a squirrel to jerk off?"

"Well, yeah." Julie walks away from her and Rachel follows, closing the door. "I'm upset."

"Clearly. What's going on?"

She forces air through her teeth. "I just got done with an article, only to realize it's an hour late. The guy is deducting 20% off the pay now."

Rachel walks over to the kitchen, peering out the window.

"Oh, well that's rough."

"I'll say. It's the first time that's ever happened too. Could have just given me a warning or something. Every dollar counts. Pfff, jerkoff. So what's going on with you?"

"I was just by and thought I'd drop in."

She cocks her head and waits for Rachel to look back at her. "Rachel, you live an hour away. That was your excuse two days ago."

Her shoulders slump. "Okay, I came by to tell you something. You should be happy." She points a finger at her. "But maybe you'll be pissed."

"Out with it, miss drama."

"I talked to Sam yesterday—on the phone." This is new. "A good friend of his is a hiring manager at Preston Publications. Someone's quitting and he needs a production assistant. Sam just got back to me today and said all you have to do is show up for the interview, and the job will be yours."

"You got to be kidding me."

"It's two hours away from here, but it has benefits, retirement, and it's full time. Of course, you can learn more about it at the interview."

Rachel stretches her neck out, staring at Julie.

She blinks a lot. "You two just set up an interview for me, without even asking?"

Rachel leans back. "I was afraid you'd shy away from it. I convinced Sam not to call you about it. I wanted to tell you."

Should she be angry or grateful? Julie tries to feel one or the other, but it's both.

"Are you mad?"

She stays silent.

"Will you at least go?"

"I'll be losing money that day."

"It's just one day."

She stares down at the cream colored carpet beneath her socks; toes wiggle in deliberation. How can she say no? What is her excuse?

Feet shoed, she steps into her house after another two hour drive, exhausted from the travel.

Back aching, she plops face-first onto the couch, ready to sleep when the phone rings. Knowing who it is, she groans and forces herself up. She picks it up just when she thinks the person would have given up and hung up the phone. Hearing her voice, she replies, "I got the job."

Rachel gasps, an unusual sound coming from her. "So you're taking it?"

"I guess."

"Great, now all you need is a new place. Jodi owes me a favor. Do you want an apartment or—"

"Rachel, what are you doing? Why are you doing this?"

She hesitates. "Because you're my friend and you're in a rut."

Julie grimaces at that answer, brows trembling. "Don't you have your own life to manage? You helped me get a job and now you're arranging my home? Who says I'm moving, anyway?"

"Hey, my life could be better, but yours needs to be a lot better. When you're some big shot in the city, I expect you to hook me up. Wait, you're not moving?"

"I haven't decided yet."

"What's there to decide? It's two hours. You want to drive four hours a day?"



Julie sighs. "I should be thanking you."

"Yes, you should."

"And I am thankful, but you don't understand."

"Sure I do."

"What then?"

"You're stuck in the past."

Those words catch her off guard. She needs to hang up.

"I'll talk to you later, okay?" Rachel agrees with reluctance.

When she hangs up the phone, she lies back down on the couch to sooth her back. Her painful groan fades into a light sigh. Feeling comfortable, her vision is filled with the grey ceiling; she studies every crack and crease in the plaster. She breathes in the smell that can only be described as her place. This is her couch, her ceiling, and her air. So there's a ghost living in it. If she had to live with a ghost, it would be Peter, or Rachel. Plus, Peter doesn't moan and drag chains, waking her up at all hours of the night. He doesn't make the foundation quake or fling dishes across the room. He doesn't make a peep. He's passive, was always passive.

She sucks in her breath. She wishes he spoke though, missing the long conversations. Above all, she wishes she had the ability to ask him things; what he was going to write down in that word document—why he didn't?

She lifts her head and sees the door to his old room. Ignoring the pain, she gets up; its white closed frame beckons her to step forward. Her hand turns the pewter knob and opens the door, leading her into a small windowless room with an unused bed and some boxes on an empty desk and chair. No trace of red, but she cringes—nevertheless—always expecting it.

She does something she thought she would never do. She takes out his computer from the box and plugs it in. When it warms up and his desktop appears, she clicks on icons. As if the moment of invasion could only be brief, the black arrow clicks every folder within a folder. The whole thing is invasive, but that doesn't stop her or her pace. If she were to move, she did not want to haul this computer with her. She has to know what was going on in his mind. He didn't tell her in life or death, so she must raid his files.

The expected shows up. One folder contains pictures of naked and clothed young women. In another, critiques of games he had played—he'd type them out in


a word document before sending them on forums, she supposed. Listings of his favorite songs. Documents with URL's to his favorite YouTube videos, several of them he had shown her. She stops each one after three seconds, instantly recognizing them and moving on.

