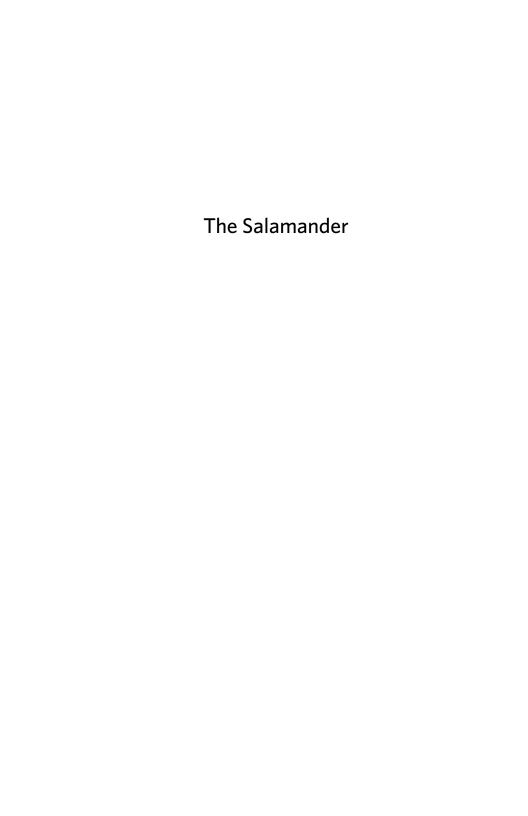
# The Salamander







#### The Salamander

The Salamander is published annually in the spring semester of the academic year by the Literary and Graphic Arts Society at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York. The journal is financed by Le Moyne College's Organizational Finance Review Committee and is distributed free of charge. No formal subscription is available, though copies of the most recently published issue may be mailed to interested parties depending on availability. Availability and mailing costs will be discussed at time of request.

The purpose of the Literary and Graphic Arts Society is to encourage literary and artistic creativity in the Le Moyne community and to publish outstanding student work in *The Salamander*. Submissions are usually solicited towards the end of the fall semester and start of the spring semester, depending on the editorial board's preference. Short stories, poems, manuscripts, non-fiction essays, photos and artwork are solicited for publication.

The Salamander was first published in 1975 with no volume number. Volume I was published in 1976.

Electronic submissions are preferred and are only accepted in response to the call for submissions, issued annually by the journal's editorial board. Submission guidelines are subject to change annually, based on editors' preferences.

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# The Salamander

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#### WORDS AND THANKS FROM THE FDITORS

"Spirit. Inquiry. Leadership. Jesuit."

This is our mission statement here at Le Moyne. The student writers and artists of the 2012 issue of *The Salamander* exemplify inquiry into the human condition through their use of language, art and photography. In their work, they capture emotions often hidden and unexpressed.

We chose to honor the students' work this year, allowing each student his or her own unique voice. As editors, we made few changes to content and respected writers' wishes for their original format.

While altering a few pieces of the artwork, we chose to essentially continue the look of last year's *Salamander* to create uniformity between issues. We would like to thank our graphic artist, Nancy Boyce, for working with us on the design.

We are proud to announce that this year is the first we will have an ISSN number from the Library of Congress. This number is to remain for upcoming issues. Many thanks to last year's editor Omar Qaqish and to I-Chene Tai, Technical Services Librarian at the Noreen Reale Falcone Library, for their efforts.

We would also like to thank our gracious moderator Dr. David Lloyd for his guidance during this process as well as the support from Le Moyne's Creative Writing faculty. Without the strong encouragement from the Creative Writing Program, *The Salamander*'s publication would not be possible.

Lastly, it is our hope that you enjoy these pieces as much as we did and that they inspire a lifetime of inquiry and creativity.

The Salamander Le Moyne College May 2012

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# **Fiction**

#### The Crown Vic Stakeout

From the clearing the car seemed harmless. Planted firmly, it didn't move for almost three hours when it first pulled into the access lot surrounded by the woods. The two boys had been squatting among the low brush there for twice as long as that. When their mark pulled in it caused no reaction but a glance of confirmation. The last three hours went by slower than molasses; time always does when you're waiting. A whole life can go by in a blink if you never look forward to anything... mine did. In fact, I never know what to watch these days, mostly family, but time goes twice as slow here. I looked forward to this since I heard, and to say the least, I wasn't thrilled. It was more like dread. They were about to ruin their lives... all for me like it could make everything right. See what they didn't get was that I had to die; it put everything back in balance. Revenge isn't possible when the victim is supposed to die. I'd never kill myself but what happened is only a slight sight better.

I knew those guys from the moment they were born; hell, if I didn't, that'd make me a worse brother than it feels already. And if you're the kind that would tell me that they're only my "half brothers" then you've got half a chance of finding my bad side. Even if we didn't have the same mother, those little creeps looked up to me. It's the father that counts anyhow, and what a guy he was. A family can always work if the father keeps it together no matter what cost. Seeing how my Pop took care of Mrs. Brooks, and her two little rug rats, always made me wonder why my mom did it. I was still in thigh high huggies when it happened, but I've heard enough versions to put the pieces together. If only Pop would tell me; as if he would ever speak a word that would blemish my mother's memory.

The closest theory to my belief was planted in my head when I was only nine years old. As my dad's brother told it, she turned the car on in the garage and left me snuggled up knowing that I'd be okay. However it happened, the real reason is obvious to me: she was doomed from the start. People like that always are. She threw away the jackpot of a husband and a baby boy that she could mold into whatever man she chose. When we read The Awakening in ninth grade I realized what my ma was thinking. She had everything and gave it up simply because she was free to. Maybe it was post-partum depression. Either way, if she had taken me with her, maybe she could have saved a life and my father no end of grief. There'd never be an end to his grief. She thought she could go quietly, and she did, but the repercussions never stop echoing. He had to know that I was doomed too; things like that always get passed on. It didn't matter. He remarried and gave me a new family, one I could grow up free from the sins of my mother. That's my father for you; always sure he can rewrite the rules.

But Deegan and Brian had a chance. That is until they grew up with me. It's so much easier to understand when it's over. They looked up to me because I gave them all the answers, and above all, always warned them not to be like me. Whole lot of good that did... looking out for them only made me love them. Them and my Pop were the only people that I could look at and have my heart drop just a little bit. Although I loved Mrs. Brooks too, it was more of a love you feel for a character like Mrs. Brady — simply because there wasn't a thing you could dislike about her. How could I ever truly love her like a mom? Whatever my dad said I knew she served one purpose — a band-aid to cover up what my mom had left behind. Unfortunately I couldn't even call her a scab because then you would get the wrong impression. A scab fills in what once was. Mrs. Brooks, bless her heart, could never fill in all the damage from a suicidal mother. To this day, I know that's why I was doomed. No matter what path I chose, it would have caught up with me. Even when I was alive I knew it. The only thing that haunts me now is how Brian and Deegan got caught up in it. Now they're about to carry my burden for the rest of their lives no matter how short.

It's unbelievable that my cold attitude rubbed off on those little runts. Without a doubt I tried to hide my apathy towards the life dealt to me. You can't really expect for that to work though. How often does "do what I say not what I do" make you want to listen? It's been used by every shitty parent in history and makes a perfect recipe for shitty children. But really, why would they look up to me instead of that shining beacon of a father? I guess it's because I didn't look up to him either. God I loved that man, but he accepted everything in stride. You can't trust a guy that compliant with the horrible circumstances he had to bear. Maybe that's why my mother did it... he just took everything and stayed the same happy. Certain things can put him in the dumps for a spell, but he's steadier than a pacemaker and more reliable too. She probably knew she wasn't normal and the impossibly content disposition he possessed drove her to end it. Who wants to spend the rest of their lives with somebody that happy? I simply can't think of anything more boring. Sometimes you gotta get the wind behind your back and go out in a blaze.

Once Deegan moved I knew it was finally time. His cue came from the car door slamming shut and the figure trotting towards the woods. Brian followed suit as he always did. They both slunk along the tree line until Brian cut back in fifty feet before the car. My oldest brother sped up and jumped into the back, shutting the door so quietly it made a hollow sound like kickin' a bottle. He knew the man would hear it regardless, but that smart bugger knows we'll tell ourselves anything to disprove anything out of the ordinary. As Officer Siegerst made his way back to the car wiping droplets of urine off his hands, he reflected on why it was so hard to piss with a utility belt on. He figured the engineers who made that crap should factor that

in when making them; after all, engineers are men. He knew he'd made up that door sound in his head because he always chose this road to park on specifically because it was so quiet and afforded him naptime once a week.

As soon as he sank back into the seat he heard, "Keep lookin' right ahead super cop." Startled by the noise, Weagar kept his hands on the steering wheel as his eyes flicked into the rearview. He knew he should just take off, but starting the car would startle the maniac and he never heard of the bulletproof racks actually holding up. It's funny what you're sure of when you're about to die... not much.

He couldn't make out the face but a glimmer of metal grabbed his attention. "And quit glancin' back here in the mirror. Busy yourself with the road, after all, that's your job — stare at the road." Deegan spat at the shrinking officer.

"You can't even shoot through the rack asshole, and the doors don't open from the inside. How 'bout we just drive to the station?" Siegerst unleashed as he grew a little confidence.

He waited for a response and alls he got back was "Let's." Weagar calmly stuck the keys in the ignition and rolled forward. Two loud pops meant he was riding on rims.

From behind him came, "Please look to left and unlock the door for my brother." He saw another black hoodie and jeans pointing a snub nose, the one that went missing from Uncle Bob's estate sale, right against the window. God why did I flash Brian that steel before I stashed it in my dress shoe? Deegan was bright enough to pretend he had a gun so that Siegerst knew why all of this was happening. There's no revenge if the culprit doesn't understand his punishment. Brian jumped in without a word. He was never much of a talker. He pointed the revolver keenly at Siegerst's forehead and cocked the hammer.

Deegan announced, "See we had another brother until he went down on I-80 thanks to your nudge, what the fuck did you think would happen?" He realized the two assailants went to his church. "Listen boys I only tried to box him off the road for his own safety; your brother was toppin' 110 it was bound to end badly. I've been cleared by the law and made my peace with Jesus."

