

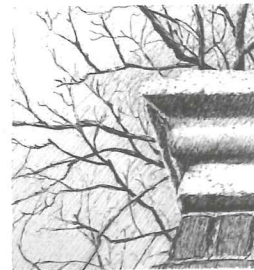
# Zephyrus 2014





# Zephyrus

2014



**A publication of the English Department  
of Western Kentucky University  
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**Award Winners**

**Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Award**

Rachel Hoge  
"The Story of the Imaginary Granddaughter  
and How She Said Goodbye"

**Browning Literary Club Poetry Award**

Isiah Fish  
"Contextual Eulogy"

**Ann Travelstead Fiction Award  
of the Ladies Literary Club**

Paul Richard Watson  
"Storm Shelter"

**Wanda Gatlin Essay Award**

Blaine Ely  
"Warning"

**Zephyrus Art Award**

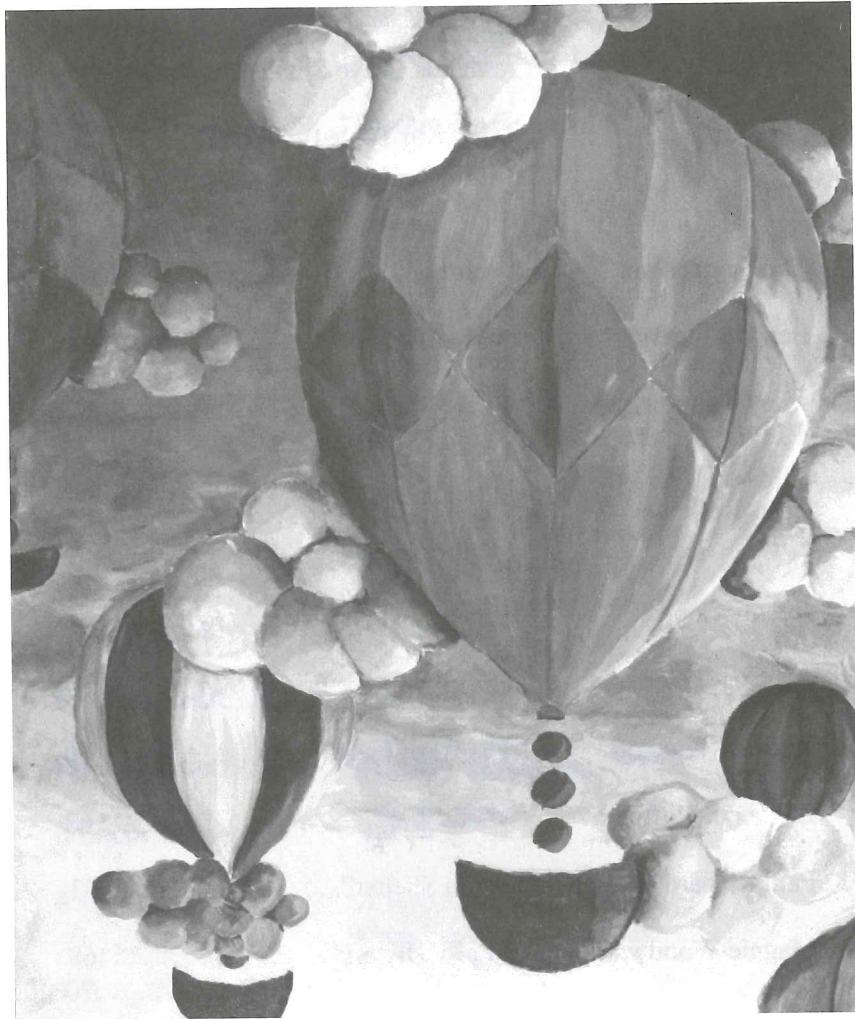
Hannah Cooper  
"New Bike, Sunny Day"

Writing award recipients are chosen by the Creative Writing faculty of WKU; the art award is chosen by *Zephyrus* staff.

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Miranda Lear

Reverie

**The Foreign Correspondent to The Land of Nod/East of Aspen**  
(for my spiritual guide and Cancerian brother, Dr. Hunter S. Thompson)  
Matt Byrum

The apartment is cold and lonely, scarred by cigarette stink and way  
into the night conversations.

I knew the first drink I should have taken on my twenty-first birthday  
should have been a shot of Wild Turkey.

I look across bedsheets and the backseat of my Jeep Liberty  
at the curves of a cherry blossom body  
and I know the smell of artificial strawberry number five is the smell  
of home.

I'm the happiest when the characters on the page are all self actualized  
and cut stabbed and shot full of holes by punctuation marks  
writ long in a swirling vortex of neon.

Each comma and period is the end of a line like the  
final stab of Hercules's sword between the eyestalks of Cancer  
before he hurled the crab into the sky.

I knew the truth of my shepherd  
when I first heard the words fear and loathing  
and I looked to Duke as my spiritual guide,  
my brother born beneath the twinkling eyes of the crab  
on the same night fifty-five years later.

The burning in my belly is the fear of a thousand boyhood night terrors  
and the unspeakable Gonzo truth of galaxies that reverberate  
Iggy Pop and Tom Waits songs

to shut out the haunted sickly tune of "Goodnight Irene"  
All roads somehow lead back to Kentucky in the very end  
and Children of the Water inevitably seek the real rhyme in the core  
of the sun.

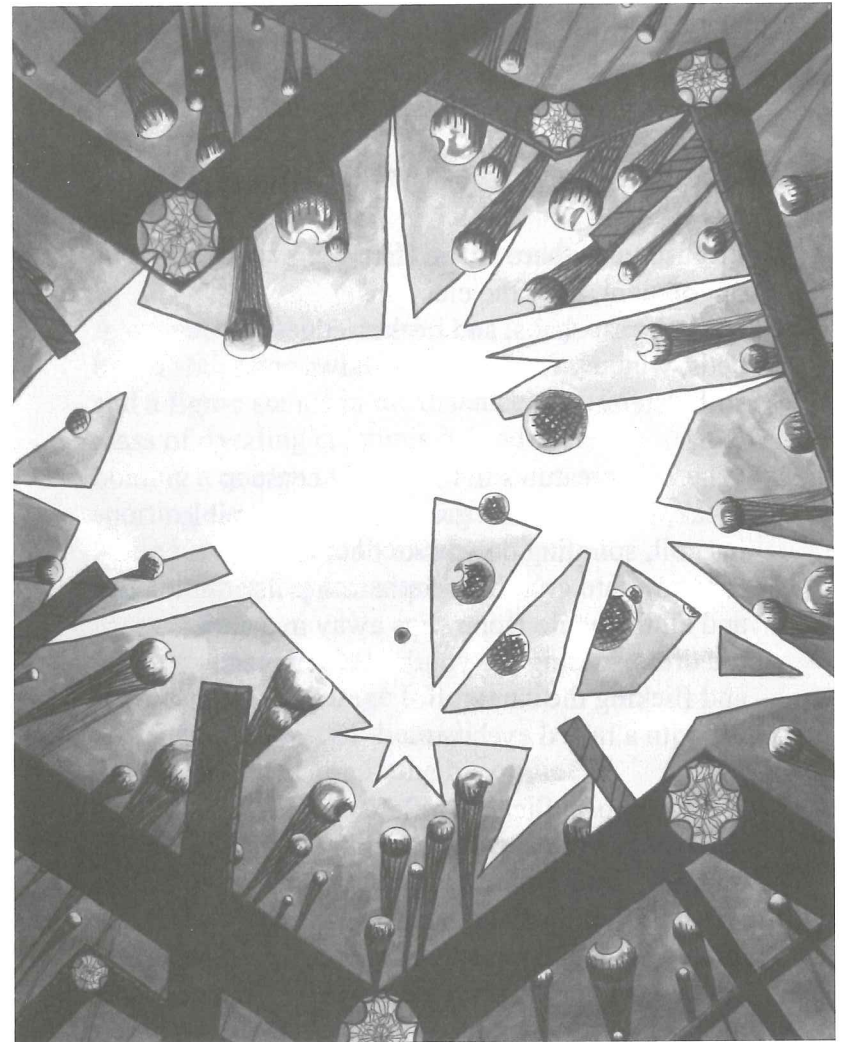
"Thank the Lord there are people out there like you>"

Lovers waltz to "The Eyes of Youth"  
and weep to "Waltz for the Moon."

We Mutter and putter through the sunlight hours  
and dance on the head of a crystal goblet.

There are worse demons than Nixon

that were born by the dawn of Y2K  
and if Nixon is the worst of the bastards from  
an era born into inevitable darkness leading to decadent decay  
then Hell holds no more villainy.  
I drink deeply from red wine and The Grand Simian,  
that fantastic conductor,  
guides my fingers and the waxing and waning of  
the Sea of Tranquility seems truly tranquil.  
We are drawn in by the magnet  
and the leather on my back could repel bullets and slurs and  
disingenuous assertions  
that it takes twenty extra years to see how the world is run,  
and when we tear the meat from our pallets  
the gods of America weep .  
I should have been born as the West Wind,  
with you, Hunter, as the Gulf Stream to lead me to all points  
beyond.  
And how silly I am compared to the fullness of the American  
Truth to which you sought.  
I'd sooner find myself deaf and dumb,  
beneath the shrine of the Great Fist that rises higher,  
higher even still than Heaven to mark the place  
of the Foreign Correspondent to the Land of Nod/East of Aspen.