She wants to access his email account, but there is no folder containing passwords and usernames. He was no longer signed in, of course. Nearing the end, she did find a document, containing a short, written outburst.

"God, I hate people. They're always complaining about their lives. They don't know how good they have it. They don't care. I hate them."

It doesn't sound like something Peter would have said; he was so articulate and he should have been specific on what got him riled up. Yet she can hear him say the slew of words in her mind, punching the keys with his fingers, eyes moist.

The computer returns to the box, unplugged and dark. She stares down at



the black screen, disappointed, fingers at a half curl. She didn't learn anything new, just what she had suspected and always known; he was miserable.

With a bottle of red wine in her hand, Julie sits on the kitchen tiles and consumes. Her body feels like water, slushing around like the black liquid in the bottle.

Peter's blurry form enters the room after a while. That's when she pours some red on the floor for him, like on TV. She doesn't look at him. "Peter, I think I'm going to move."

He says nothing.

Eyes closed, she lifts the bottle up to her nose in an attempt to take another drink, but she pulls it away and sets it down. Her eyes crease open, blurred. "I think I'm going to move."

Rachel, of course, helps her with everything. They went house hunting together. She knew someone who knew someone who could haul her furniture. She is now helping Julie pack her remaining possessions.

When the place becomes vacant, Julie looks over at his room. It looks so out of place and unnecessary that surely the new attendants will have it torn down. As for his things: his computer lies broken in a heap of junk somewhere, and his desk and bed frame were donated. All that remains in her house—was her house—is a box of bathroom supplies.

Rachel comes out of the bathroom. "Looks like that's it."

Julie concentrates on the cream-colored carpet, faded in sections where furniture used to reside. She says to Rachel, not looking up, "Thank you for helping me with all this."

"You're welcome?" she says with a tilted head. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I just wanted you to know you've been a good friend. More than you think you know."

She has a big grin now. "Gee, don't get teary-eyed or anything. It's what friends do."

"Yeah," she utters. A shadow moves in the kitchen.

"So, this is it," Rachel says, picking up the remaining box and leading her to the

front door. "Say goodbye to the place and let's hit the road."

"I need to be alone for a minute." Rachel stops and stares at her.

"Why?" Julie lowers her brows at her. "Okay, okay; sorry. I'll just carry this box over...by myself."

She leaves the door open; the sun illuminates the floor and brightens the eggshell walls. Julie sees Peter fixing something at the stove.

She walks over and rests her shoulder against the wall, watching his blank face staring at the timer. Did he always look that bored? So drained for a twenty-five year old. And had he always frequent this kitchen like a zombie stuck in a routine? He was too young to die, too young to waste his life in this house. She wants to scream at him to leave. Just leave, and be happy outside these walls. She sucks in her breath.

"Peter," she begins. "I'm leaving now. It was bad enough seeing you do nothing while you were alive. I can't keep this up, so I'm moving away and I'm not coming back."

He scratches the back of his head, and then he looks out the kitchen window, resting his hands on the sides of the sink.

"Maybe you can't hear me, but I need to say I tried my best with you, to get you out of this loop. I wanted you to get a job, have a wife, and live in your own house. I tried, Peter, but you wouldn't budge."

He glances at the timer.

“What more could I do? It’s all on you, Peter. You chose to do nothing, then you chose to take your life. I didn’t do anything wrong. Right?”

He leans off the counter and opens the invisible latch to the oven.

“You’ve had six months to make your peace with me, but you wasted it by doing the same damn thing over and over, like before. Whether I stay or leave, you’re just going to do what you want. If you needed me to get to Heaven, you’ve wasted your chance...unless you want to say something now?”

He places something on top of the oven, taking a utensil and making invisible pizza slices.

She rubs her eyes and takes a deep, quivering breath. “Okay, Peter. I’m leaving.” She turns to leave. “Goodbye. I love you.”

She walks toward the bright opening. Her right hand clasps the side of the doorway and her upper body bends forward. Tears cannot be suppressed; she cries. She looks back again and he’s still making preparations, never looking back.

What if he is in her head? That means she’s sick. If she moves, he might reappear and this will always be her hell. Yet how will she ever know if she stays in this house? What else, what else can it be? Why won’t this ghost acknowledge her? Old Peter talked to her. Does he blame her for nagging him? Does he blame her for his death?

What if he hadn’t died? What if she died? She can see him, but he can’t sense her at all; it makes more sense, right? And he doesn’t seem troubled. Not happy, but not in agony. She’s the one in agony; she can’t stop crying like a child.