Brian straightened up and said, "It's a beautiful story, but you shouldn't live your life on it." His last word was followed by a resounding bang that lifted the car and shot the window out as Siegerst slumped against the door, head hanging out the shattered window. "Or your death." After that, Brian got out and let Deegan out the back. Some revenge, huh?

I remember swerving my Honda 2750 with Siegerst on my tail. He always had a hard on for me and he was about to catch me. I always knew it'd end that way. I couldn't go out quietly like Mom. The end was worth the wait. I only have one regret — those boys are doomed.

# Eyes on a Bookshelf

I am Fergus. This spot on the bookshelf has been mine since they were built. The books were filled in about me; I liked their closeness. There are many, many books on these shelves that curved about the room to encircle the woman; she liked it too.

The woman was Finn, and I liked her, I suppose. We had similar habits: we both stayed in the library, leaving only for the short time it took us to use the facility, get the mail, get groceries, and eat. She used to go out all the time, or so she said. I did not know her then.

We had our routine. Every morning she would call me for breakfast, and then when she had refilled the enormous mug for the third time, we made our way down the winding staircase to the library and took our places.

Finn liked to sit in the big armchair after scanning the meticulously ordered shelves until something caught her eye. She always said that if she was supposed to read it, that it would seem to leap off the shelf of its own accord.

My neighbors were hardcover editions. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* were my primary company, but on any particular day I would make my way around the twisting shelves and find the more adventurous, and my personal favorites: *The Rats of NIMH or Redwall*.

Finn would comment to me after reading a book and explain the conflicts or anything that really set her off... which was pretty much everything. From these descriptions I knew almost every book in the library. I enjoyed falling asleep, staring at the cover art and I found that my dreams would be particularly interesting.

Sometimes I am not sure that Finn knows that I am here. It is hard to discern whether she speaks to herself or to me; but the outpour is almost non-stop unless her mind is in the pages of an exceptionally good novel.

This morning I woke up from a night of odd dreams — tired. I dreamt of a highwayman come riding, riding... who kept waking me up. I suddenly missed Finn and decided I must look for her. Her bedroom was empty, as was the kitchen, but the familiar scent of hot vanilla rose from the steaming cup on the counter, so she must be close by.

I waddled toward the screen door to sit, staring out. There was Finn, her hair unkempt and free flowing. I could not see her eyes, but I knew that they must be like ice to accompany her tense body — arms crossed about her, yet her shoulders were back and her stance was firm. I knew that the man in front of her did not stand a chance. In fact, I was surprised that he hadn't left yet, as so many had done before.

I didn't have a great view of him from my position, but I didn't want to miss anything, though I was tempted to get onto the counter and look through the window above the sink. His expression was unyielding. He

neither advanced nor retreated and Finn did not seem to know what to make of it.

"That's what you're trying to do, you're trying to forget I ever existed! Part of life is getting hurt and trying to figure out what it is that you need. Don't push me away..." His voice took on a softer tone near the end. I wasn't entirely convinced of pure intentions.

She stared him down, "Well, this is my life now, I don't need you — I'm living the life I have always wanted."

"Well, I will come back and you think about it. How can you live the life you always wanted and not want to share it with anyone?"

Finn didn't answer, but I so wished that she would. I growled deep in my throat. I shared it with her and I couldn't be happier. But I wasn't sure how happy Finn was. She was the same as she always had been, and that was... content.

Presently, Finn walked back inside, stiff-legged. She abhorred not having any response. I have never had that problem. She stepped around me absent-minded, hardly noticing me. That was just as well because I was still processing as I pressed my belly to the cool floor.

She did not read that day. I tried to lead her down into the library; I paced back and forth. I stayed on the shelf and dozed for a couple hours, waiting for her, but she never came. After my nap I came back upstairs to look for her. She was sitting on the porch. I came out and sat beside her, trying to determine where she was looking. I waited for her to tell me; she never was good at keeping her thoughts to herself.

Sure enough, "I love this place, Fergus. It's like something out of a dream for me. I had planned for this my entire life. I had said that I wanted to live in a beautiful house with all the books I could ever read, not to be bothered by anyone. Now I'm sort of wondering what it might be like to be bothered everyday... which is stupid because I have no patience for that sort of thing." She sighed heavily, and then frowned.

"Well, it's no use dwelling on anything." She got up and walked inside, slamming the screen door behind her. I hope that wasn't directed at me, because that was rude.

After that, she went down to the library and stayed late into the night; reading a page of one book, a chapter of another, until a tower of books rose upon the stand beside her. She could not seem to find one that captured her mind enough.

"My mind will just not do what I want it to!" Finn exclaimed.

By now it must have been in the early hours of the morning and my eyelids would open no further than slits even when a hardcover flew inches past my nose.

The man came back the next day; this time I made sure to be on the windowsill when he drove up. I narrowed my eyes at the full pot of coffee

on the counter. There were two mugs next to it. How could she do this to me? Maybe I could get hair in it...

Yet, here he was at the door, being invited in. I narrowed my eyes at him, hoping he would take the hint. But he just looked at Finn. I had never seen anyone look at anyone that way before.

"I thought we could go out for breakfast," he commented.

"I like it here." Finn poured the coffee. "Sugar? Cream?"

"Both please," he smiled and looked about the room. "I like it here too; it suits you so well." He removed his coat and placed it on the back of his chair. The jacket's fibers were just so that I imagined tearing them out one by one and piling them in a dark corner where they would lay, forgotten.

"Well, thank you," Finn replied, a shy smile playing upon her lips.

The man stayed all day just talking with Finn. She showed him our life. Then he came the next day. At some point I retreated down the winding staircase to the library. The room was dark, a pretend fire burned in the fireplace and the books were waiting for me. I jumped up to the second shelf and walked about the titles until I found something comforting.

The cover art reminded me of some dream that I could never completely remember. Elves, fairies, dryads, and even birds danced upon the cover. Wildwood Dancing looked so terribly intriguing; if there were ever a world out there that looked like this, I would live there. I bet Finn would too. She always said that she could live in the Wildwood, and every time she picked up the book, she did. This book was old with a cracked cover and the spine was so soft it could be turned inside out. I settled next to this and shut my eyes. When I was ready to come back up, perhaps Finn would have made him leave.

That was not the case. I sat on the cool, tile floor with elegant poise. I hoped that Finn felt the commanding vibes that emanated from my eyes. I had gotten off the shelf and climbed all of those stairs, just for her to ignore me.

I did not bother coming up the next day. I was on the top shelf deciding between two paths that were diverged in a yellow wood, when I heard her getting up. Finn's feet hit the floor then the usual few stumbling steps to the kitchen. A couple minutes later the smell of hazelnut filled the house and Finn's footsteps were more purposeful. I waited for her to call me. I did not hear the familiar echo of her voice down the steps. Instead I heard the scuff of slippers as they padded out of Finn's room. I knew that it couldn't be her because she hadn't left the kitchen, and these feet were heavier than hers.

I stayed on my shelf. I didn't need her voice drifting through these books, complaining, describing, and speaking to fill the air. I breathed heavier and thought I detected more oxygen than normal, but my ears echoed with the footsteps that were neither Finn's nor mine.

# Another Rainy Night

The town was always empty of people. Only cemeteries and monuments to wars are tended by its residents. The young move away and the old drink coffee, talk about the rain and the ache in their knees that predicted it. The tavern and the rest of the town are divided by a rough, black strip of road.

A wife and husband walk down the damp sidewalk; its cracks and pits filled with water. They walk to the door of the tavern and the man's shoe sprays water on the woman's jeans. She shivers. He swings the door open and walks with certainty over the threshold. He holds the door stiffly with his outstretched arm. The woman follows slowly behind. The man moves down the row of booths and sits in the last one. The man takes off his coat and slaps it on the table. His wife shivers and wraps her coat tighter around her chest.

The man orders two tall glasses of beer and carries them back to the booth.

"What awful weather we're having," she said.

"Yes." He takes a deep drink from his glass. "But it's good for the field."

"I suppose it is. I still don't like it."

"You're never out in the rain. You spend all day in that of-"

"Please," she stopped him quickly. "I don't want to fight. It's the cold that I don't like. I don't mind the rain." She takes a few sips from her beer. Her husband's is empty. He leaves and returns with two more drinks. He leans into her side of the booth and places the drink in front of her. She could feel the heat coming off of his arm.

"Drink this. It will warm you."

"What is it?" she asked.

"It's whiskey. I told the barman to add a splash of water this time.

"You'll feel warm in a minute."

He drains half the glass of whiskey without a flinch. His wife stares at the lines of his face; proof that a smile rested there once. She raises the drink to her lips. She can't hide the frown from that first taste.

"It tastes so strong. It hurts my throat."

"You'll get used to it," he said.

"I haven't yet. I don't think I ever will — I'm not like you."

"I think you're right."

"I want to go home." Her eyes gave the command more then her voice.

"Finish your drink and then we'll go home."

"No. I want to go now. Please."

He finished his whiskey and rose from the table. He pulled on his coat, drank her glass, and walked to the bar to pay for the evening. The man and the woman left the tavern together. The rain had stopped. The wife tried to stay close to her husband. She was cold but his body was warm. He was

walking quickly, each step spraying more water from the sidewalk's cracks and holes. The wife slowed down her pace to avoid the spray.

Inside their house the woman walked up the stairs to change her clothes and go to bed.

"Are you coming to bed?"

"Yes," he said. "I'll be up in a minute."

He could hear the water in the sink upstairs turn on and then off. He pulled a bottle of beer from the refrigerator and stood over his wife's desk. Then, from the bedroom, he heard the typical squeaks and immediate silence of the mattress. The man stared at the papers neatly stacked on the desk. He picked one up but did not understand the numbers or brightly colored charts. He dropped the paper back on the desk and watched some of them flutter off of the desk. He turned on the television, took a sip of his beer, and sat on the couch. He was asleep on the couch with an unfinished beer in his hand. His wife lay awake on the cold mattress in the bedroom.

# Morning People

"Uuuhhnnnuuhh..."