Elizabeth Hoffman

Scream for Freedom



**finite.**

Chris Chamberlain

*"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for the."*

*-Revelation 20:11*

I refuse to be there as the stars fly,  
out of sight, after the elections  
of madness, chaos, and broken edges of  
beds, window cracks, hard pillows and  
still waters.

When the creatures in the woods cease to  
speak, the mountains groan with irreversible  
turmoil, spiraling down like dominos,  
cars turn into crumbs, people into pills,  
and all the while Hope slips away in a dark  
red dress, kissing the youth, the believers,  
and flicking the sinners  
off with a raised eyebrow.

News snippets flicker on flat-screen  
televisions with anchors speaking in  
tongues, flashes of deep, black pits in  
Canada, New Zealand, Kansas,  
and Taiwan, and multitudes of people, some  
clothed, some not, screaming wildly,  
pushing angrily while buildings  
plummet to the ground.

In Germany, a blond boy, age 12, picks up a  
revolver and a single bullet, and watches as  
a bright light splits the clouds,  
striking the ground.

The gun dissolves into water,  
the bullet turns into a ring  
and he flies away, eyes lit with wonder.

A woman holds her daughter as a drip of  
blood slides down the corner of her mouth,  
and a figure stands in the distance, a large  
mass of dazzling creatures behind him,  
holding a golden crossbow,  
sporting a strong, fierce beard,  
while his eyes shine like stars  
and shimmer like the seas.

He stops in his tracks,  
His beautiful entourage follows suit.  
He is the brightest of them all,  
an orb-like hue completing his outline

"Be still," the figure says,  
and the explosions pause in mid-air,  
tears take a break,  
Hope flashes a smile and  
Evil begins to listen.



Jessica Booth

## Vulture

## Warning Blaine Ely

The voice on the other end says he's in the hospital and to come right away. There's just one class left anyway, and you doubt you'll miss anything. But you really should have called him more, I mean, just to see what was going on, or to ask him about the game. It wouldn't have been that hard. Then again, he doesn't really call much either. The phone works both ways, right?

1. You don't *have* to find cover. Nobody's going to force you under the bed or wrestle you into a porcelain tub. No one's going to kick in the door and shove your face in front of the Weather Channel. You could just ignore it. You could just stare through the window, or read a book, or grab a beer and enjoy the view from your freshly stained porch.

You're there now and he's talking and kind of laughing. Just a close call, we guess. A few stints and some fancy machinery later and good-as-new. You remember that you never liked hospitals—antiseptics and fluorescent lights and the way everyone just waits. But you don't have to be there long. You made an appearance. You showed you cared. That's all that matters, right?

2. Most of us just live for prevention anyway. When's the last time your doctor told you to drink more? Or your mother told you not to worry about a seatbelt? Health is the new disease. It's the new-and-improved. Research proves, research proves. The new religion: prevention. You drive home in traffic. People coming and going, one day at a time, one more day survived. Some guy on the radio's shouting something about the government and the way it *ought to be*. Maybe he knows something we don't. Maybe he's figured it all out. Or maybe he just knows what hospitals smell like.

3. A watch is a watch. A warning is a tornado. Everyone always confuses the two but how hard is it? A warning is to prepare. A watch is to prepare to prepare. Haven't they read the pamphlet? It says to develop a plan. Practice drills. Stay away from windows. Abandon your mobile home. Find your nearest and most convenient basement. See: your death-cheating checklist. Flashlight?



Check. Radio? Check. Bible? Check. Ever  
seen *Twister*?

You're home and the man on TV is wearing a suit and  
telling you to find shelter. Tornadoes are serious. Your  
mother's calling again, making sure you've heard. You  
open the fridge and reach for a bottle, taking a swig and  
grabbing Chuck Palahnuik's latest. You open the door  
and feel the wind on your face and find the best spot on  
the porch. Because when you really think about it, sirens  
are better than nothing.

## Contextual Eulogy

Isiah Fish

And then you slammed the door  
in my face so hard I needed gauze.

My phone died and I said  
a little prayer, I stitched together

a casket from its case,  
gave a eulogy for lost texts

that held our first words:  
"Hey" and "Heyy."

Then insomnia met me like  
an assassin disguised as a girl

selling cookies so I let it in my house  
and now I can only daydream about

you driving a car that explodes,  
or you getting eaten alive by slugs,

or me dressing in my Sunday best but  
never making it to your funeral.

When you hate someone you used to love  
it means that you hate that you still love them.

After I realized this,  
a marching band did a number,

I watched them like a baby watching  
a cat who doesn't acknowledge the baby.

**Purr II**  
Isiah Fish

Have you noticed I never write about dogs?  
I do it to piss you off.  
*Cats.* Cats, everywhere!  
Sascha the Manx is repelling down my leg,  
swinging from her silver-silken whiskers,  
whipping them into lilac bows—catch us in the Kitty  
Deluxe Drag Show on Thursday night at ten!  
Ask me why I glued cheetah-print mittens  
to the tree bark, I'll answer, *improv bitches!*  
Impressing them with my room full of  
cats, I impressed them in a room  
full of cats—aloofness and freedom  
are interchangeable bedspreads.  
Look at Tymoshnikov the Tonkinese,  
opening up a beer with another beer,  
posing for a postprandial selfie  
in the diamond-shaped light  
cast through the bejeweled summertime  
curtains, *that's Daddy's boy!*  
I taught my cats how to sew booties,  
the difference between “pre” and “post,”  
and how to tie knots with dog ears,  
leaving them looking like a basket  
that should be squeezed.  
In the mornings glassy dawn breaks peach  
and Cirozinni the Himalayan rolls  
his cotton ball body over my rancho beef hash.  
I tweet about the intrusive puss.  
*Oh look!* Cat wigs are trending on Twitter,  
Tabby the Turkish Rex inevitably meows,  
she's trying to tell me nine things.



Katie O'Grady

**Confusion**



### Gone is the son, Son

For my mother, Sharon, and my brother, Ryan  
Kayla Grorud

Like endless vines  
devouring brick shadows, words  
creep out of their mouths effortlessly:  
“I will pray for you” and “God be with you”  
until I wish they were being strangled by tears,  
not I. Sugary sap wedges underneath my filed  
fingernails as I rip apart the fleshy petals of  
sacrificed lilies lining the wooden rails of his  
crib. Nothing cannot replace this life I have lost.  
Fifty-nine black beads rattle between my breasts with  
every wavering step. The mysteries of the saints are a  
guilty weight upon me now; I hurl the rosary against  
the merciless pavement. (At dusk I crawl out of  
the trailer and sheepishly free it from the dirt.  
It does not mean I will ever believe again, but  
I toss them in the back of the drawer so  
I can sleep free of  
fiery brimstone  
tonight.) Instead,  
my nightmares  
become stained glass  
with grateful faces standing  
in its cast prism. I find myself  
leaping through the spectrum; rainbow  
shards divide my spirit from soul. Blood  
flows not in romantic colors, but black, black  
as ink, and incense I have compliantly bathed in  
for decades pipes out of my veins in a final release.

I was not told to  
hate God Above for this, so  
I didn't. Her slender hand on my  
cheek warms my icy freckles. I gulp  
down every faltering sympathy and  
promise of casseroles as memorized  
prayers filter through wrinkled lips.  
This is not a new chorus for this  
somber Friday mourning club. I  
squint through blonde eyelashes,  
crusted in makeup. My gaze  
opens to the long face of  
my mother, wrecked by  
grief, but I  
have a feeling  
it isn't all for  
me. Oh, has she  
chosen already? To be  
as unfeeling as the stones  
in the steeple? My ashen  
tongue tastes of copper and  
cannot move to warn: Death  
isn't glamorous or poetic. The  
rusted bell chokes out tones for  
me, but after sunset, they will  
leave me shivering alone again:  
bones in the rain with the worms.



Sarah Nikolai

P31, Dignity

## The Monster

Anthony Gross, Jr.

### Dangerous Places

Closets are curious things. Growing up, I would stare into their mute darkness, captivated by the beckoning black of solid shadow. I would wait for the ominous breath of some unnatural figure to caress the sheer curtains covering my closet's threshold or for the careful curl of a monster's claw to snag against those supple swags. My breathing would grow short and heavy with the thought of the monster's talon dragging me deep into the depths of his fortress. Closets were forbidden places, places for moth-eaten wool and spider-eaten moths, dangerous to enter during a dead-noised game of hide-and-seek. But I must have wandered too close to one of those dark, sinister lairs, falling victim to the odd fingers of its looming fiend. Or maybe I went willingly into that shadowy space, searching for solace in the last place its monster would think to find me.

### The Roar

I can't remember the exact moment I found myself closed in the cool blackness of my closet's corners. My memory insists on a series of minute images muddled with the words of one man in particular: my stepfather. When I was five years old, I bounced up and down while he dug his thick fingers vigorously into my sister's ribs as I watched with anticipation, laughing and waiting for my time to be tickled. But the rising and falling sway of my wrists provoked a roar of disgust: "You don't flap your wrists like a girl!" my stepfather bellowed. My heart throbbing with fear, I sank away to quiet captivity, small and defenseless.

### The Snarl

In the suffocating heat of a grunting black Astro van, my lanky eleven-year-old body responded unquestioningly to my stepfather's command to roll down my hand-cranked window to let in the outside air. My wandering mind paid no attention to the half-visible window glass that his angry blue eyes focused on. "Roll your window all the way down, boy," he said, "only women and prissy boys roll their windows down half way. Are you scared of messing up your hair? I obediently heeded his snarl, lowering the glass separat-



ing our mobile hell-chamber from the last bit of air withheld from our bodies. But I felt no relief.