Rachel and Sam aren’t dead. She’s left the house, hasn’t she? Aren’t ghosts supposed to stay put in the same house, like Peter? It is strange how she has never considered this alternative before.

What if she is the one who died, and this is her purgatory? And where she is about to go is the next step, starting over?

Yes, she likes this interpretation better. If Peter is the ghost, then she is abandoning him, his only friend. But if she is the ghost, she’s already out of his life; she’ll be free.

Rachel honks the horn; she can’t see the doorway from where she is sitting in the car. Julie stands up straight and wipes her face. She takes the brass knob and sees Peter, one last time, opening the invisible door and seeping through the wall, dissolving.

She whispers, "Goodbye, brother," and she bows her head as she turns away, stepping into the morning light, with a soft click of a lock behind her.



Dallas, Texas

J.C. Brown

In St. Javon's yard
We stand under the
smoky sky in
Dallas, Texas
We are all black, charred

There are no words in St. Javon's yard,
south of Rosewood Home, north of
Adams Hospital, where he was

Just moans, caressing of others who are
also black and hands pressed closely as
we pray
to whom it may concern

We stand
I remember when he stood 6'3, bald,
black skin, peppered grays sprinkled
around his firm, full lips like fireflies
of smoky cinders, working hands and
a demanding voice; even when he said,
I love you.

There are children here in black, full
bodied dresses. With fidgety fin-
gers and wrists decorated with
multi-colored bracelets that
peak out from under their
black, lace sleeves, like
the digging joy of a
rich man's mis-
tress peaks out
from under

her black lace veil

She is here as a friend of the family

I am his only son
There may be others but I am the only
one
here

Dallas, Texas is where I was told, not
by mother
She had no words, barely a heartbeat
Aunt Jewel came into my orange and
green bedroom. Placed her experienced
hands on my body One hand on my
lower neck and the other on my chest

She faced me
Burnt brown eyes
Fragile fingers, fragile all over really
She leaned in, placed her lips close to
my left ear and whispered so that only I
and God could hear

Under the sky
in Dallas, Texas

We stand
in St. Javon's Graveyard, south of
the home, north of the hospital
where he was



State of Grace

Ricardo Maria Amezcuita

Looking down at the ceiling fan,
waiting for an angel
between the blades

sending telepathic messages
to friends and neighbors to call
while a hand is on the phone which
rings though the phone bill
hasn't yet been paid

taking a shower in the blue tile
bathroom without towels,
the only water
springing up from the floor
as cupped hands wet and rinse
your soapy nakedness
and a warm breeze
dries your skin

thinking of a kiss
while driving to a stoplight
just before sunrise
and a truck named after a saint
crosses the intersection
and in its wake
unloads all the kisses
you ever had


About the Authors and Artists

Ricardo Mario Amezcuita born and raised in Sterling, Illinois.

Upon graduating from high school in 1966, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where he served as a survival trainer until 1970. He attended Sauk Valley Community College and Sangamon State University (now the University of Illinois Springfield), earning his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Comparative Literature. He has worked as a legal advocate for migrant workers, served as an academic advisor to college students, tutored NIU athletes, taught First-Year English and English as a Second Language at a variety of colleges, served as a translator for Lutheran Social Services, and worked as a medical equipment and supplies contract specialist for the Veterans Administration. He is the author of two books: *Eating Stones*, a chapbook published by Sangamon Press, and *Then She Kissed El Paco's Lips Now! Or April in DeKalb*, published by Indian Paintbrush Poets and a version of this same book, *Rezo Resbaloso*, published and distributed electronically by Alexander Street Press. His poetry has also been published by a variety of journals and in a number of venues, some of which include *The MacGuffin*; *Somos En Escrito*; *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*; *The Spoon River Quaterly*; *The Rockford Review*; *The Alchemist Review*; *Poets Against the War*; *Kalligraphia*; *Many Smokes*, and *CARACOL*. He is currently retired and lives with his wife, Bonnie, in DeKalb, IL.

JC Brown is an Interpersonal Communications major. JC is very active in the Forensics (Public Speaking) world. He is a Resident Assistant on campus at the University of Illinois and an LGBTQ Peer Educator. JC strives to build a well-rounded and diverse community around his self and his peers. It is JC's life's goal through my writing to unveil the beauty in things too small to be seen but big enough to feel.

Bradee Campbell is from a farm town community in the area of Macomb, Illinois. Bradee is majoring in Psychology but has always had a strong interest in English and Creative Writing. She has never submitted any of her pieces before so this is all new to her.



Austin Enburg is a junior at UIS anticipating an English major with a literature focus and a minor in the Mathematical Sciences. Austin started writing as a senior in high school when he was introduced to the school's creative writing program. Since then, Austin has participated in poetry presentations, writing workshops, and researching sessions with professors, but still feels like he has a lot to learn. Austin thanks hopes you all enjoy his work and thanks you for reading.