The daughter of Aoife was an early riser. The sun's light was only just beginning to pierce above the horizon, but it pierced directly into his eyes, even through the shade and curtains — that one substantial sliver gap which she promptly opened wide.

"Aauh!" He uttered a word he usually refrained from using in her presence.

"C'mon, get up. You promised."

A fine, long, thin iambic trimeter accosted his ears. He squirmed, his body caught in the web of sleep as his mind was torn between sweet mercy and wakefulness.

"What did I promise?" The effort behind the strained-out words was akin to that exerted climbing Everest.

Aoife's daughter sighed in a fashion to suggest he were the dumbest man in the world. "The fair," she explained, as if to a slow child. "You promised to take me to the fair."

Fair... fair... fair — damn! So he had. He groaned exaggeratedly, pulling a pillow over his head to shut out the light. All the child heard of his answer was a muttering like a loon or a conversation too far to eavesdrop on. She tugged at the pillow with small hands.

"I can't hear you."

"At this hour, men aren't meant to be heard." He shifted, rolling over while holding the same spot; Aoife's daughter was kneeling on the bed, pinning the blanket with her knees. He had held up the pillow with his forearm to shift, and now let it fall back onto his head so that it covered his eves.

"I don't know what that means," the child admitted at last, in a voice almost as small as she was. Sometimes she could be cute, he had to admit.

He sighed. Then, after a long pause, grumbled, "Either do I."

"Then why'd you say it?"

"Y'never miss anything, do ya, Hon?"

The girl did not answer. She laced her fingers, weaving and twining them in the slow, nervous, antsy way of young children. Though he couldn't see her face, he knew she was biting her lip, her wide eyes locked on him with such confusion that it bordered tears.

He sighed, this time a little more congenially. "I'm sorry." Most of the time he didn't understand the reasons he had to apologize to women; he supposed it was an accomplishment he knew when to apologize at all.

Between thumb and forefinger he lifted the pillow just far enough that he could see her, his eyes squinted against the morning sun. And she, like

an angel, knelt blocking the light — its rays framing her slender form like a heavenly aura.

He pursed his lips, trying to focus on her features against the bright light.

"Honey... I don't think it's even open yet." Hell, he didn't think the janitors had been round to clean up from the night before yet, but what was he to tell her?

"Yes it is," she responded patiently. In spite of her child's voice, she tended to argue — at least with him — as if she were the adult — as opposed to the whining and complaining of most other brats.

"The commercial said seven o'clock. It's past that now."

"...What time is it?" His voice was impossibly hoarse.

Aoife's daughter was only just learning to tell time. She took his watch from the nightstand, passing it into his open hand. He shifted more onto his back so he could hold up both the pillow and the watch.

After an eternity of squinting and straining, he handed it back to her. "I can't see it." He rolled fully onto his back and dropped the pillow onto his face. "See the longer hand?"

"Hand?"

"The black thing. S'called a hand — what number's the longer one pointing to?"

There was a moment of silence as Aoife's daughter counted, on fingers and by mouth, forcing all of her limitless concentration to the task.

God love her. "Honey?"

"It moved."

"What number is it nearest?" Good Lord; he'd be better with a digital.

"Three."

His mind filled with a curse.

"Is that... ten?"

Oh. That's what she'd been doing. "Huh? Nah, honey, that's fifteen —" "It didn't get there yet, it's nearest there."

"All the better."

She waited, but that was all he said. At length, she sighed, quietly but dramatically. She settled down cross-legged beside him, facing the headboard, the watch still cradled in her small hands. She ignored the sucking hiss of air through clenched teeth as the light struck his eyes in spite of the pillow.

It was more than the light that was causing him pain — much more, but the most painful of all was the fact that — how could he explain it to her?

How do you explain to a child of five that a trip to the fair costs money — for transportation, admission — before you even purchase a thing? It made him sick at heart as her timid voice returned to him — how she had

asked him the night before, the week before, after the hundredth time she'd seen the commercial and determined she still wanted to go. "I promise we don't have to buy anything," she'd said. "I promise — I won't ask for a single thing!" It must've taken her a lot of courage to be able to ask him.

Yes, sometimes Aoife's daughter could be cute. And sometimes she could break his heart.

She did not know what a bus fare was, didn't know admission was for every ride and not just at the gate, didn't know he would have to feed her — didn't know he couldn't afford it.

How could you tell her that?

He lifted up the pillow, just slightly, and looked at her. She was staring at the watch, as if trying to memorize its face so that she did not have to count every time anymore.

7:15... Jeeze.

And he started to count — if he stretched what remained of this paycheck, he could buy groceries with the next — maybe take tips for groceries this week and pay the rent with the next...

Aoife's daughter turned her head and locked eyes with him. She saw his mind in motion, that usual look of calculation as he tried to make it better. He saw her dark expression, the seriousness in her eyes as she prepared herself to accept defeat, prepared to hear that common word: No. No, not today, sweetie. Prepared for disappointment.

They saw these looks upon one another.

Again.

He bit his lip. The sun stung his eyes, but was nothing in comparison with that glare. But maybe, maybe...

In the softest of voices, in the slightest of brave, pained tones, Aoife's daughter murmured, "You promised."

And his heart shattered in the early morning light.

So he had.

#### **DAY 8:**

Nashville was an old town. Older than I thought it would be. I was now over a thousand miles away from my diagnosis and that fact seemed to give me piece of mind. I finally stopped to get some rest. I was staying in The Homewood, an upscale hotel downtown. When I arranged my suite at the front desk, I couldn't help noticing the attractive, blond woman that helped me. She reminded me of Ellie. Her smile was the same, her eyes too; her eyes had the same sun bursts in them. I got to my suite and inspected the room. It was nice. The wall facing the city was entirely glass, a mirror to the outside world. The table next to the bed had a bible on it. I never understood hotel bibles. Especially now — faith was the last thing to occupy my heart. Faith was an empty truth. All the love and faith in the world wouldn't stop my deterioration. I would soon be gone and nothing could change that. I leaned against the mirror to the city and looked out over the streets. Nashville breathed and for me it was all fresh air. The lights, the music: it all brought me away from my thoughts. Across the street was a line of bars and music joints.

I laid down. It was nice to be in a bed again. I had driven for the past twelve hours straight and needed to close my eyes for a minute. When I did, I saw Ellie. We were walking through the commons. It was winter. We exhaled clouds into the pale, blue sky. I could feel her hand in mine; it was a perfect fit. When I opened my eyes I looked around the room in hope that maybe she was here, but like so many times before, hope failed me.

Walking through downtown was pleasant. A light humidity hung in the air, one that you could breathe. The stars were washed over from the bright city lights. Kids from the college staggered from bar to bar. I took a turn onto Second Avenue and continued my meandering. It was here I came across a saloon called the Orchid Crow.

It was as old as the town itself. The wooden floors and jukebox made it feel more like west Texas than a city like Nashville. The lights were shallow and the air was hot. After five minutes, beads of sweat rolled down my nose and splashed into my drink. A dozen people or so occupied the establishment. Most were sorrow drinkers, myself included. I downed the whiskey and ordered another. An old man grabbed the stool next to me and sat down. The bartender called him by the name "Tennessee." I didn't hear him order anything. I just stared into my drink, avoiding eye contact. I could feel him staring at me.

"Who're you?"

The old man spoke with the same gravel in his voice that had left the deep cracks in his face. His skin had the permanent burn of someone who had spent their entire life in the sun. His eyes were black, his gray hair hid under a cowboy hat. I looked up from my drink, caught off guard.

"Me? Iack."

"Jack, I'm Tennessee. Tennessee Reaves."

He offered his hand. I shook it. His hands were rough and stronger than mine, even despite his age.

"Pleased ta meet va."

"So... a man named Tennessee, living in Nashville, huh?"

"Who'd a thunk it? You're not from around here, are you, son?"

"No. From Boston."

"Boston? What the hell you doin' all the way down here?"

"Just passing through."

"A ramblin' man. Don't see too much a them anymore."

"Nope."

"You don't say much, do ya kid?"

"Nope."

"You should try. Talkin' does wonders sometimes."

"What if there's nothing to say?"

"There's always somthin'. What'd you do back up in Boston, there?

"You ask a lot of questions, old man."

"Yes, I do. See, I know everyone in my bar but you. Now this poses a problem because if I don't know you, how can I trust you in my establishment? Now, I've done my time on the road, just as you doin' now. I've seen it all and been back. So why don't you tell me why you're here and I won't boot cha ass outta my bar?"

"I told you, I'm just passing through on my way to desolation."

"Those are some morbid words, son."

"I'm living in a morbid world. I'm dying."

"Shit, you don't look dying."

"Well, I am."

I pulled the tiny orange bottle of pills out of my jacket and tossed them to Tennessee.

"That isn't recreational shit. It's to numb my body from the pain. I left my job a couple days ago, packed my bags and headed west."

"Chasin' that horizon, huh?"

"Guess you could say that."

"I'm sorry, son." Tennessee whistled for the bartender. "Danny! Bring down the Macallan's."

The bartender grabbed a box from under the counter and brought it over to us.

"Some clean glasses too."

The bartender grabbed two glasses from the row hanging above the bar and placed them in front of us.

"Thanks, Danny."

Tennessee opened the box and pulled out a bottle. It was half empty. He opened it carefully and poured us each half a glass.

"This here whiskey was brewed in 1939 and aged forty years. The first time it was ever bottled was '79. I've been savin' this half for some time now and I can't think of a better time to finish it. Drank it first when my son was born, then when my son died, and the last time was when my granddaughter was born after his death. My daughter-in-law found out after he passed that she was pregnant. If there ever was a miracle, that was it right there."

"Why finish it with me?"

"Because, you remind me of him. He was diagnosed like you... I see him in your eyes. I see the same worry he had. And I'm gonna sit here and tell you the same thing I told him. And that's there ain't nothin' you can do about it. Don't worry about what you have no control over. Leave today knowing it as the day you lived your life."

He raised his glass to cheers.

"Now I ain't getting any younger. To becomin' ghosts."

"To ghosts."

We clinked our glasses and downed the gold liquid. It had a good, strong burn to it.

"Smooth as I remembered. Damn that's good, ain't it?"