### **The Gnash**

Splay-legged across my mother's new khaki couch—the one she bought during her third unfulfilled threat of divorce from my stepfather in my nineteen years—I watched the smutty humor of a liberal late-night comedian. My stepfather sat big bellied and bearded nearby, sneering at the uncouth humor of the boy-bodied entertainer. Before I knew what was coming, an image flashed on the screen of the bare-assed comedian sliding his oily hands down the sagging skin of a naked old man. Where a laugh would have slipped out in my stepfather's absence, there was instead an uncomfortable hesitation as I waited for his caustic response. "Fucking faggot," he said, "If I had my way, I'd kill them all." With his predatory threat, my face went numb and my body rigid. I could feel the gnashing, the gnawing, the grating of his hatred against my bones, the carnage of his words dragging me like carrion through bile.

### **The Monster**

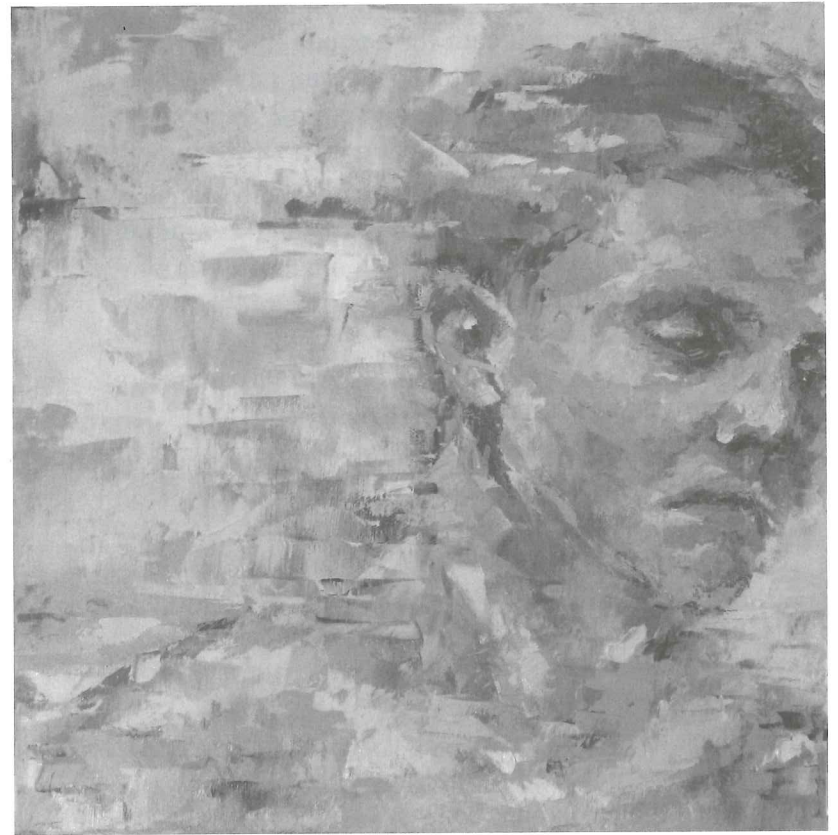
The world is an angry black hole in a bedroom wall. I search my childhood memory for answers to how I found myself so strictly confined to such a dark, lonely place—for what drug or drove me into that closet. I consider my stepfather who sent me cowering into the peculiar safety of otherworld creatures that I feared as a boy. But now he has aged, and I recognize the emptiness of his growl and weakening grip he has on my life. I've been neglecting my closet, bearing my undeniable self in a search for others who have shared my burden. Every now and then, though, my ignorant boyhood eyes seize my manhood skull. Filled with nervous fear, they stare at our reflection and cannot see the difference between the monsters outside the closet and the monster within.

## **Therapy: Directions for Use**

Hilary Harlan

Use only under doctor supervision. Contact counselor if rash, nightmares, excessive anger, or extreme mood swings occur. Change therapist immediately if accused of being depressed due to homosexuality, the weather, school classification, long-running war, or your job because, let's face it, everyone is depressed because of his/her job. If upon arriving for your first visit with a counselor, he asks you why you are there, simply tell them you have no fucking clue and ask them to figure it out. If this offends your counselor, seek another counselor. If you are afraid of saying the word "fuck" in public, specifically to a trained professional, simply respond that you need some tips on how to cool down your extreme anxiety. Attempt to hold back tears. When your counselor asks you what makes you anxious, simply reply that you don't have one goddam clue, and you thought that was their job to know that. If you are afraid of taking the Lord's name in vane in front of a person of an unknown religion, simply tell the counselor that you feel anxious everywhere, specifically at work, almost to the point of being agoraphobic. When the counselor's face falls into a stern and angry expression, and he asks why you think you may be agoraphobic, simply respond that you don't understand the question because you are concentrating too hard on trying not to have an all-out panic attack right here in the office because you truly feel like you might be murdered by his facial expression. If admitting that sort of emotion upon this first meeting is troubling for you, you may instead tell the counselor that you are afraid of the mall, Walmart (especially on Saturdays between the hours of 10AM and 2PM), restaurants on Sundays after noon but before 2PM, large assemblies where there might be a gunman present, public events that are often target to terrorist attacks, your apartment because you can hear people talking through the walls, and his office. You should tell him that you change your habits to avoid heavy traffic of both people and cars. If he suggests that you buy a totem, a small trinket, let's say a pin, to keep in your pocket, you should do this. If he tells you to hold onto it tight to remind yourself that the bad things, the anxiety, the overall heteronormativeness of the people you are surrounded by will go away soon, trust him. Never trust him. When you find the small glass "get-well" teddy bear at the consignment store, buy it.

Keep it in your pocket for the purposes listed above. Get it out and flip it over in your hand when you are greeting customers at work. Do not drop it. When it falls to the ground and bursts into a million pieces along with your hope of ever going back to see a therapist again, go back to the therapist again. (You don't go back to the therapist again.) Six months after your first use, if you see your therapist walking down the street with an arm full of Pop-eye's chicken, politely tell him that fried chicken has been proven to cause feelings of emotional unrest and extreme arachnophobia. Don't say this. Instead, avoid eye contact and pull out another cigarette.



Hannah Cooper

**The Wait**



## A Hypothesis on Purgatory When Your Family Needs Heaven to Be Real

Richard Heyne

### *Observation:*

A scientist walks into an animal shelter,  
(don't hold your breath for a punch line)  
passes by the puppies pressing their paws  
against steel bars and rust and almost freedom.  
The scientist purchases a cat with a single hypothesis.

### *Hypothesis:*

Something can be both alive  
and dead at the same time.

Schrödinger,  
were you so scared of life  
yet detached from death that  
you carved riddles similar to the  
signature of an almost-artist  
on the inside of a bathroom  
stall somewhere in the middle  
of Sunrise, Florida?

### *Experimentation:*

Place the cat within a sealed box  
with nothing but a vial of poison.  
Since the cat cannot be seen  
it is assumed that the cat  
is both alive and dead.

The concept seems farfetched  
outside of Hollywood Blockbusters  
and first-person shooters:  
the living dead.  
How could something be both?

### *Analysis:*

My family hasn't brought it up  
since my grandmother  
passed from breast cancer.  
It is awkward and intrusive.  
The elephant is a third and fourth nipple  
six inches below the regulars.  
The room is a hospital.  
My family visits me like a welcoming party,  
trying to avoid early good-byes.

Supernumerary nipples are commonly confused with  
**BIRTH MARKS!**

Little dark skin with bumps like micro nipples.  
They function similar to a regular nipple.  
No, they cannot be sexually stimulated!  
The breast tissue is defective  
sealing in these spreading roots underneath their skin  
taking over my body while  
tightening around red organs.

My heart is the reddest.  
Roots wrapping around like a hug  
too tight from relatives who  
seem so unfamiliar.  
I never met my grandfather.  
He died at the age of 40  
from a heart attack.  
These nipples and their roots  
are noted as causing heart failure.  
My family hasn't brought it up,  
avoiding early good-byes.

*New Hypothesis:*

Schrödinger, please clarify the living dead.  
If living is literal,  
is death the outlook?  
Being told to finish college,  
publish a collection,  
get married,  
have kids.  
Then turning to lab coats  
predicting these goals have been  
trickled to dreams.  
Less than two years, they say  
less than two years.  
You're a member of the living dead,  
wishing your body would just  
pick a side.

*Conclusion:*

Schrödinger, you must have felt like a God.  
Far too much power for a  
single man to trap into a box.  
Short term goals are living dead.  
My family is living dead.  
Supernumerary nipples are living dead.  
Purgatory is living dead,  
and my friends are clueless.

**After Your Accident**

Rachel Hoge

You circled bent metal: a carcass  
we never thought would break  
but it did and you broke, too,  
bruised and purple like mounds  
of produce too injured to sell.

I never told you this, but it was comforting  
to know that you could die. You were

always busy, had lists you recited  
like a pledge *I will not miss meetings*  
*only meals* and *I have to work until*  
*I can't* because what else would  
your father care to hear about?

I know you think I cry  
too much, but sometimes  
I wish your eyes would  
swell—sell the last of their  
indifference until you fall  
onto the asphalt and call  
into the air that life is the  
worst and the best, and  
the rest are the days that  
make us something—and  
those moments can't be  
scheduled at 4:30  
on Tuesday.



**The Story of the Imaginary Granddaughter and  
How She Said Goodbye**

Rachel Hoge

When you died they misspelled my name  
in the obituary

and I imagined a girl  
eavesdropping, collecting my  
memories the way you used  
to hoard coffee tins  
and Sunday comics.