Jason Fischer is nearing completion of his Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of Illinois Springfield. Jason devotes most of his time to chasing after his precocious two-year-old daughter. Jason spends the remaining minutes of the day chatting with his wife and reading a wide variety of fiction, non-fiction, comic books, and tweets.

Pam Miller is a published poet. She was published in *The Alchemist Review* in 2003, as a student at age 53, receiving a BA in Liberal Studies. She was also published in *The State Journal Register* in 2000, and *The Catholic Times* in 2002. She currently writes as a member of the Carlinville Writers Guild and Springfield Poets and Writers and displays poetry and art on her personal website: www.mimiofthepen.com.

Nancy Pistorius received her MA in Literature in 1978. Nancy is of Lawrence, KS, and was getting into trouble for scribbling stories instead of working on assignments when she was still in kindergarten. As a teenager, she won the *Chicago Tribune* Voice of Youth essay contest and two national poetry competitions. Since then, she has published award-winning fiction, poetry, and feature articles in more than seventy-five different literary and mass-market publications. She was a former editor of *Spoon River Review* and member of the “brainchild” women’s poetry collective. Her most recent honors were the Langston Hughes Creative Writing Award and the Jacqueline Jackson Alumni Creative Writing Award.

Roberto Sabas is a graduate of the University of Illinois Springfield, with a major in Liberal Studies and a minor in English. Roberto lives in Champaign, Illinois, with his wife and three children, where he currently works at CITES, UIUC. Roberto loves poetry and short fiction and hopes to keep submitting more work to venues this coming year.



About the Editors

Bianca Bautista is a Sophomore who is a Pre-med student, Sociology/Anthropology major, and minor in Public Health. Her hobbies are focused on creative writing. In her spare time she does text-based role-plays on a forum designed for players who are fans of DC superheroes. Bianca serves as a fiction editor for the *Alchemist Review*.

Maureen Bocka is a Communications major and English minor. She serves as the Assistant Managing Editor of the *Alchemist Review*. Maureen is a senior and is originally from Chicago, Illinois. When she is not writing poems Maureen enjoys rollerblading, trying out new crochet patterns, and looking up graduate schools. One thing that would be great to see in the future is to have local Springfield poets come in and work with UIS writers to build the creative writing interest on campus.

Jacob L. Cross is a Fiction and Poetry Editor for the *Alchemist Review*. He lives in the southwest suburbs of Chicago, where he works in a French cafe and rum-mages through local bookstores. He studied creative writing and publishing at the University of Illinois Springfield, majoring in English and minoring in Communications. He is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Popcorn Farm Literary Magazine*, a Midwestern journal publishing art and literature inspired by film. He enjoys hiking everywhere from the Smoky Mountains to the Rockies with his wife, playing music with friends, conquering Zelda temples, and eating excessive amounts of sushi.

Erich O'Connor is an undergraduate at the University of Illinois. Erich's major is English. He is this year's managing editor of the *Alchemist Review*, but Erich has more hobbies besides managing the UIS literary journal. Erich watches a lot of movies, plays a lot of chess, and reads a lot, as well as writes his own short fiction on the side. Erich also runs another literary journal called *Uproot*, which focuses on why people move to the Midwest. He has a sister, a brother, and a dog. Erich can't wait to see what the *Alchemist Review* staff will do next year. He hopes that with future staffs, the *Alchemist Review* will continue to establish its presence on the web, as well as continue to make a deeper impression on the UIS community and the literary community.

Scott Scholl is an Senior English Major with a focus in Literature Studies and a Minor in Mass Communication/Journalism. Scott has been writing since grade school and creative writing remains his hobby outside of school. He has several other hobbies, from reading, music composition, gaming, hanging out with friends, to playing the jawharp to game music. Scott and his family are all mostly from Pennsylvania. He moved to the Midwest during the 8th grade. Scott is a fiction editor for the *Alchemist Review*. Scott hopes to uphold the *Alchemist Review's* guidelines by watching for work that truly offers a different perspective or change in the normal way of thinking. The way the *Alchemist Review* is going is very optimistic and represents a fresh and new take on the literary community.

Robert Von Nordheim serves as fiction editor for the *Alchemist Review*. He is an English major with a double minor in history and education. His fifth and final year at UIS will end with a student teaching position at Southeast High. Rob's favorite stories are, in no particular order, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. He's nearly always reading something—if you count text boxes in video games; when he isn't, Rob likes to visit his twin brother in St. Louis and sing karaoke.

Colophon

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