"Yeah..."

"Now, why do I get the feelin' you haven't told anyone 'bout this yet?"

"Cause I haven't. Got no one to tell it to. Just the way I like it."

"You can't possibly like that. You gotta want to tell someone 'bout it. Hell, that's why you told me. You ain't even told your family?

"What family? My mom got drunk behind the wheel of a car and turned herself into a cadaver. After that my old man turned into a mute. When he finally said something to me, he said he was gonna head into work for some overtime. He never came back. So to answer that question, no, Tennessee, I got no family."

"I'm sorry that happened to you, Jacky boy. I am. Here. Come on, let's do another."

Tennessee poured us another glass. Over the next couple of hours I grew to know Tennessee better than I knew my own father. He told me about his family and the adventures he'd had. Tennessee made it clear to me, that time was everything. Opening my eyes every morning was a blessing. No matter how hard the day would be, I had a breath in my lungs, and that was enough to rejoice. I left that night with comfort knowing I would see Tennessee again. If not here, then in a better place.

# Poetry

#### Coffee Bean Bonanza

Beep, snooze, beep, wake up! It's raining which makes it so much harder to leave my cocoon, eves heavier than two cinder blocks. body slouched and dragging, I beg for death just so I can sleep.

At least there's always that first sip of coffee to get me through. Ahh, that first cup of Joe; that excellent espresso: that jamming java; that perfectly blended brew;

I don't even think coffee could shake this slump this morning.

First sip and I feel different, my body feels light like a feather as something called energy enters me, it's not a caffeine rush, or a jittery jolt, I feel invincible as the coffee continues to flow.

I go out to my car, but why drive when I can fly? Another sip, lift up my arms and on to class I go, flying through the sky with the birds and clouds, as if I am still dreaming or in a corny love song.

Class begins,

I take another sip and turn the teacher into a clown. She runs around on a unicycle with her red nose while the class goes crazy and I savor my magic coffee with an evil grin.

Time to go home to make a jungle in my backyard or maybe a safari — possibilities are endless.

No! This can't be happening! No more sips of my magic coffee? How will I get home? I'll have to call someone to drive here or maybe make another pot of coffee.

# Rabbit Hole

Sleep won't come for her tonight for she is hopped up on coffee, thoughts of all the nights that she has laid untouched. She has found a remedy to her out of tune melody — water, a lightly scented candle and the salt rocks to scrub and grind away the female need to be sexed and cuddled, stripping the layers of this undesirable trait, clothing the raw supple skin of longing.

Strapped to her feet is her release treading fast to mimic the intensity of pleasure she desires to feel breathing, thinking, pushing beyond her breaking point to gain at once not even the fraction of closeness she desires from the object of her sex.

Yes, three months ago she died.

# It's the Way God Runs the World.

Sometimes I am sad about the leftover dandelions. Do they know their hair is getting gray? Do they still turn to the sky — Do they hold sunshowers in their delicate faces? Not knowing they are ghosts. Not knowing it is fall.

The maple's leaves start to fall. We used to praise the dandelions Who, blooming, scared away February's ghosts. In their fragility, they soaked up the gray, in the ice and on our faces. They soaked up the sky.

I lay between the sand and the clouds. I'm waiting for July to fall. I'm waiting for the waves to wash over my face. I'm waiting for the dandelions to keep their promises, whispered as they turned gray. I'm waiting to see saltwater ghosts.

I wonder where they are, the ghosts of all the wishes we threw into the sky. Who told us that if we sent them on the gray legs of a wilting weed, they would fall and grow into meaningless dreams? Dandelions grow dandelions. They don't grow wishes. They don't fix memories.

My grandfather's bald, at least in my memories. I don't believe in ghosts, at least not his ghost. I wonder, though, if now he's surrounded by dandelions, and if their bald stems look towards the sky like I do. Maybe someday, they'll fall, the ghosts and the dandelions, and it'll just be a fog of gray. Even the puddles are gray. We waded our way through the memories, forgetting it is October, forgetting it is fall. The kitchen table's still loud, ghosts of laughter and ice cream from the truck. We couldn't see the sky, We couldn't see any dandelions.

Maybe they do fall. Every time the sky is gray, There are dandelions coming home, planting seeds of memories and ghosts, waiting to turn golden and find the sky.

## Lamp-post

"It will not go out of my mind that if we pass this post and lantern either we shall find strange adventures or else some great changes of our fortunes."

— The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe

It was the same journey each August. Dad, Andrew, and I squished into whatever whining car we had with pillows, macaroni salad and "Goodnight Saigon." We took the drive to the hidden cottage.

In the aluminum canoe, we'd voyage out to the hidden pond. I never learned to steer but Andrew couldn't even paddle. Dad navigated to the secret fold of the lake (it was full of unexpected places). I marveled at the beaver's dam that rose from the water; Andrew dipped his fingers in the pond and pulled up lilypads.

On rainy nights, there was no outside playtime. Dad picked movies from his college years, usually starring Robert Redford. We watched them on the tiniest of televisions. The rain and the bats and the tree's arms pinged on the tin roof while I cuddled into the tired, green velour arm chair.

When everyone slept, I'd disappear into the spare room with the ancient paperbacks and C. S. Lewis. Andrew never wanted to come. Beneath one bare bulb I'd travel into those endless woods of deep magic, Fearing nothing — not even the Lion.

# Lacking a Presence

Cement to foundation, pipes to outlets, floor to ceilings, hallways to stairs, bricks to paint, neighbors to friends, signifies an apartment complex.

Dare I walk into this house, this litter box? Where dust and mildew cover these walls. Insects and ants crawl on these floors.

No care, no love, disrupts the foundation of the home. Leaving this litter box untouched, letting it smell like mold. I can't walk into this dungeon, this house, this forsaken box.

Envisioning the nightmares of the hallways to stairs is another despair — of stretchers gliding through the hallway and bumping these stairs.

Taken to the hospital, a sick father with seizures, prostate cancer, swollen feet, failing kidneys, weekly dosages of dialysis.

Walking through these tunnels, passing the bedroom where he slept. I saw a strong man, muscular, active, deteriorate to skinniness, in pain, sick in bed.

The blood on these walls from the needles he acquired, the sweat, the tears of panic and emotional desires make up the liquid, the paint to these bare walls.

Seeking neighbors and friends
I cried for help.
I shoveled my way through the litter, making a path for myself.
I could not stay in that litter box
with the dust and mites.

Into the bright light, I see you, standing there watching over me.

It is okay. I know you tried, fighting to stay alive, Dad.

But I will always remember you and where I came from.

The memories cannot lie.

# The Mentality of a Bull

Shaking legs, trembling hands, secreting sweat glands as my eyes focused on the car's arrival and impact of its metal to my flesh.

The car had no lights for caution, no lights for signal. The honk of its horn, the screech of its brakes skidding.... woke me, leaving me breathless, in a puddle full of water.

Water of my own tears like the womb in which my mother carried me, supported me, isolated me from the outside world.

The world to which my dad was the provider, the protector, yet passed away and left me.

The child who is me... leaving me with this tough soul holding back these tears. Not crying because he left me with a father, the father of God.

Yet I am damaged losing him as my love. I have no faith falling in love because I do not want to find a man to replace my dad's sort of love.

I am still hurt. I am troubled. I am that raging bull. Flaring nostrils, charging horns pertaining that bull liking red sort of mentality.

#### Trust

Nonsense, confusion about wanting to know why you snatched away my inner core, my body, my strength, my soul.

The television enticed you with its negative remarks; you just shushed me and playfully yet quickly did your part.

You flopped, you fiddled, you held what was mine between your hands. You showed me what was yours and wanted me to do the same.

And that is when I stopped you, feeling guilty from the start.

Too bad I did not tell you what I was truly feeling from the heart.

You thought it was appropriate yet all these years went through. I can never forget all the devastating thoughts that I feel about you.

I try not to say I hate, so I would instead say dislike. Ugh... you know I hate you and would hurt out of spite!

I am boiling inside, I am flaming. My soul just wants to come out. To devour your inner being and make what is yours, mine.

But I have taken it easy and I have kept my mouth shut, which is the foolish thing to ever do so now with you, I lost my trust.

#### Sweet Air

i see her in an adjacent row, her sweaty forehead darkening her blonde hairline.

she is crouched over in a white and blue checkered short sleeve, focused. her glasses positioned on her head, ready to jump off and inspect any questionable berry,

anything unable to meet her steep standards.

96 degrees today, I am hiding from the sun's unbearable rays, but she doesn't notice. she is busy cleaning out bush after bush with her stained fingers, nobody could do it like her.

i know her well enough to know she is panting, slightly gasping for air, especially this berry infused air,

this field is her holy ground, this is her serenity, this is her escape, it is her. it's not the berries that keep her coming, nor the hot sun, nor the company, it's nothing

but her youth and memories of berries. This field that yields, this place that understands her.

## The Lively Bunch

Some drink to their memories, some try to forget. Never let them tell you it's all in good fun.

They're a lively bunch, that is certain.

They tell you not to threaten them with a good time.

It's never just fun when you're with the wild bunch. They'd rather push the limits than waste a good night.

They're young and stupid, but that's no excuse.
A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

I wish they'd grow up, those useless wastes of space. They're still sleepin' and wastin' good daylight.

I gave up my health, my wealth, and my mind with nothing to show but some good for nothin's waitin' for tonight.

## Apology for an Apology

When I leave this court I shall go away condemned by you to death — Socrates

I am writing you Grant's letter, surrender or die.

Evidence exists. Like Washington's cherry blossom, it cannot lie.

Do with my words as you please. Place them in Lincoln's pocket. Tie them to Franklin's kite.

I am Jackson. You are Carolina. Secede if you must.

But join or die.

## The Wanderer's Song

A little night music plays, providing a lyrical mood to my walk from your window.

The mood is sad, eerie it seems, but no, no sorrow is felt, no fear strikes this mind as I go on my search to find your mirror, your perfection.

I try with words, art, but only God can make perfection. I have its key.

So as I walk from your window, only happiness is heartfelt, for as it seems each step is moving away.

I find the next moment closer to you.