I wonder if she went  
to your room after  
everything and smelled  
your books, remembering  
how you told her being  
a writer meant learning  
a new word every  
day, and she believed you  
because you wrote  
songs in Nashville.

When she was twelve she brought  
in chapters of her novel and  
you said *I know some publishers*  
and *I'll mail this of tomorrow*.  
I wondered if she realized that  
you never planned to send them  
but kept the pages in a drawer  
hoping she'd get better.

I wonder if she was there  
for those weeks your skin was

clouding purple and your bones  
were soft as styrofoam.

I hope she held you and  
told you that you were better  
than most, than anyone—  
because you believed in  
dreams when you were 73  
and 100 pounds, leaned against  
your walker, hanging clothes  
in winter—the afternoon  
sun circling your silhouette while  
you yelled at the *goddamn dog* and  
smiled when you caught her laughing.

## Sunday Worship

Rachel Hoge

One time Sabrina's aunts got stuck  
in Merlin's castle hours before  
we sat in pews saying *Our father,*  
*who* ought to be resting is a cloud  
raining—insisting magic is false and  
witches are fiction. But the Holy Ghost is  
walking through my walls like  
he owns the place, so I say  
*hey man, wanna watch some*  
*cartoons?* and he calls me a rebel,  
a slave of sorcery, a woman  
who sews magic bands on her wrists.  
But I laugh and say *it's just TV* so  
he sits beside me and we eat cinnamon  
rolls until they say it's time for church.

## What God Likes

Rachel Hoge

Kyle was still wiping the snow off his boots when Ally opened the front door. He noticed her hair was a darker shade of brown, her face pale in comparison. She'd gained some weight since he'd seen her last, though that was the summer she was determined to spend their family vacation in a black, string bikini. The swimsuit horrified their mother—a born Baptist and deacon's wife, who wasn't shy about either. This was the same summer Ally stopped going to church and their dad gripped the steering wheel, the Sunday morning sky bursting blue, and decided she'd have to move out.

"How was your flight?" Ally asked.

"Short," Kyle said, wheeling his suitcase inside the apartment. "I barely got anything done."

"Don't tell me you brought a suitcase full of books," Ally said, rolling her eyes. "Tomorrow's my graduation—we have to celebrate!"

After eight years in and out of different colleges, Ally had finally earned her bachelor's degree in Chicago. Their parents were flying in tomorrow morning, attending more out of disbelief than support.

"Do you really think that's a good idea?" Kyle asked, his voice quiet. Though he was grown, there was something about being around Ally that made him feel like child again. "It is your graduation... and Mom and Dad are coming."

Ally showed Kyle the guest room, unlatching the futon and letting the panels fall. Kyle put his suitcase on the mattress.

"Just think about it," he said. "You know they're not big on drinking... and you haven't seen them in a long time."

"You have *got* to loosen up," Ally said, pulling his arm and leading him into the kitchen. "You take everything so seriously, Kyle. I swear... I don't even think we're related half the time."

"I just like feeling accomplished," Kyle said. "What's wrong with that?"

"Doesn't leave much time for a life," she said, leaning against the counter. "I bet you haven't even dated one girl since you've been in college."



Kyle put his hands in his pockets. "I've been busy."

Ally shook her head and walked to the cabinet. "Well, clear your schedule... because tonight—" she passed him a glass "—we are celebrating." She poured them each a shot of whiskey.

"Ally... you know I don't like this stuff." Kyle had only ever drunk wine, usually at weddings or holidays. Even then, he only allowed himself one glass.

"Tonight you do." Ally smiled, and thrust the glass in his hand. He tipped it back slowly, the liquid thick on his tongue.

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Kyle's feet dangled from the stool, his hands gripping a glass of water.

"Where did you say you were from again?"

A woman was sitting beside him, her blonde hair long and braided. She was twirling a toothpick her mouth, the wood covered in spit.

"Tennessee," Kyle said.

The woman nodded. "I went there once."

"You mentioned that," Kyle said politely. He checked his watch and stood up. "I'll be right back... I need to find my sister."

He slowly made his way to the door, pushing between women in circles and men holding beers. He found Ally two floors down, her shoes abandoned on the floor and her legs swinging, the bottom of her dress coiling around her thighs.

"Kyle!" she said. "Come dance!"

"It's almost three, Ally. Don't you think it's time—"

"Come on... you promised," she said. "You haven't even met my friends yet."

Kyle stooped down and picked up her shoes. "Well, introduce me," he said, brushing the dirt off her heels.

A group of Ally's friends were standing in the corner, leaned against a cocktail table. When they reached the table Kyle dropped Ally's shoes. A woman with thick eyeliner and a tight, black shirt turned to Ally. "Is this the little brother you've been hiding?" she asked. "You failed to mention that he's gorgeous."

Kyle felt his cheeks flush. Ally pretended to put a finger down her throat. "That's my sweet, virgin brother you're talking about!"

Kyle glared at Ally and grabbed her arm.

"What?" she said, her stance defensive. "What'd I do?"

The woman with eyeliner grabbed Ally's hand and others followed, walking back towards the dance floor. Kyle watched her leave, his eyes feeling tired.

"You all right?"

Kyle looked up. A guy with thick facial hair and a tattered t-shirt was standing across from him. "Yeah," Kyle said, shaking his head. "It's just—is she always like this?"

"Who—Ally?" he said, laughing. "You haven't partied with her before?"

"Not really."

"You're missing out. She's wild."

"So I hear." Kyle strained his eyes, attempting to find her in the dark. "She's my sister—my older sister... but somehow, she makes me feel old." Kyle looked back at Ally's friend, suddenly embarrassed. "Sorry... didn't mean to ramble."

He shook his head. "You didn't." He took a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. "I'm Corey, by the way." He offered Kyle a cigarette.

"Can you smoke in here?" Kyle asked. Corey laughed, putting a cigarette to his lips.

"Ally wasn't kidding—about you following rules." He struck the lighter, the fire glowing against his skin. "I like that, though," he said, his lips around the cigarette.

"Seriously?"

Corey nodded. "People are always trying to be what they're not," he said. "You may be boring, but hey—"

"I'm not boring."

"Uptight?"

Kyle crossed his arms and looked away. "Sometimes."

"Why?" he asked, smoke leaving his mouth.

"I don't know." Kyle leaned against the table.

"Bullshit."

"What?"

"I said 'bullshit.' Of course you know."

Kyle's eyes narrowed. "My parents think they screwed up with Ally," he said. "I'm expected to be different."

"Do you think that's true?"

"About Ally?"

Corey nodded. Kyle stretched across the table and took a cigarette. Corey looked up, his face surprised. He took the lighter from his pocket and held it to Kyle's lips.

"It's not true," Kyle said, coughing as smoke filled his throat. "My parents are just... traditional, I guess. Ally is wonderful. Everywhere she goes is like a party."

"You're not so bad, either," Corey said, his eyes dim.

Kyle squinted, attempting to see Ally through the dark. He was suddenly aware that everyone around them had left— tables lay deserted, empty glasses filled with toothpicks and straws. Corey leaned forward, his fingers flicking ashes.

"I'm going to get Ally," Kyle said, turning from the table.

Corey stood beside him, his hands in his pockets. "I'll come, too," he said, dropping his cigarette. Kyle tried not to notice how closely they walked, how seamlessly their footsteps matched. When he finally reached Ally the music was blaring, the blinking lights making his temple throb.

"I'm ready to go," he said.

"Just one more song," Ally said, turning to her friends.

Kyle pushed forward into the crowd. "Please? Let's go," he said in Ally's ear. She shook her head. "One more," she said, wrapping her arm around his neck. "Have fun." Kyle looked around for an exit, realizing he was stuck between dancing bodies that were too close, too compacted. He felt movement from every side—the bending of knees, the smell of sweat and smoke.

"You don't dance?" Corey said, his voice loud above the music.

"Not really."

"Just move your hips." Corey demonstrated, his body making circles in the crowd.

Kyle shook his head. "I can't—"

"Oh, come on." Corey put his hands on Kyle's hips, Kyle matching his step. "Look at you," Corey said. "What a natural."

Kyle laughed, quiet but unrestrained. And then it faded, his mouth hanging long, his hands gripping the curved muscles in Corey's arm. He saw dry, peeling skin on his face—probably from a dull razor—and the slow way he chewed his lips. Kyle's feet shuffled and he felt hands on his side, holding his hips, moving his body. Corey was behind him—his body beating rhythmically,

keeping time like a metronome. Kyle leaned in further, his eyes closed, his back curving towards Corey's chest. His hands found the toned muscle in Corey's thighs and scraped against his jeans, the denim's friction making his hands numb. It'd only been seconds, but he had the odd sensation that someone was staring. He opened his eyes and found Ally— her eyes wide, her face shocked.

Kyle pushed his way through the crowd and out into the early-morning cold, sliding into the first taxi he saw. He leaned back into the leather seat, his hands in fists.

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It took Kyle ten minutes to find Ally's spare key, its metal body wedged underneath a porcelain pot outside. He walked inside, the apartment seeming too quiet without Ally there to fill it. He locked the door behind him and went to the guest room, flinging his sweater and jeans off, the musky smell of the fabric making him sick. He slid his boxers off, the bottom damp with sweat. He threw on clothes and went to the bathroom, grabbing his toothbrush and scrubbing until the taste of smoke left his tongue. He stared at himself in the mirror—his long healthy hair, his green eyes—and where everyone else saw someone handsome Kyle saw a scrawny kid in Sunday School, wearing button-ups with tight collars and sleeves.

"Do you know what abomination means?" his dad asked once.

Kyle nodded, even though he had no clue. He was only seven.

"It's things God hates," his dad said, his hands on Kyle's shoulders. "We never want to do what God hates... that makes Him sad."

"Like that time I took Ally's game without asking?" Kyle said. "I bet God hated that."

"He did," his dad agreed. "But there are things God hates even more. It's hard to explain, Kyle, but God... He owns your body. You can't do whatever you want with it."

Kyle scrunched his nose. "Like what?"

"Like taking things that aren't yours, or being mean... and other things, that you won't know about until you're older," his dad said, his voice low. "Just don't ever do anything God doesn't like, and you'll be fine."



"But how do I know if God won't like it?" Kyle asked, his voice desperate. His dad laughed, and put a Bible in his lap.

By the time Kyle was thirteen he could quote sections of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, could justify how the sodomites were dragged to the city gates and stoned. He taught Vacation Bible School and studied the story of Adam and Eve, knowing that they were made to fit like a puzzle. He told no one about his feelings for Jimmy, his best friend from middle school. When he was sixteen he told Ally about his first kiss on Jennifer Hane's front porch, and Ally said if Jennifer broke his heart she'd kill her. But Kyle didn't tell her how the kiss just wasn't right, just wasn't natural—like wearing shoes in bed. No one knew the nights he spent in the dark, sliding his hands past his hipbones, imagining the lips and body of a man until his skin was wet and his hands could do no more. Those were things he kept to himself.

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Ally came home with the morning birds, their chirping audible through the window. Kyle was asleep on the couch, a blanket wrapped around him. Ally's body ached for bed but she sat on the couch instead, rustling Kyle awake.

"Hey," she said. "What happened to you last night?"

Kyle blinked and rubbed his eyes. "Just got tired," he said, pulling the blanket close.

"You really worried me," she said, standing up and pouring them both a glass of water.

"Welcome to my world." Kyle looked down at the floor, his head pounding.

Ally passed him a glass. "Here— drink some water." She sat down in front of him, her hand on the couch cushion. "So what happened last night?"

"What do you mean?"

"Kyle... come on."

"There's nothing to talk about," he said.

"Whatever happened with Corey... whether it was real, or just the alcohol, we need to—"

"That's what it was— the alcohol, I mean," Kyle said.

"Corey just started dancing on me..." He shrugged. "You have some weird friends." He laughed, trying not to sound anxious.

Ally looked at him, her eyebrows wrinkled. "And that was

it?"

Kyle shrugged. "I guess I was a little upset about all the jokes—you know, about me being uptight."

"I just wanted you to lighten up," Ally said. "You've been this way since you were a teenager—a total perfectionist, living your life for Mom and Dad. You don't have to do that, you know. You can be and do whatever you want." She tried catching his eye, her face expectant.

Kyle nodded, but wasn't listening. He was already thinking about getting a hot shower, taking a double dose of aspirin, and ironing his shirt. He needed to look neat and normal, with no traces of a late night or hangover. He needed to look perfect.

**Jimtown Bar**  
Ben Hussung

Hot, stuffy air, I, thirteen, smother  
against polyester seats. Truck cab tight,  
midnight moon and blurry stars,  
Highway 39. Snuggled in a blanket  
between a Baptist missionary couple,  
searching.

*Daddy, come on home now.*

Five miles north of Lane Deer,  
the building sits long, sheet metal, white  
paint cracking in streaks, nestled in front  
of two small hills, the hundred yards between  
filled with rusty beer cans and battles, cheap  
and used up, a six-foot mountain.

*Daddy, come on home.*

Gravel crunches, our headlights dance  
across old trucks' busted fenders.  
The door opens, bitter cold wind  
bites my face, the missionary woman  
tucks the blanket tight  
around my shoulders.

*Daddy, come home.*

Daddy's old Chevy pickup rests in the corner,  
its windows foggy. The missionary man opens  
the door. Little brother and sister huddled  
in the middle shivering, sweat pants and t-shirts,  
caramel faces round and pudgy, tiny fingers gripping  
a half-eaten Snickers and empty Coke can.

*Daddy.*

Cottonwood stumps line the bar.  
Daddy fills the one at the end,  
head down, long black hair wild  
against his weathered, skin-taut face.  
Eyes muddy, deep smoke peeling  
from his lips, bottle clutched in hand.

*Baby, I'll be home in a minute.*



## My Best Moments

Ben Hussung

run south down I-65, barely  
prodding along, hardly

inside my own head. Blank  
black miles in front

and behind, headlights wink  
amid trees in the median. I shout

hymns with no one  
but myself, words—

newborn souls—springing  
from deep wells,

the steering wheel  
drum, voices rushing

toward me like rapids,  
full and wet and raging

with love, or from love,  
and then I know that I am

not alone. I am bound  
south, to where my family

lives and my father keeps  
the honeysuckle

bright, in bloom.

## Barnacles, Brachiopods, and Annelids Leave Shells at Least

David Langdon

Opening the door on a song  
half-finished,  
I have the urge to market the first  
canoe-on-a-stick.

The omnipresent canoe  
tied fast to the bank of  
the river while my  
dad, Andy Griffith,  
cooks hotdogs  
at the fire and tells  
me right from wrong.

I went to town once  
to fetch you up,  
but you weren't there  
from then on  
up 'till now.

Now, every night is tender  
lit small by a candle  
so quick, I'll just go  
and stand by the ocean  
and hear every word played  
all at once  
in waves, and,  
toes to sand,

I'll miss you in there somewhere.  
The sea scoops out the smack of  
me from my carcass.

But, I remember,  
just down the road,  
there's a joint where they will play  
*Toto* to the sunset,  
"Africa" to the water,  
and serve me a soulburger with ease.

## Mahjong Table (with Our Filipino Grandmother)

Jade Primicias

Family time is at the table  
under the skylights, moon or sun.  
We eat between games  
and play between meals  
and there's always someone in the kitchen.

The rice cooker steams with Jasmine  
while discarded shrimp tails and shells  
pile up into translucent pink mounds  
while their dwellers do into Pansit.

We never leave the last bite sitting  
in a casserole dish or on a plate.  
The *last subot in Paris* is sacred.

Someone clears the dishes  
and takes the heavy leaf  
out of the caramel, wooden table  
so we can take four seats  
and build the walls.

We feel honored when Lola  
sits down to partake as an expert  
joining child's play.

She cooks all our meals  
always dressed for success,  
beaded slippers peeking out  
beneath her pantsuit.

She'll pretend that she heard  
and will laugh out of turn  
but she'll still kick your ass  
every game.

## Sunkissed

Jade Primicias

Your sloppy, drunken kisses  
taste a little bit like  
freeze pops, cold and sticky  
like the wrappers  
I would peel off with the grass.  
They bring me back  
to the long days  
in the faded kiddie pool  
out back by the fence  
my dad built  
to keep our nosy dogs  
out of the neighbors' yard.  
Your cigarette lips  
and vodka tongue  
shouldn't be as tempting  
or as sweet  
as a honeysuckle's nectar;  
the vines' fragile tendrils  
arranged in tiny pin circles  
wander like your fingers  
searching for the sun.





Cae Normanha

Vulture

## Mister Chiclot Ben G. Rogers

Finding the bus stop put April's mind to rest, if only for a moment. She set her heavy backpack on the bench that was only occupied by an old man. He did not acknowledge her or the backpack. She looked up at the top of sign post which had the familiar red circle crossed by a horizontal line with the words "REQUEST STOP" below it. Below that was a grid of bus numbers, which she could make no sense of. She was just glad to find a way back into London.

Although lost, April was relieved to get away from her friends. They said if she went with them to the famous Abbey Road crossing they would go with her to the National Gallery, but they cared more about shopping than the works of the masters. So when they all decided to hit the shops instead, April chose to go it alone. This would allow her to take her time and not worry about the next photo opportunity her friends wanted to visit.

After an awkward and hasty goodbye she was inclined to walk the opposite direction and soon forgot where the Tube stop was. She wandered the suburb almost regretting her decision, but finding the bus stop was assurance that she could, in fact, travel alone.

April looked down the street of quiet houses and office buildings for the familiar red bus that towered above the traffic. After craning her neck, still getting used to the left side being the right side of the road, and not seeing a bus in sight she sat herself on the bench next to the old man. She straightened her hat and put her hands in her jacket pockets, out of the biting cold, and hoped the bus would come soon.

The old man, who must have been in his eighties, sat gazing at nothing in particular. His mouth hung open with his tongue hiding just behind his lip and every few seconds his lips would touch, as if they remembered that it was proper to keep the mouth shut in public. They would soon forget their duty and fall open again and then close

for another instant and open, caught in a strange loop. April noticed the man's discolored hands that resembled giraffe skin resting upon his metal cane, which thumped on the ground almost in rhythm with the closing of his lips. He was wearing house shoes.

The collar of his tweed coat, half of it turned wrong-way out, bordered the back of his bulging neck. Most of the hair on his head was in his upturned, pointy eyebrows that made him look quite friendly. April thought he was a cute old man and wished she could set up an easel and paint a portrait of him right here. From his calm posture, she determined he must ride this bus all the time and he would know where it would go. Starting with the most British word she knew she said to him, "Sorry, but do you know if this bus goes back towards town?"

"I beg your pardon?" His voice sounded like every white-bearded wizard narrator April had ever heard. She couldn't help but smile.

"Does this bus go towards town?"