#### 11.24

Lemon-juiced, your blonde hair drips down your freckled shoulder still damp from swimming silent and secretly on our witching-hour rendezvous.

Towels and the September night draped over us, yet somehow colder than before, we link arms and weave up cobblestone walks. Lips tinted blue — you

lean into me and the soft weight of your breath against my skin makes me weak.

A kiss from you, like the first bite into an autumn apple, is crisp and clean; like the first fall of October snow, your lips melt on mine and wreak havoc on my heart.

It seems — you supposed iconoclast! that you hide me as you hold me, both your prize and your poison.

## My Sister's Long Hair

My sister's long hair, slipping over her sloped shoulders as she blew lightly on her spoon, dipped gently into the thick ceramic bowl that sat heavy in front of her. She drew back quickly, not noticing her hair becoming damp with broth, and the tips of her dark, winding ponytail swung back against her body. Tomato bled across her ribs and when she felt it seep through, she sighed.

Mouth full, she motioned at her shirt with her free hand, the other pulling it away from her skin and I passed her a small bouquet of coarse, white napkins.

## My Colorless Pen

rests stubbornly in between fingertips. Ink becomes letters. Letters become words. But they are lifeless. Still words go on and catch pages ablaze. But it is only a gray flame, vibrant as fading bone that seeps through cracked coffin. Thriving dirt carries cryptic dust into sun-bathed leaves. Concrete now gleaming within Spring's new births.

## Harpooner's Will

And will a whale's spout bellow secrets of the depths onto the surface of the ocean, sprinkling recipes for joy across the break of the world, that only periwinkles be granted access?

So children sing to the snails for their knowledge, if so. Yet seeing their contorted faces they close forever. Captains of ships will hoardingly net the surf for answers; then the swallows dive, and return less innocent,

in their bills are silvery slivers of hope, to themselves devoured and savored alone. Society is prevented from the dunes to ensure a secret's security in the bellies of the birds. Roll in the sand — the pixie-dust of mermaids —

cover yourself in golden powder and kneel before Poseidon. I'm worthy of your secrets but only admire the shadows of the everlasting trench. That is where you reside, and where from the cetacean took its news.

Explore the alluring seas at your will, to the wondrous walls of Atlantis, and you will never find reply!

I assure your obsessive mind — unrest.

## Caring Hearts and Lonely Souls

Decide forever what is now, and feel love drift away, but only if the winds allow, to not be blown astray. Caring now for only one, but lying to myself. Feeling e'erything's undone, a forgotten soulless self. To what degree will all this end? And I have peace once more. The choice is then:

> to comprehend, or rather to ignore.

Doubts echo inside my head, and drive me to the edge. Answers I always seem to dread, are with me on the ledge. But if I turn, will they follow, and haunt me to my grave? Or do the lies I swallow, beg me, be their slave?

## Death, Justified

They lead me through the square, through the maze of sneers and stares. My hands, bound in iron chains. Clothes with my own blood are stained. I cry, the heavens; Take this away! To God I plead, to see a new day. As I grow closer to my final state, I see those who wished me this fate. Colorless, death-driven eyes, crowding the streets to watch my demise.

My lips mimic my innocence, to societies' deafened ears. A mockery of their common sense. They watched me decay, these past few years.

Suddenly I laugh aloud, and smile at the thought of death; to be rid the ignorance of this crowd, of drawing my final breath.

"Let death come!" I cry;
"Let the devil comfort me!"
Over the jeers I hear the reply,
'Never the devil would take thee!'

I climb the stairs to face my fate, and turn to scorch this town with hate. As I hear a new voice above the others, "Hear me! Hear me, my brothers! This man accused of many crimes ones that live throughout the times is brought before you this day to die and so with death he must comply; Charged is he for many dead. Iustice be served, off with his head!"

The crowd erupting in applause. the shadow lays my head to rest. All to see in work their laws, with naught but one contest.

I smile as the axe is raised, and again begin to laugh; force a thought of better days, the work done on my behalf. 'So here ends my tale,' I thought, barely heard above the town. Now at peace with all I've fought, as I hear the axe bare down.

## Transformation

So easily we hide, no death but suicide. Fall victim to this fate. and cleanse ourselves with hate. We've lost ourselves to sin. to the dark that grows within. A phantom we must fight. Another vengeful plight. The daemons I well deserved. hang the love that I once served. Turning eyes to black, and again they spin the rack. The pain that I've forgone, is lost within this song. But will again be born. Behold its newest form:

A shadow overtakes me and bathes me in cold sweat. a shivering death that I foresee or a life I can't forget. Decisions I wish that I'd once made and mistakes I wish I'd not. seven days since I've last prayed to a god I've long forgot. A broken dream of something new the last remaining light, cast upon the midnight view to vanish out of sight. Life goes with my dying hope for all this world contains, a time at last I couldn't cope Louldn't break these chains.

I only wish to set in stone the words in ancient dust, to crawl from out the great unknown or back within disgust.

## I'm Tired

I'm tired.

I'm tired of eating when I'm not hungry, and tired of sleeping when I'm not tired. I'm tired of smiling when I'm not happy, and tired of frowning when I'm not sad.

I'm tired of believing when I don't believe, and pretending that I don't when I do. I'm tired of holding on when I want to let go, and letting go when I want to hold on.

Oh how I wish I could go out to eat And pick the food that I like the most...

I'm tired of writing in hopes that, someday, you will understand how I feel; Yet, here I am.

## Reverie

Seasoned irises soften in the sun's radiance.

Laughter lingers in August's obscurity.

Where wheat once grew, ghastly grounds glisten.

And the warm summer breeze runs through the vacant trees-

like the eerie village

of old Chernobyl.

## Paper Doll

I'm in Kindergarten again, lusting to grab some scissors and cut on the dotted line I've sketched for myself.

I practice first, and draw straight, narrow lines as I stand in front of my mirror. Curved contours can't be seen with the angled lines I've delicately drawn.

Stepping back, I look at my handiwork. God couldn't have designed better. I almost can't believe my eyes; I can see myself.

My fingers caress crimson stained shears as they free me from the excess encasing my perfect outline. From the excess that engulfs me.

I ignore the fire licking my body. I know beauty is pain, I know.

#### CHRISTI FRATESCHI

## Schizophrenia

He knew

What he did to me;

Loved what it did to me.

I loved it too.

His hands know where to touch.

His body screams for mine

And I feel on top of the world.

We're swimming in the sheets.

He craves more,

But I'll make him beg

Because I ache for him,

And he's unsure.

But that's not fair;

Stop.

Doesn't he know

this is right?

It's completely, utterly, entirely,

Right.

Of course he knew I wanted him.

He watched me ache for him

Was I that stupid?

From all of his experience

He knows I'll give in.

But I'm powerless

And I'm drowning

In a faded shadow of love.

I'll make him care;

We could have everything.

And I'm positive He should be mine.

Stop.

Shouldn't I know this is wrong?

Wrong.

## An Archaeologist

An archaeologist's job is to know the difference between relics and remnants. The separation of meaning and meaningless things. The fiord between the fossil. the valley between the bone.

A copper bottle, the clay pot, a convoluted wicker basket that carries the muffled sound of dust resonates in the mud. Hands dig for what? The dull feeling of discovery, or the thing to fasten

their lives to. Once, my father wished he was an archaeologist. All that year he dug a deep crevice in the backyard, searching for a luminous head, a skull, the skeleton of his past

sunk beneath the soft grass-root. Things fell in: televisions, the sound of the radio and newspapers, then worse. Shapes, images, language, big malleable dreams. He never comes up for air,

talking to him is like speaking in echoes. My voice carries down like a mouth full of dirt. It sounds like the breaking of things. Clay becomes soft, copper turns green, wood-soaked, heavy from rain, things rust.

I flew to Memphis, to Gaul, and found my father's face beneath the sand, the dirt, the ash and behind glass, improperly labeled this is us, it says, this is time, this is history, this bag of grey dust.

#### Fractures

A city grows from my fingertips:
Fragmented concrete, glass filaments,
a naked steel frieze. I'm putting things
together. I'm giving the world the fragrance
of new paint. Oranges, yellows,
fuchsias, a deep saffron: fresh brush
strokes for each falling leaf. I'm gluing
up the slow faults with reflections.
I'm mending the false walls with
fancy chandeliers. A distraction works
best by forging bald attractions. I
fill the sidewalks with newsprint.

Even strangers are fixable.
I apply the best of my paints to their faces, foraging for that full-look that defies fate.
That wide-eyed fracture of the brain-bones, the look of wonder in a dented femur.
I'm covering up for feeling.
I'm covering up for fractures.
I'm covering up

I'm covering up our wildly fractured selves.

## Jackson Hole, Wyoming

Why anyone would choose to bother about it, a hole dug by a stranger, the green moss still growing up the rope, shining in the sunlight, only Josh, Paul and Lesley know.

Looking deep into that black pit, the diseased algae dances across the fibers, the vine, like grapes. Lesley says first, all the colors in the world make white.

losing all the color makes black. I don't believe her. Darkness is a combination of things, not their absence. Bound by love and disability, and keeping the echo of a promise

I take out something I've carried inside a long time and let it drop, gently falling against the green rope. Josh and Paul do the same. Lesley looks heavy; she holds

the weight of her breath and has more to drop a book of blank pages, old men and elbow patches, the painted jars and fresh silverware. We wait for the evidence of the bottom,

the sound of the splash, the smell of disturbed sea. The sky falls. Everything illuminated turns black.

#### Behind the Mona Lisa Smile

tuesday morning

At one o'clock in the morning the sky is red charcoal in a wood-burning stove. Deep sangria ashes dusted across white clouds.

tuesday afternoon

You know sometimes I wish I could dispose of my emotions. It would be a freeing sort of experience, to think clearly without the storms of love.

wednesday morning

And yet when I go to bed, I see

those red clouds peek through the blinds.

The light making its way across my face, reminding me it's morning.

And I have still not had one hour of sleep.

wednesday night

If I could lay my body down and escape for a while, let my soul run around

and live.

I think I would be happier.