"I should sure hope so," he said a little too loud, "today is my wife's birthday party and I forgot to buy her a gift. If I'm late she'll be so cross."

April didn't know what to say. Before she could consider that she was intruding, she asked, "Do you know what you are going to get her?"

"Well, she likes necklaces. I'm sure I'll find something once I get to the jeweler's."

"How old is your wife today?"

"Heavens me." He raised his hand to his cheek where his mouth fell open once again. "Well, she'd say she's not a day past sixty but between you and me—she's a bit past that now."

April's laugh was courteous but her smile was genuine. The old man chuckled and looked at her for the first time. His smile twitched and his eyebrows flapped like they would fly away.

"I can tell you're no Londoner."

"Yeah," April sighed before she revealed the damning evidence, "I'm from the states."

"Don't say it like you're sorry, Americer is a lovely place to be from."

April turned towards the old man and leaned forward on the bench. Her hands wanted to join the conversation and left her pockets.

"We just grow up thinking the rest of the world hates us. I don't know. I almost want to say I'm Canadian sometimes."

"Nonsense!" The old man banged his cane on the ground. "If anyone could hate a lovely young lady like yourself then they're not worth the time of day."

"Thanks." April was glad the bus hadn't come. The gallery could wait. The smile on the old man's face disappeared behind a curtain of wrinkles and his gaze became non-fixed again. It was as if he had shut off and April needed to put another coin in a slot in his cane to turn him back on. Before she could reach into her pocket, the man's lips began the same cycle once more. An inward breath interrupted and initiated a pause that lingered between them.

"I have enough trouble getting along with other Americans. I don't really have any friends in my program. In fact I was just left behind."

"Pity," the old man coughed, "certainly you have a nice chap back home who misses you."

"Nope. He didn't see four months apart as worth it."

"I used to go to Spain once a year for business and Eileen missed me so much she would write everyday. I kept every letter." The old man's tongue rolled around his mouth a few times, making sure the teeth were still in place, "The busses have never been on time since the Labour Party took control."

April wondered if anyone would write her letters. She didn't even know her address here yet. She could use a letter. She wondered if this was what her four months abroad would consist of—wandering away from the people in the program who treated other countries as theme parks while she sits, lost, at bus stops conversing with



strangers. At least she was trying to be a part of the country, not above it.

"It's hard to be alone, though," she unintentionally said aloud.

"Yes, it is." The old man tapped his swollen ankles with his cane. "When my wife died—oh my."

The old man seemed to turn off again. April felt the cold even more now. It crept up inside her ankle-bones. She leaned over to get a better look of the man's eyes. His eyebrows were all distorted now, crinkled by a fault line of doubt. April quickly looked again for the bus.

"I can't..." The old man said, almost whispering, "Where does this bus go?"

"Are you alright?" April asked to the shaking man. Her eyes darted through the traffic and across the street.

"I'm just late," the man said as if it were a deep sin. His eyebrows stayed furrowed above his frozen expression and he just breathed now. No lip loops, no cane-banging—just a weak mouth breathing that continued while April rose to her feet. She suddenly wanted gold leaf frames inside warm walls, to be in the yellowy embrace of Van Gogh, where the paintings only moved if you wanted them to.

"Mr. Chilcott! A voice from behind called. "You'll catch a chill out here." April looked behind her to see a woman of Indian descent in blue scrubs half out the door of the concrete multi-story building behind her.

"Come inside for a nice cuppa, come on now," the nurse said, gently but stern. The old man's eyes sprung back to life. April thought she saw a puff of exhaust erupt from just above his eyebrows.

"I'm afraid I hardly have the time, I must make it to the jeweler's," he bellowed, without looking back at the nurse who was now approaching the bench.

"We'll call you a cab, my treat," she said letting him grab her arm for stability as he slowly rose. "I'm so sorry if he has been bothering you," she said quietly to April as she walked him back into the building. A sign

above the entrance read, "WEMBLY HOUSE: ELDER CARE & ASSISTED LIVING".

Once inside, the nurse helped the old man into a wheelchair and came back out. April was standing and wished for the bus even more. Another nurse came and delivered tea to the old man. His head hung low.

"I hope you weren't waiting for the bus," the nurse said. "The bus never comes. The stop is a dummy. We built it out here because sometimes our residents run away. We noticed the first place they're off to is either the bus or Tube."

April didn't say anything. She slowly put her backpack on, and kept her eyes on the old man as the other nurse began to wheel him away.

"We've stopped many elders from getting lost or hurt," the nurse continued, trying to meet April's eyes. "It presents us with a nice way to play along with their delusions and safely bring them back into reality."

"But isn't that like a trap?" April asked.

"It is a bit of a trap, but it keeps us from having to lock people like Mr. Chilcot up. A nice trap. Did he say where he was going?"

"He said it was his wife's birthday and he was going to buy her a present for her party," April said as cold as the breeze that now escalated.

"Bless. It's just him now," the nurse sighed, "If you need the Tube it's down three blocks and to the right. So sorry, we usually have someone watching but we're in a bit of a jam today."

"Thanks."

April began to walk down the street. She turned around to try and at least paint a picture of the old man in her mind before he faded into the shadowy walls.

## Elegy for a Noble Death

Abby Rudolph

I hope I die having sex in a hot air balloon that gets carried too high and I suffocate on the thinness of the atmosphere.

Or with my hands locked with hundreds of others, a link in a chain protecting the last mountain in Kentucky. I hope the bulldozers don't stop and our bodies are planted like seeds in the soil.

I hope I die alone in a thunderstorm in the middle of the ocean on a tiny sailboat. I hope I battle against the ropes and pulleys until the rage of lightning blinds me an instant before the waves fling my body into God's hungry water-belly.

I hope I die in the Revolution.

Most likely I will die withered and warped, my body eaten by cancer, my mind by drugs. Frail and breaking along my seams, my skin like the spine of an old book that rests for half a century in an attic and then cracks apart with a hiss.

Most likely I will die for no particular cause, without poetry, or honor, in a hospital room full of machines. Most likely I will linger too long and it will be a relief to the ones on vigil when I finally go.

But now my hands speak as red palms flying and my leg muscles twitch after running.

Somewhere there is a whale swaying behind a wall of water, wondering why he can't get through.

Outside there is a mockingbird on a limb, trying to talk to me, but he can only mimic stray cats and car horns.

All I can think about is sitting with you while you do your physics homework with a bitten pencil in your hand and a cup of coffee on your desk. A line of sheets drying in early autumn air, collecting pollen and grass-seed. Sharing a peach in the car. This is fleeting and false, a mirror of everything else.

I hate this poem because it isn't smart and it isn't funny. It's just lying naked and fetus-curling, bone-drunk on being twenty-one and infatuated again, full of the memory of your face when you conquered your Catholic guilt and broke the promises you made to God when you were small by finishing on my stomach.

I hope I die in a moment of overwhelming bliss and power. Thrown from a startled horse off of a cliff on the coast, any coast, to be found later lying limp among sparse wildflowers and sand and rocks. My horse running forever with my empty saddle on its back.

Mostly I hope I die without a roof over my head, in clean air.

But I'm not counting on it.



**Elegy For Neverland**  
Abby Rudolph

And now I walk through cherry halls with Freudian  
navel-gazers awaiting intellectual exorcisms and or-  
gasms.

Sometimes a box is just a box.

The unconscious was invented by a man who scien-  
tifically proved that no means yes. He mapped the  
female brain with cold metal instruments and wrote  
down its measurements in pencil.

The only phallic symbol he overlooked.

We walk around with our lead penises exposed,  
thinking we must have something to say. Of course,  
we must have something new to say.

Our hope is hidden inside salty mouths and the ten  
cynical quotes we all memorized but don't believe in,  
mangled mantras. (*Everything has been figured out  
except how to live.*)

We think about the industrial food complex and third-  
wave feminism and WWII. (*The opium of the peo-  
ple.*)

Then we meet a pair of eyes at the bar and we are re-  
minded of grass, and how many stars live outside the  
city, and the way our stomachs felt during our first  
kiss.

Books didn't prepare me for your smell: sharp like  
autumn ferns unfolding.

Or the opaque darkness of your eyes: open mouths  
wanting to swallow me whole.

The books are just a hand on the shoulder. A voice in  
the ear. *Every human has felt this way.*

You study rocks. Solid things with properties you  
can measure.

But at the root of the rock is its story.

Quiet hands painted moon-white from light that pours  
through broken blinds. Dark grass bleached pale.  
Dust motes float inside moonlight as inside sunlight.  
But moonlight hangs thinner, sweeter, dreaming. It  
etches scenes from *Peter Pan* on my bedroom walls.

**Ctrl+Z x ∞**

Chris Rutledge

My wife on The Sims just got cancer  
and my happiness meter is at an all-time low.  
You can be anything, they told me,  
and so I chose to be a stay-at-home father  
who never stays at home.  
At night when the crickets are first spawning  
I like to lay facedown on the astroturf  
next to the pink flamingo  
and imagine what life would be like  
without wants and needs.  
Every time I leave my house I lose time loading  
so I built a theme park in my backyard  
with a Ferris Wheel and a petting zoo  
so I can look down and see the animals  
the way God sees them.  
Even God can't/won't negotiate with chaos  
and before I can click there's an urn next to my plasma screen TV  
and a ghost in my back yard  
and I lay my face on the keyboard  
Ctrl+Z x ∞.  
Cheating your way in to money  
isn't nearly as satisfying as cheating your way in to life,  
and I may not have a sense of smell  
but I can see the stream of flies gathering in front of my nose  
when it's time to take out the trash.

**George Martin**

Chris Rutledge

Is what we named the dead bird  
Rotting outside of the diner  
The past six weeks.

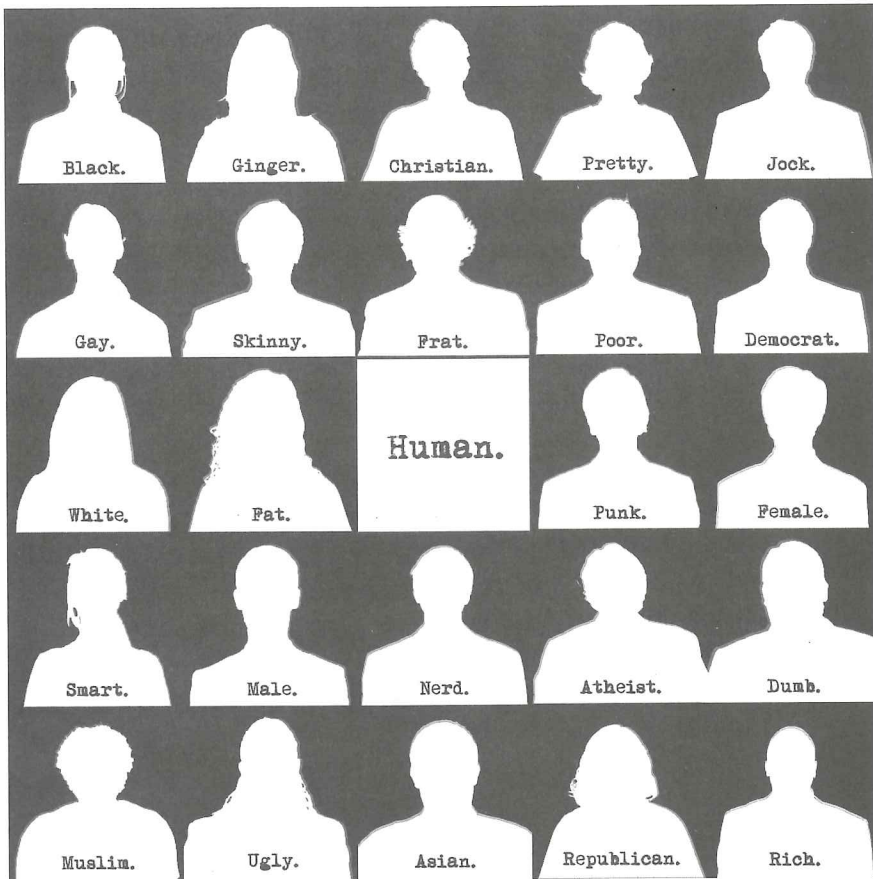
His skeleton and lungs  
Are melting into the street  
But he doesn't care,

Or at least not any more than Lisa  
Who owns the diner  
And a dustpan.

It took four days to bury my grandpa,  
Who left behind nothing but a family  
And a knife collection,

Not a poem, or a song,  
Or a rotting corpse,  
Or anything to remember him by.





Jeremy Copeck

Human Labels

**Dear Ex-Lover Friend**  
Rebecca Thieman

I found the letter you wrote.  
It was shoved in an old book and  
fell from the used pages like a paper  
bullet; a soft silent shot through  
book leaves , an impact on  
painted brown floors.  
My bare feet.

I was hunting through pine shelves  
of hoarded old things – books, journals,  
letters, lovers. None of them made  
me feel less alone. When your letter  
landed I felt the air around my foot  
swing and I knew it would be a waste  
to pick it up and return it between the leaves.  
I think you know what happened.

Your words are like aching arthritis.  
They used to feel like fresh scabs  
slowly peeled. I suppose this means  
I'm healing but it's still pain and I  
can't think beyond nerve endings.

When I say words I mean oceans.  
When I say healing I mean lost.  
When I say I found you shoved  
between the pages of an old book  
I mean enfolded inside me.

## The Bean Field

William Traugott

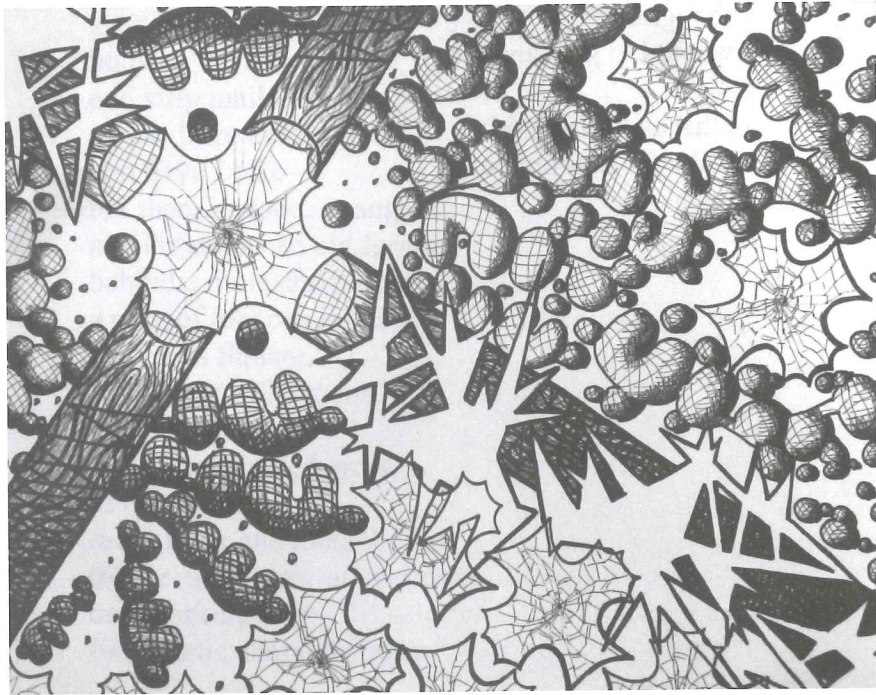
Driving down Campbell Lane  
I passed a bean field  
growing in-between  
housing developments  
and strip malls—unlikely  
across from destiny Lane  
and Crye Leike—  
but there it stood, strange  
and defiant as an old farmer  
behind a mule and plow,  
a plug of tobacco in his jaw  
on Times Square.  
Anywhere. The moon.

The beans rippled green  
in the middle of all  
those brick and metal boxes  
that seem to blow in overnight  
onto parking lots  
like plastic shopping bags.

The field was as peaceful  
as a pensioned battlefield,  
like Shiloh or Manassas,  
as remote as Buddha  
resting lotus-style  
beneath the spreading peepul tree,  
chanting *I sold you*  
*and you sold me.*

The bean field waved  
as I drove by, neighborly,  
I thought.  
I wanted to stop and plant  
a sign  
in that field that said:  
thanks for holding out.





Elizabeth Hoffman

### Micro War

## Storm Shelter Paul Watson

“Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,  
Blindly struck at my knee and missed.  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known...”

-Robert Frost, “Bereft”

She led the way down the steps into the storm shelter and he followed behind, carrying the flashlight and the weather radio. The wind rattled leaves over the concrete top of the shelter as they passed down into it, playful now, but hinting at anger to come. When they had locked and latched the door behind them, they turned on the light, a single naked bulb hanging from a mass of wires in the center of the room. The shelter was small, no bigger than a bathroom, with loose plywood boards laid over the dirt floor. Down there it smelled of fresh rain, Angie thought, though the rain had not fallen yet. The clouds, dark purple and full like a bruise, were coming. She had seen them on the horizon, barreling towards them with alarming speed. Several folding chairs were stacked against the far wall and he went about setting one up then another, offering the latter to her. She took it and they both sat.

“Not bad down here,” he said, placing the weather radio on the floor and adjusting the dial. “I mean I wouldn’t want to spend my summer vacation down here but it’s cozy, you know.” He looked at her and tested a smile. She did not smile back.

“It should only be a few minutes,” she said, crossing her arms, reaching up to grasp the opposite shoulder with both hands. “Probably just a little storm rolling through.”

“It didn’t look very little,” he said and couldn’t help laughing at her, how she was crossed up like that in the little metal chair. She hated that. He was always laughing at things for no reason.

“It should only be a few minutes,” she said again. “They only issued the tornado warning for an hour.”

“Still,” he said, really beginning to grin, like he was about to tell some sly joke. “A lot can happen in a few minutes.”

“Stop it, Dan.”

“I just think it would be romantic, don’t you?”

"No."

He stopped grinning and glanced away, then back at her.

"Why are you being like this?" he asked.

"I don't like storms," and she rubbed her shoulders again and then uncrossed her arms and brought her hands together, rubbing the sleeves of her sweater and then crossing her arms again.

"Well, that's why I'm here. To protect you." He smiled as he stood up, walking to the stairs behind her and back.

"This shelter is protecting me. You are just here," she said and watched him, as if on command, sit back down. After a time he began laughing again, running his the back of his hand over his mouth.

"What is so funny?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing," and then chuckled again. She sighed and the sound seemed to pass between them and only them, finding no resonance in the cool chamber, falling dead against the dirt walls.

"I hope a tornado does touch down." he said.

"Why would you say that?"

"I don't know. I've lived in Kentucky my whole life and never seen a tornado. Always tornado warnings and never tornados. I figure that's like living in the Himalayas and never seeing an avalanche. "As if to emphasize his point, the weather radio began squawking again, announcing the tornado warning for Claybourne County until 10 p.m. When the radio quit its talking, she seemed to still be thinking about what he had said.