Chase bluer skies away from haunting oceans, I

think I would be safer.

thursday morning

I sometimes feel like the beauty is haunting me,

taunting me,

chasing me.

My eyes are cluttered with sceneries and smiles, perfect hair, and

bleeding rainbows.

I am never alone.

Even inside my mind the wind is screaming.

I cast my faith out into the sea.

I'm waging a war against myself

and I'm losing.

I put my trust in burning buildings.

#### Nocturne

Moon like and full of inconsistency; I with my chasten white skull —

It holds those sunken eye pits, and a crown of loose hair

black as roots. How celestial! I drag out the tide and swallow it.

Lilly-livered, lily white — yet wild and unabashed; I concede into myself,

to emerge again. Against the sky I am found by stark contrast.

My thigh untouched, skin unclenched. Least a shadow —

of indifference. That neglects the ripe flesh, which hangs like old skins,

an onion dead and translucent; hovering like specters that greet

the blue mist: oh the halos it forms above the grass I tread.

## The Obelisk

It burns — it turns me to ash, skin and hair.

I shall not survive — the brute stare. The bare flesh has been exposed.

The unwanted, unnecessary skin peeled back; loose

it falls off.
Thin like cheesecloth —
I've no use for them now.

The thief — annihilator of the word; he is my god, who

saunters the cold landscape — of my mind; this mind so planetary.

He collects my tongue, my voice, and the old sheets.

My senses ravaged — casualty to some unspoken war.

Obelisk — the marble god, takes with him the splendor —

the spoils — some old antiques, but not my heart.

## Disposable Boys

Red and blue cups jammed in the wrought spell "WELCOME" above the homeward highway, naivety displayed across public overpasses and scattered like limbs in our own back yards, our firecrackers retired the grenadiers and artillerymen. "Boys, lunchtime!" — Our queue to negotiate a ceasefire, two-inch, green men abandoned with childish gluttony. The loser would bury his captain 'neath a garden-rock tomb we hadn't the mental faculties to recall these damned soldiers their memorials would serve as mountains, bunkers, and mausoleums again. Sidewalk wars would be waged on and ever on 'til the day when only the radiomen and some lucky minesweepers remained.

Red and blue cups jammed in the wrought two-inch green men abandoned in a childish act of gluttony.

You applaud the homecoming of the radiomen, but what of our disposable boys?

## Growing Up

We sent out an S.O.S. call
It was quarter past four in the morning
When the storm broke our second anchor line.
Four months at sea, four months of calm sea.
"Play Crack the Sky" — Brand New

You said it was okay, it was normal to feel that good. Stars shadowed in wind — grass peeling on suede. A year ago I never would have.

You said it was okay, enjoy the mist and inhale the earth; take a few chances with dilution in diffidence.

You said it was okay, smoking with windows up, wrists wrought in tension, fingers grasping sounds of freshman year caught in the air.

You said it was okay to take advantage of the lies. Sleeping days into night, we rode the night skies under eyelids of hope.

You said it was okay, you would take the road not taken pain is only a problem when noticed, you said.

## Acid Velocity

Shattered glass, oil smeared on wintry flakes. Sounds of children laughing through arid throats: wind through skin like acid velocity.

A trunk full of cans, wine, pans, and groceries: hours of frenzied shopping, running between anxious youth and glum parents running late.

The snowstorm interrupted our night. We waited through booze and stars for a new year to break empty resolutions.

Tires tracked on slick pavement, seat belt slit into skin, "I'll Be Home for the Holidays" blares behind nails clinging onto crimson skin of lost hope.

Midnight lingers behind fingers lapsed in the silent fury of the night. Gasping fumes of exhaust and gratitude, rubber and sorrow.

Mother always told me we're fortunate when problems happen on Thursdays.

It's Friday night.

## Final Blow

The crystalline constellation of Orion's belt lies on a mirror, shattered, sickled pieces. The morning breath lingers booze and passion. Surely you have done the same in mere longevity and bitter selfishness. I have allowed myself to break so gently; so beautifully and so peacefully. It's a tired state of bliss that I am left in. Letting go is something I must do and must essentially enjoy. Do I enjoy the rest? Possibly. Yes. I close my eyes and see dark blue-swirls, spinning until I finally fall. Fall into such a sleep, so serene — so finite Love is finite.

## The Light

"It gets better" — it's easily said...

Peaceful silence sounds more appealing.

Breaking free is more rewarding.

Breathe in sweet child — your shallow breaths will gain strength.

My promise is not empty.

The light glistens — so follow it. Not the light in front of your visage, the light at the end of the Tunnel of Struggles. You will conquer, you will gain sanctity and sanity.

There is so much to hold on for.

The cry of a newborn, the singing of baby birds — the mere value of helping another.

You are cherished here. You are adored — so break the violence, expel the silence. Hold onto the pure white light of hope and life. Breathe in Sweet Child.

#### Aftermath

"The roses look beautiful," I hear the women say across the yard.

They said you looked beautiful too.

#### Considering

That word sends shivers through my body.

How dare they breathe that word.

Considering

How the truck buckled the car.

Making you one with the pavement.

Considering

How your own mother couldn't recognize your face.

Out of the corner of my eye I can see my coat flung on the chair next to the bed.

A rainbow of silk and satin shattered across the floorboards.

He kisses my cheek and breathes "Was that good for you?"

Faces, details blur.

The end result is all the same.

My thirst quenched.

I no longer dwell on the small details like names.

#### Considering

The line of men I have pulled in with my siren song.

What would you say if you were here?

Would you recognize me or be blinded by their hollow eyes of earth?

The way I was always blinded by your golden curls

draped over your shoulders.

## An Aftertaste of Dinner in Your Dance Studio

Tuned to the beat of a lie, I heard nothing but the lies you fed me. You

are so strange and so malign. I know you, you are a dancer. You have me on a special

diet, one that gets me into shape so I can dance the way you want me to. You feed me this dancing

diet of lies all the time, when I'm awake, when you know I'm asleep. I know what they taste like now, I remember from last night last

week, every lie tastes like an overly dressed salad. A salad that dances within my gullet whittles me down so I can

dance perfectly for you, lover, awake, asleep, it does not matter. I dance to the eternal slicing

and shearing, through the erosion chosen at terminal speeds, wearing down my stone heart,

taking it away, giving it up as I used to do in Sunday school when practicing for confession, but instead of it shriveling in a wicker basket it becomes a luminous pergo dance floor to lindy hop

on on our way to god, yes sir, a nice strong pergo floor, no rug, we cut it

up dancing, tearing through, exploding like alligators from hatching eggs. No,

no, there is no container for our love, we will be the last couple still dancing when the jukebox stops

after the sun freezes over and the moon burns out, so let's go lover, feed me, so I can dance, for you,

with you, you matter, whatever is left of me from the waking and sleeping eating is here

to tell you that yes, you do matter, here, now, and always, dance in me and with me, amen.

# Head in the Clouds (Along with Everything Else)

They laugh at me, they always laugh at me. I scowl, but the wind does not howl. I frown, but the sun does not go down. I call, but hail does not fall.

What good is it being made of clouds if you can't even storm out of a room properly? All those blowhards get storms named after them.

And they think it's funny calling me foggy. I might as well just let Aeolus have his way with me.

Of course, he'll probably send his vassals to do it.

I don't even merit an "it was a dark and stormy night" for my grand send-off.

## Velocity

I see I saw I seesaw with mama who mama sav mama saw mama who saw a deliveryman with manna ride up and down with data where to deliver on alpha in beginning and omega in ending to reach his quota through the street and mama starts yelling Hey Hey Fella come over here I want vanilla I want some vanilla and the Fella drives up or down the vista depending on where the Fella is or where we are the Fella has to drive to the alpha or omega and turn around its a common idea on how to get to our little vista since we are the center and mama wants some manna for poppa his favorite vanilla we ran out of extra since there was no comma in our eating of the vanilla we only could get the idea to eat manna under magnolia amidst the gardens in all their flora amidst the ponds in all their fauna in the midday sun with its corona while we seesawed so mama yelled Hey Hey Hey Hey Hey Fella

#### Lust and Love

I want someone to lay with me.

Run their hands down the sides of my mind.

Touch the soft curves of my thoughts and

brush against the fragile bones of my soul.

I want to be addicted.

A junkie looking for my next fix,

searching for a way to pay for my next moment, of euphoria.

I want to feel needed.

That choking feeling of hope

that someone would grab the rope

before I jump, before I let go.

Because I ache for more than the surface.

More than conversation down dates

and broken hotel rooms.

I want to feel real.

A rush.

Push me against the wall and tear the clothing off my heart.

I want to expose all

my dreams and fears,

without being afraid,

to fall apart.

Comb your fingers through my mind.

— Don't let go, pull, tug!

I want to show you, everything.

I want to fall in love.

## It's Lucky You Live Here

You: "What are you doing here? It's two in the morning." Me: "I thought I'd surprise you." (Lie; truth:

Drunk off of Admiral Nelson's "Premium" Spiced Rum, I stumbled from the room of toga-wearing partiers, desperate for a skirted stick figure on a square sign beside a door and eager to escape the rancid reek of liquors blended and roaming past the walls and absorbing into the sheets draped over shoulders, when someone came sprinting past, arms flailing and linens around his ankles; taking this as a message from above, I ran at full tilt right behind the runaway, escaping 'round the corner and down a ramp, across a field and into some woods until I realized my shoes remained behind, so I settled on a stump and watched stars through the sections of sky barely visible between branches; but rowdy howling somewhere off who knew how far? — sent me scampering somewhere down a shrouded pathway, crickets chirping rambunctiously, until I came to an exit onto a street, and turning right, I knocked at the door of the first house. Here we stand.)

## On the Train (with William Blake)

I fell asleep sprawled across your lap somewhere west of Springfield, east of Schenectady. I woke to only the smell of sweaty shoes, a rhythmic thud sounding below. In soot I sleep, dreams thick with dust, weeping when I wake.

In those moments, memento mori\* suffocates our senses and shrouds our sight. There is no hope of reaching a destination — no angel with a bright key — there are only empty seats and a hope to one day wash in the river and shine in the sun.

I fell asleep sprawled across your lap somewhere west of Atlantis, but east of Rivendell.