"I don't wanna see no tornado," she said finally.

"Well I do."

"You won't see it if it comes anyway. You'll be down here, under the ground."

"Maybe I'll climb out just to watch it pass on by," he said.

She laughed and pulled her long woolen sweater over her legs.

"That's just like you ain't it," she said. "Thinking you can stand face to face with everything and nothing will ever hit you."

"What does that mean?"

"Have you not thought about this? About a storm coming and keeping us down here, until the morning? Until Clark gets home?"

He looked away.

"No," he said. "I reckon I haven't."

"I didn't think so."

"That won't happen. You said it'd just be for a few minutes."

"What if it ain't?"

"I'll tell him I'm a plumber, or some handyman looking for work."

"You don't look like no plumber," she said and laughed, snorting a bit.

"Why sure I do."

"You're wearing khaki pants."

"I'll tell him something," he said.

"Okay."

"Besides, Clark's a truck driver, not an educated man. You say yourself how stupid he is. If he wants to believe I was here fixing the toilet, he won't have the mind or the will to think otherwise," he said.

"You think you have it all figured out don't you."

"What do you mean?"

"You think just because we do this that you are so much smarter than him." And now she was crying and he hurried to put himself around her, both of them, skinny man and skinny woman, balancing awkwardly on the flimsy chair. She pulled away at first but after a minute she accepted his arms and cried into his shoulder, until finally, they lay on the floor and she stopped crying. It was rough, that wood against her back but when it was done he held her and that was all she cared about, all she had wanted in the first place.

After about an hour, with the wind above growing continually louder, he began rummaging in the corner and he came back to her with a deck of cards.

"Wanna play a game?" he asked.

"I hate card games."

"C'mon."

"I don't want to."

"Let's play Ukure," he said. "Two handed Ukure."

"No."



"You've played it before, at Martha's party."

"I hated it," she said.

"Didn't complain none."

"Well I'm complaining now. I don't want to play."

"What else are we going to do down here," he said. "I'm going crazy."

"I won't play."

"Alright then well I'm leaving."

"What do you mean you're leaving?" she asked.

"I mean I'm leaving. Walking out into the cold windy night."

"Don't."

"Liable to get sucked up in the tornado, but here I go."

"Stop, I'll play," she said.

He scurried back and began laying out the cards and soon they were playing.

"I played Ukure with a homeless man once in Louisville," he said, flipping up a card.

"That a fact?"

"Yep. He was black, begging for booze."

"Huh."

"In fact," he said. "I never played two handed Ukure before I played with him. He taught me how and we played right there on the sidewalk, on the condition that I buy him a beer if he could beat me."

Something hit against the door of the shelter, perhaps a fallen log. They could hear the whistle overhead growing louder, though muffled. She shook her head.

"Did he beat you?" she asked.

"Yeah. Sure did."

He won the hand. He had won the past two while they had been talking. She wasn't even looking at her cards.

"Did you buy him a beer?" she asked.

He looked up at her as if he had forgotten the story already.

"What? Oh. No, I didn't."

"Well that ain't right," she said and put down her cards.

"You said you'd buy him a beer if he beat you."

"He was already drunk. I wasn't going to buy him more."

"But you gave your word," she said.

"No I didn't"

"Didn't he say he would play you and if he won, you could buy him a beer."

"Yes."

"And didn't you say okay?"

"Well, I reckon I did," he said.

"Then you gave your word and you lied," she said.

"Why are you being like this?"

"You lied."

And then a gust of wind flew through the shelter, like the door had blown open, but it hadn't. They both looked around, trying to decide where it had come from but couldn't see any opening. And yet, the cards were now scattered across the floor, the game ruined.

The wind grew louder yet, like a train approaching in the distance as they sat there in silence. Eventually the light went out as the roar grew closer and neither of them moved in the dark. Finally she put forward her hand to try and touch him in the blackness but she felt nothing, like he was gone. Above, things were hitting the shelter door, bits of things, debris. They both silently wondered if they door would hold. They both feared it would not. They both sat still on planks of mildewed wood and listened as everything above seemed to be dismantled. They both searched out each other's outlines in the dark, never touching, as across the countryside, the roofs were ripped off of carefully built things, in some cases beautiful things, exposing all of their contents and raining down personal effects, even secret things, on waiting treetops and fields.

## Family History

Maggie Woodward

My family's name is written in ash across  
the state of Kentucky. Barnabas McHenry,  
the Methodist circuit rider, traversed

the colonies on horseback to spread the word  
of God—his great-great-great-great granddaughter  
does not go to any church. Miss Maggie Bell,

the suffragist, my namesake, taught me why  
it is called the *Rough River*—how do we teach  
ourselves to ourselves without knowing the selves

we are made from? Miss Maggie was a letter-writer  
now dead one hundred years. She lives inside  
the name we share—her ghost sees the sins

of fathers passing as ash inside of daughters:  
Miss Maggie, never married, my mother,  
the Margaret who passed our name to me,

my sister, named for the wife of Abraham,  
is our newest bearer of the Word of God.  
She told me once she cries for my soul,

living as ash inside my sinning skin. I can't see  
the God my blind Barnabas gave his life to.  
I saw my mother stare at the stained glass

in her childhood church where his name  
is welded. She told me once she will  
have failed me—if, when my body turns

ash, I do not rise to Heaven to meet her,  
my sister, Miss Maggie Bell with her books  
and papers, Barnabas McHenry and his faithful

steed, to spend eternity inside my name  
and her name and his name and all the names  
of mothers and fathers—if, instead,

I live only as ink inside of books and papers,  
who will pass our name, the Word, and our history  
of ash to the next daughter of Kentucky?

Last summer, I carved my name into a wooden plank  
and gave it to the Rough River—it will dissolve  
to ash and flow like time to a nameless daughter

who longs to swallow the stained-glass  
Word of an ancient mother.



**Mike Teaches Me God**  
Maggie Woodward

*Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

--Step Six, Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

Mike tells me God can be anything. He says he once knew a man, an old friend of Bill W.'s, whose God was a rock

in the middle of the Wolf River. Mike's told this story before, so he knows how to keep me rapt, how to describe

the boulder in the river as baby-skin smooth, its rough edges beaten by who-knows-how-many years of water coursing

around it. He says the rock was God for the man because it never moved—it was always there: reliable, infinite, unchanging.

Mike knows I cannot grasp God like some others. He's listened to my confession about the minister, who wouldn't let me park

my car in his driveway until eleven, a reassurance that the night would keep me hidden. Mike stayed quiet when I told him

about Kathleen, dead at eighteen on a Tennessee highway, her car hit by an eighteen-wheeler at eleven on an October morning.

Mike tells me my God can be *Good Orderly Direction*. God can be putting one foot in front of another, *do the next-right-indicated thing*.

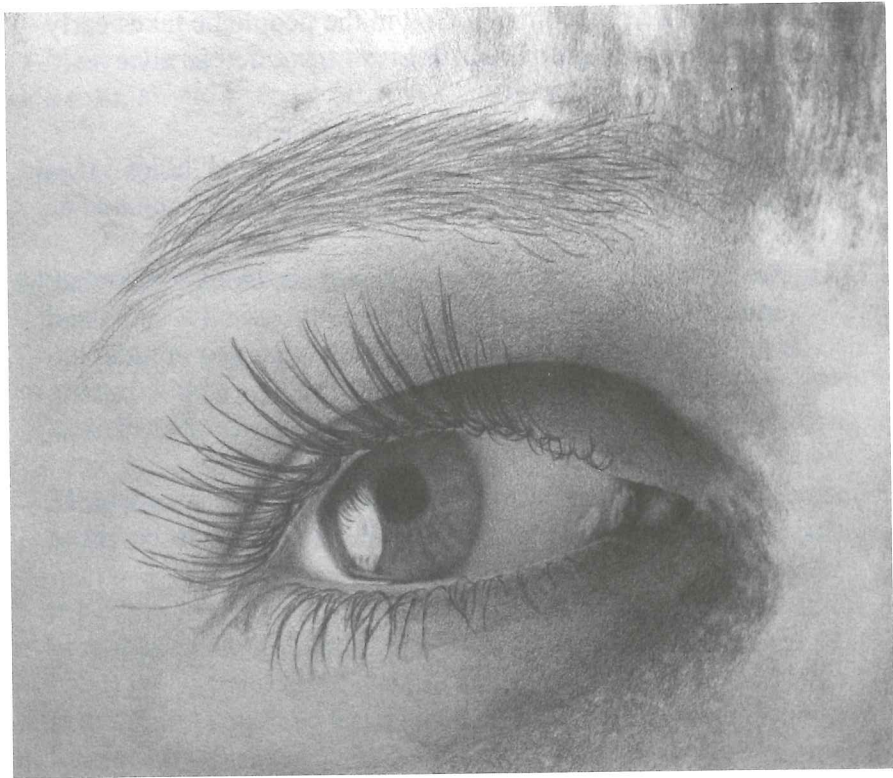
He tells me God can be in people, in our *Group Of Drunks*. That I won't have to look far to find the good in anyone—that I can scan

our circle and see God in the faces looking back. I trust Mike, but I don't know how God has the time for everyone.

I think maybe there's too much God in the people he takes early—those who burn so brightly their light stays welded in my eyes.

As for me, I tried to be taken and missed the exit—sucked back into a world of dull edges and dimmed lamps. I want to tell

Mike that I can't find God in a stuck rock, that God moves: that he must also be the river's endless water-flow, urging jagged boulders to surrender.



Lindsey Pillow

Concern