I woke to no smell as we rose in the glowing darkness and glided onto a platform with soot-less footsteps.

\*memento mori: Latin phrase meaning "remember you will die."

#### We will fall and snap.

A mind is a Kenmore refrigerator, all day opening and closing but still humming when the light turns off at night.

Behind crusted Smucker's raspberry jam and a fuzzy can of Alpo "Prime Cuts" dog food, a forgotten apple withers on the bottom shelf.

\*\*\*

Always something buzzing or barking, occupying the gaping regions stretching from the Boise Weekly on east, well past the Bismarck Tribune.

We try to imagine the people that, by no easy mistake, find themselves living there: several nothings, living in nothing, surrounded by nothing, but there is still a pulse.

\*\*\*

We pray for a timely cure, but it will be the dog on a leash seeing a squirrel just out of reach. His barks fall to his paws as words reach our toes and we wonder how long it will take for the leash to snap and the refrigerator to stop screaming.

#### Visit Me

I remember stomping in Aunt Sue's cranberry bog last summer — our black boots sloshing in the gushing red that stained our clothes and dyed our skin like the blood our bodies shed the night of the hurricane; pushing us through the sliding glass door Katrina was in control, penetrating our bodies with glass. I heard her cackle that night, gusting the fierce wind through Aunt Sue's house as she stole and obliterated you like a spoon in a rusty garbage disposal.

I remember visiting the house of Frida Kahlo in Mexico, acting like a fluent Spanish-speaker — Do you think they could tell? The culture danced around us, and we ate too much salsa. Galapagos Islands — it was your choice, Remember? It's still on the list.

Summer days at Aunt Sue's were spent sipping pomegranate iced tea, and napping on the hammock. It was those days when you'd teach me about black holes and Quantum Physics — matter and energy, and the uncertainty principle "Study for the test tomorrow," you would whisper in my ear.

Testing gravity in an exuberant red and yellow hot aired balloon we were supposed to fly across the plains of Mexico during the festival of *El Día de los Muertos*. Remember — you told me this when we were laying in the hammock, watching them rise like bees from the Zinnia flowers.

I can only hope that you will be reincarnated and when you are, come find me. I'll be at Aunt Sue's this summer, for the first time since the hurricane, and I'll be laying on the hammock Visit me — we still have a list to conquer.

# Non-fiction

#### Revelations From Nature

The most philosophical question that one can ask is "What should I do with my life?" Many individuals spend their entire lives searching for the answer to that simple yet complicated question. Many times the answer appears extremely obvious, but many times it appears much later or not at all. Individuals usually fall into a situation that defines their life whether it be a career, job, or a pre-determined station in life. To many, their place in life is not satisfying; the craving to want more is ever present. Many individuals want to make a difference in the world, but they don't understand how to make it transpire. Finding one's plot in the world is one of society's most mind boggling questions. All that one needs to do is take a walk alone with Mother Nature to answer this question.

The earth is a very complicated place that works extremely efficiently, while we as humans are aliens that invade the music and natural rhythm of nature. We can become part of nature and thus fertilize her and make her thrive. One must find where it is that they fit into the puzzle of the universe.

The path of life is very similar to walking along the trampled earth that leads into the darkened forest. The tranquility that envelopes the spirit is reminiscent of the deadening silence one feels as they are thrust into the world without any warning of what lies ahead. The luminescent sun that so vividly lit the path of a promising future fades into the forest canopy as the ferns along the forest floor envelope the soil. The glorious routes of life's passions have disappeared and one must search their soul for answers alone isolated from society. The answer to life's most daunting questions lies in the depths of nature.

Being lost in the forest or lost in the world is irrelevant. Mother Nature speaks through the breeze; one must listen closely as she utters her message. The air may be dainty and understanding, proving that individuals need to follow the directions of others through life in order to thrive and grow as a person. The breeze may swell from a weightless breath, to a gusty wind that howls through the trees symbolizing that one must stand strong and hold their ground-becoming a beacon of leadership among the masses.

The trek through the forest of life may be blocked by a fallen tree, the demise of a great soul that once stood strong is now returning to its creator. The rotting flesh of a once prolific leader becomes the nutrient that feeds the next giant of society. Many great lost and dying souls may topple at your feet, but in order to survive, you must be aware of their confines and recognize the impression others have bestowed upon them and not stumble along the journey.

A light buzzing is detected by the ears as the aroma of honey envelopes the nostrils. The eyes focus on one of nature's smallest but most efficient creatures. A honey bee hovers over the beautiful flower that opens her

petals to allow him entry in order to suckle her sweet nectar. The honey bee takes all the nectar that he can hold and transports it back to the hive where he deposits it for his queen. The colony works efficiently with drones, worker bees, honey bees and a queen to produce one of natures' most succulent treats. The honey bee proves that everyone has an important place in society and working together as a team producing a product is endless and beyond comprehension.

The silence of the forest is as deadening as the rustle of an evergreen branch that pierces the air, eyes dart to the right and the body is frozen still. The sun gleams through the branches and there she is the most graceful and elegant of God's creatures making her way across the meadow. There appears a small fawn bouncing and teasing a butterfly. The gracefulness of her movements resembles that of a small child, carefree and fanciful. One can only imagine that such a sight may be that of one's child frolicking in the courtyard of one's castle. The fawn stops suddenly and stares in awe of one's presence; she doesn't dart away, but she stands frozen like a child caught committing a blunder. As one approaches, she doesn't stir, the sight is becalming when she catches the scent of one's hand as the two make contact. The fur is soft and smooth while her nose is damp and cool; she is beautiful while being calmed by company. As one rests, a mirage of a child frolicking appears in a hallucination. Suddenly, the fawn is frightened and she darts off into the forest. The vision disappears as abruptly as it emanated.

A trickle of water dribbles down one's cheek, the coolness of Mother Nature's tears spread across the meadow. The sky abruptly darkens and her thunderous voice echoes across the land as her ire rises; her tears unfold to a deluge across the land. One must seek asylum and dart across the meadow. Suddenly he appears, the statuesque red wood rising to ever-ending heights over the forest, with his arms splayed open welcoming refuge from Mother Nature's wrath. The envision of a father welcoming one an escape from life's tribulations. One can always flee home to the refuge and protection of their father, but one can only stay a brief time, Mother Nature has much more to reveal.

The journey through the forest must continue as the sun sets across the western horizon. The canopy blackens out the majority of illumination that remains. Mother Nature is silent again and all that can be heard is the clamping of one's footfalls against the forest floor. The stench strikes one as if being slapped in the face, the scathing odor of rotting flesh. The vultures are pecking at the unrecognizable remains of one of nature's creatures. Only the strong survive; the destiny of god's weakest beings is pre-determined, they will be destroyed and their carcass will be picked apart while their remains will be left to rot and return to nature.

A shadow of darkness conveys across the land. The blackness of nighttime appears quite rapidly. The air slightly chills as the heat of the almighty sun disappears. Silence is broken as the howling of a pack of coyotes can be heard echoing over the forest. A frightening chill travels up the spine as shelter needs to be obtained. But, how can one protect himself from the barren forest? Mother Nature's carnivorous hunters roam the forest floor in search of their next meal, shadowed by the darkness of night. A human possessing a weapon is the strongest beast, but alone and unarmed, one now becomes the hunted. Scraps of wood and branches can be gathered to build a fire to ward off the dangers of the night while keeping the body enveloped in warmth. As the eyes get heavier and heavier, one drifts off to the paradise of sleep. Dreams enclose upon the soul with visions of being lost in society, one must create a defense mechanism or allow one's personality to blaze like a fire in order to ward off the hunter that lurks just beyond the next corner, waiting to destroy one's pre-determined destiny.

The slumber is broken by a cool mist as the body awakens; the dew of the previous night dampens one's clothes. Heavy eyelids open ever so slowly as her brightness is blinding. The pure awe of her beckons the soul as one struggles to rise up and release their arms in her glorious presence. Her heat can be felt as it crawls over the skin, the hairs stand on edge as she rises above. It is her, the goddess that one envisions. She sweeps one off their feet, and protects them in her bosom from the evils of life. The feeling of ecstasy envelopes the senses as her presence is felt across eternity. The goddess will be one's partner through all of life's trials and tribulations.

The beam of her golden light travels over the surface of the forest floor creating a path to follow. As one follows her beacon, the path of life's calling begins to appear. A sparkle of light glistens off the plane of a pond in the distance. A path to the pond miraculously appears embedded in the soil at one's feet. As one cautiously approaches the pond, a reflection appears in the glass-like surface. Recognizable features appear at the realization that the surface of the pond reveals a reflection of a fawn with a statuesque redwood, the golden stands of the sun's beams appear, in the middle of the portrait is a reflection of oneself. The emanation represents that one must peer into their soul with one's family beside them in order to find a plot in the world.

The most mind boggling philosophical questions of one's place in the universe can be answered when an individual looks within themselves. The answers were always there, it just took a stroll with Mother Nature to raise them to the surface. The world is full of dangers that lurk around every corner, but if one listens to nature and holds their family close to their heart, then all that the world offers both good and bad, can be appreciated for what it is worth. The mark that we as aliens make on mother earth is a reflection upon who we are as a people. We as humans are defined by our actions in the world, but at the same time, we have the power to change our actions and accomplish greatness using the signals that mother earth emits.

#### Where No Man Woman One Has Gone Before

I can't recall a time when I wasn't a nerd — or a feminist.

For as long as I can remember, sci-fi was a constant presence in the Casey household. Well, for three of the five members anyway. The love of science fiction that my oldest sister Kelly and I shared stemmed from our mother's wonder for fantastical literature such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Namia*. This deeply contrasted with the taste for earthy realism that my other sister Tricia inherited from Dad. If it couldn't happen in real life — or on Earth — they wanted nothing to do with it. But Mom, Kelly, and I were another story.

Growing up in a house with such strong women — and a poor, outnumbered father — I was instilled with an inherent sense of feminism: that girls are just as good as boys, and an independent, enterprising woman can make it in the world. Barbies were just as legitimate a plaything as Hot Wheels. There were no gendered limits on the toys I played with or the imagination I developed. I missed the "Sci-fi is just for boys" memo.

Although my allegiance would come to lie primarily with *Star Trek*, my lifelong love of sci-fi began at the age of two, cuddled up on the couch with Kelly, who was watching *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* through a free trial of HBO.

"Who's that?" I asked.

"Luke Skywalker."

"And who's that? Why is there so much snow? What are they doing?" She dutifully answered each of my questions. From then on, I was hooked. It must have been Princess Leia's doing. Her unwavering sense of right and wrong, her smart and sassy mouth, and that double-Danish 'do which I've never been able to recreate became the standard by which I measured the worth of other female characters.

Three years into my sci-fi education, Kelly went off to college. I asked her what grade she was in.

"It's not like that in college," she explained. "I'm a freshman."

"But you're a girl," I pointed out indignantly. Five years old and ever the tiny feminist-in-training. "Why don't they call you a fresh-woman?"

And so Kelly introduced me to *Star Trek: Voyager*, the only *Star Trek* series to feature a female captain. It is the Trek incarnation with the most "girl power," which certainly appealed to my inner Spice Girl. In addition to Captain Kathryn Janeway, played by Kate Mulgrew, Voyager featured a plethora of strong women. The chief engineer is a half-Klingon woman named B'Elanna Torres. Seven of Nine is a formerly human woman whom the crew rescued from the Borg and put to work in the astrometrics lab.

Kelly got me so addicted to the Voyager series that I'd act out away missions with my stuffed animals. (For the record, Captain Janeway was a

feisty spaniel, and security officer Tuvok was portrayed by Bruno the Beanie Baby, a bull terrier with pointy ears and a stern face just like his live-action Vulcan counterpart.) I was so enthralled with the show that for a while, I insisted on being called "Seven-and-a-Half of Nine" as a nod to both my age at the time and my favorite character.

It turned out that Voyager was merely my gateway drug to the rest of the Trek universe, which I've rediscovered as an adult. The 2009 reboot film, simply titled Star Trek, rekindled a love that had gone dormant in me. In the two and a half years since then, my Trekitude has blossomed exponentially. Lately I've gotten into watching The Original Series on Netflix.

As an adult, I can now pinpoint the things that drew me to Star Trek. Although some people criticize the franchise for its disregard for real science, that never bothered me. I know nothing about physics anyway. But I have always been interested in the fleshed-out characters, who, despite their green blood or status as a twenty-third-century starship captain, struggle with many of the same issues that are relevant to people in my present day.

William Shatner's Captain James T. Kirk recites the motto of Starfleet in the beginning of each Trek episode: "To explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." This iconic line introduces the viewer to the show's central themes, and its unique way of dealing with social justice has always appealed to me as a feminist.

On the surface, Star Trek might seem to be about chasing aliens through space and zapping the bad guys with a phaser, but it does have social and philosophical value. As the U.S.S. Enterprise encounters new species, the largely human crew struggles with culture clash, racism, and just how much they can ethically interfere in another species' affairs. If only the United States followed Starfleet's Prime Directive and resolved not to force our ideals upon other cultures!

My favorite character, hands-down, is Spock, the half-Vulcan, halfhuman who serves as both science officer and second-in-command to Captain Kirk. Anyone who doesn't understand Spock's appeal should read Isaac Asimov's 1967 essay "Mr. Spock Is Dreamy!" before going any farther in this essay. For those who'd like the short version, I offer this excerpt: "Girls palpitate over the way one eyebrow goes up a fraction; ...they squeal with passion when a little smile quirks his lip. And all because he's smart!"

And, ooh, was Nimoy attractive! Once, as a child, I spied some eyeshadow samples that had come with Tricia's Glamour magazine. Looking back, the color combination of gray, green, and yellow was a bit garish, but hey — it was the '90s. I decided to experiment a bit, hoping to emulate heavy-lidded Spock's Vulcan complexion. Let's be honest: as cruel as that bowl cut was, Nimoy's makeup was flawless enough to incite envious rage in Sephora addicts across the ages.

When Tricia discovered my makeover, she was less than thrilled. Actually, she was pissed. I'm not sure what upset her more: the fact that I'd wasted her free eyeshadow, or that I'd made myself up to look like an alien freak with saffron, charcoal, and a hint of olive green blended across my eyelids, giving me the illusion of elegantly upswept eyebrows. Although there were many things over which Tricia and I bonded, *Star Trek* was decidedly not one of them.

But I digress. Where were we? Sephora, Spock, social justice... right. Moving on.

Spock was especially important to the audience of the late 1960s, a time of racial and social turbulence. His inner conflict as a half-human and half-Vulcan, and his interaction with his mostly human comrades, served as a less controversial way to explore race.

Nichelle Nichols, who portrayed communications officer Lieutenant Uhura, was an icon for African-American women. She and William Shatner performed the first interracial kiss on television in the 1968 episode "Plato's Stepchildren." But because of racism she endured from a Paramount Studios security guard and the lack of deep story lines for her character, Nichols wanted out of the show. A visit from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a Trekkie himself, changed her mind.

"You simply cannot abdicate, this is an important role," King told her. "This is why we are marching. We never thought we'd see this on TV."

At times, I feel torn between my identity as a feminist and a Trekkie, especially while watching *The Original Series*. Why are these women parading around a starship in micro-minis that barely cover their undiscovered countries? Isn't space supposed to be freezing? Those uniforms do not look in any way functional for a military woman.

Not to mention the lack of female main characters. Although the few women who appeared in prominent roles on the original Trek were indeed unforgettable, there was always a distinct sense that this was the boys' club... in space. Women often made one-off appearances as Kirk's (or Spock's or Bones') one-time love interests and were tossed back into the depths of space by the end of the fifty-two-minute episode, never to be seen again. In the episode "Space Seed," Kirk can't even be bothered to remember ship historian Lieutenant Marla McGivers' name — and that's after he snaps at Uhura for daring to interrupt his super-serious conversation with Spock.

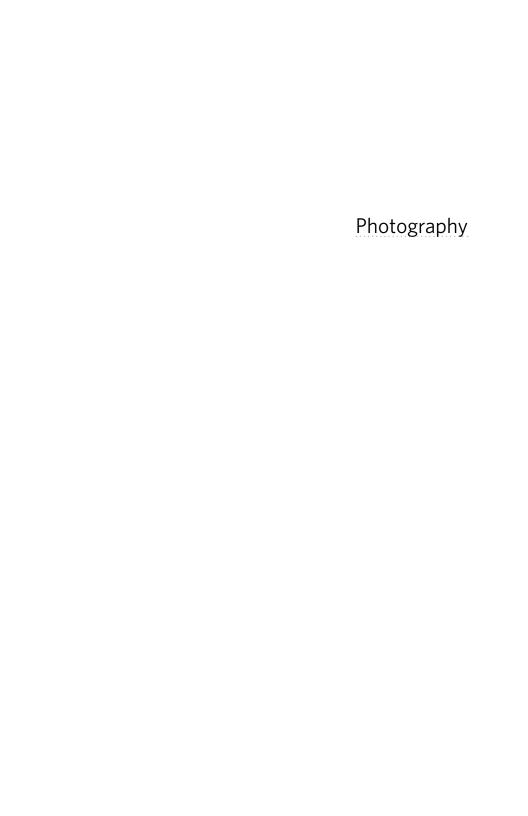
Even my beloved Spock is guilty of the sexism rampant throughout the show. When a computer malfunctions and starts flirting with Kirk in the episode "Tomorrow Is Yesterday," Spock sneers, "They gave it a personality — female, of course." Those pesky computer-women and their phone sex operator voices! Go replicate a sandwich for the captain!

However, there are enough fascinating — to use Spock's favorite word — female characters to keep me watching, wishing, and waiting for April 5, 2063. Spock's human mother, Amanda Grayson, is unapologetic about her humor and passion, despite living on a planet where emotion is seen as illogical. Demora Sulu, the daughter of the original helmsman of the Enterprise, followed in her father's footsteps and became a pilot in her own right, as shown in the movie Star Trek: Generations.

Even the villains have a few women on their team: in the original series episode "The Enterprise Incident," the Romulan flagship is commanded by a fierce, intelligent woman who tries to convince Spock to defect from the Federation and join her warrior race. Although the character never reveals her name — and only appears in one episode — she is an excellent example of a female character who's just as complex as her male counterparts.

"Romulan women are not like Vulcan females," the commander purrs to Spock between the scenes of her verbal smackdown of Captain Kirk. "We are not dedicated to pure logic and the sterility of non-emotion."

When I see one-note shows like "Sex in the City" or "Jersey Shore" that encourage women to act like bimbos to get their way, sometimes I wonder if my dream for realistic female characters is but a futuristic fantasy. Although many sci-fi and action flicks relegate women to either the sexy damsel in distress or the competent, yet frigid bitch, the women of Trek show that there is more for us than that simplistic, sexist dichotomy. A woman can command a starship, interrogate enemy spies, and still be able to kick back and enjoy some R&R on the holodeck with her comrades, all while rocking a fabulous beehive. Right, Lieutenant Uhura?



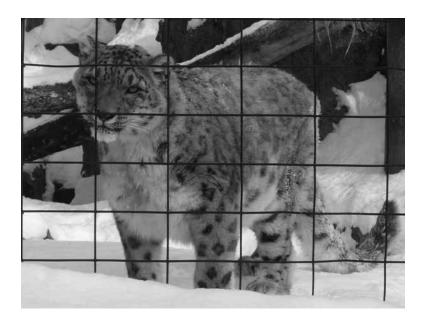
### Intruder



# Fading Woman



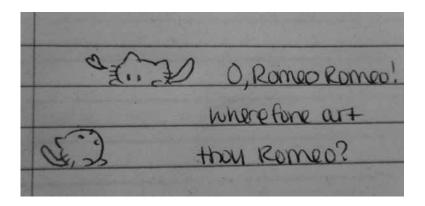
### Got a Problem Bud



# Happy Valentine's Day



### Kitty Shakespeare



### Ceaseless



# Up:Down



# A Different Perspective



# Start of a Journey



# Laundry



### Radiance





# The Salamander

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