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LITMAG

The Capture of Elusive Words

Volume 20 ~ Spring 2007 ~ University of Missouri - St. Louis



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Instructor's Note

What is good writing? Is it the relatability of the characters in a story or the way conflict moves the reader to want to know what will happen next? Is it the rhythm in a poem or the emotion it evokes? For the past four months, the *Litmag* editors have struggled to answer these questions, and out of this struggle has come the 2007 edition of our literary magazine, a collection brought to fruition after reading, rereading, discussing, and arguing over submissions.

While I expect a group of students such as those in the Editing *Litmag* class to be passionate about language, I have been most impressed by their dedication to making the University of Missouri-St. Louis undergraduate magazine a work of quality and a work of art. I would like to thank my students for reading every submission with care and respect and for ensuring that the process remained anonymous even when we were reading work by someone in the room. I would also like to thank Shannon Pendleton for her time and effort in helping our publication every step of the way.

Ultimately, it is the writers who contribute to our magazine who make it possible for us to reveal the future of art in our community. Our sincere thanks goes to all of you who submitted to *Litmag* this year. We hope you enjoy the magazine and continue to submit your work in the future.

Sincerely,
Jaime R. Wood
Litmag Instructor

Editors:

Patrick Culleton
Badia Ead
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Tobias Knoll
Shannon McManis
Shannon Noll
Andrea Richardson
Caitelin Sappington

Litmag Instructor:

Jaime R. Wood

English 4895, Editing Litmag

A course in editing and publishing a student literary journal, will be offered at UM-St. Louis in Spring 2008. Interested students are invited to contact Jaime Wood at jrw5x8@umsl.edu for more information.

MFA in Creative Writing
At the University of Missouri-St. Louis
Fiction and Poetry

Degree Program:

39 Hours selected from graduate writing, literature, editing, and comp theory classes, more than half of those hours in workshops, the heart of the program. We regularly offer workshops in fiction and poetry writing, and occasionally in essay and novel writing. The plan of study is flexible and teaching assistantships and loans are available.

Publications:

The MFA program publishes the nationally distributed literary journal, *Natural Bridge* containing poetry, fiction, essays, and poetry in translation.



The staff of *Litmag* wish to extend our sincerest thanks to the following: John Dalton, the English Department faculty and staff, Howard Schwartz, Nancy Gleason and the staff of *Bellerive*, The Office of Student Life, Jack Crosby, Helen Ward and the staff of *The Current*.

The University of Missouri, the English Department, and *The Current* are not responsible for the content and policies of *Litmag*. The contents of *Litmag* are literary and not journalistic. All rights revert to author upon publication.

Poetry

2007 Litmag Poetry Prize Winner

Sweet-Cherry Innocence

Caitelin Sappington

Someday I will toss my hair and gather my skirt,
slip on my sandals—thongs of sweat-drenched bamboo.
I need to end our beginning,
because all I really wanted from you, besides your kerchief,
was for you to taste my sweet-cherry
lip gloss. You will never be more to me than a faded name in my diary.

And about you I wrote, in my dear tear-stained diary—
but simply because your too-eager hands ripped my favorite skirt.
Your lips only deserve to taste your mother's sweet-cherry
southern homemade pie. And not my bamboo
body, that I can bend and you can break. Your kerchief,
by which I am silenced instead of your kisses, has no beginning

nor end, as I try to keep pulling it from my mouth. Beginning
tomorrow, I will end this. I will tell my diary
the slippery secrets you've made me keep—the bloodied kerchief
you wring out, laughing as my blood forms a puddle; my skirt,
my favorite, that I wore to please your eyes, is bamboo
splintered from hanging out to dry, because sweet-cherry

wine was drank and spilled, ridding of my sweet-cherry
innocence. So much for a beginning
into womanhood. I used to dream of bamboo
palaces and leafy gowns, things my diary
knows my heart still longs for; a grass skirt
and coconut halves tied with a kerchief.

Someday I'll find me a real fine prince, one with a kerchief
spun of fine silk. And he will offer me a sweet-cherry
tree, to plant and climb up, so I can look for my favorite skirt
and lost childhood. He will be dashing from beginning
to end. And when I open my heart, my diary,
to him, he will want to kill you with a bamboo

branch for the pain you've caused me. But bamboo
nor branch can break the past. We can rewash stained kerchiefs,
burn torn pages from a diary,
but never completely from our sweet-cherry
memory. We can end beginnings,
but can never quite get out all the wrinkles from our skirts.

Straightening my skirt, I become bendable bamboo
once again. A new beginning, a clean kerchief,
and sweet-cherry lip gloss to kiss my diary.

Mother-in-Law

Julia Murphy

This is a love poem to a woman I have never met.

At the zoo, standing outside the bear cage, plucking cotton candy

Full skirt, white gloves, pillbox hat, smart lipstick

Proud back leaning into unending storms – strength of Eve

Snapped evergreen limbs, crushed fuselage, useless sirens, door bell.

A Celtic Song of Me

Marilyn Koehr

I am them and they are me.
The song my grandfather sang approaching Ellis Island,
and at my cradle.

The lilting brogue of my grandmother,
even without the Gaelic.

I am them and they are me.

I am them and they are me.

The Tara Brooch on Aunt Rita's funeral dress,
and on my blouse.

The tweed flat cap my grandfather wore at the track,
and to church.

I am them and they are me.

I am them and they are me.

The rock walls of meaning running through their fields,
and through their lives.

The play of runes on the ground showing the way to my past,
and to my future.

I am them and they are me.



Shawla Scott

How to Remember How to Fall in Love

Jake McDonnell

The first step is to find a woman whose eyes flicker of a lightning charge pillowing
through your next door neighbor's roof just outside your bedroom window with
a concussion that knocks every ounce of breath out of your chest as your rag doll
body is flung to the floor before you can even awaken from your sad dream.
Your eyes are burned with a white dent that partially blinds you for days and
your ears are deaf to all but your heartbeat that fearfully reminds you with every
pulse to wish to God she doesn't happen again any closer to your fragile body.
Then you get her phone number.

Commute

Brittany Maine

The land between Fairview
and Washington Park
rises and falls in a sloping ravine,
split by a murky stream.

A pack of mismatched dogs
slink along the bank
on withered grass
and trampled reed.
The soil is aerated
with bits of broken glass
and disintegrating trash.

The air within the train is warm,
no winter wind will chill me
as I near my destination..
Outside, the dogs are regal, purposeful,
trekking homeward together –
a strange, necessary nuclear family.
As the train zips down the track,
the land levels, giving way to rows
of fenced-in houses.

At night, the dogs huddle together –
a mass of tired paws,
floppy ears,
lean ribcages –
and shiver.

Haven't

Ellen Herget

Your limbs are a long
whispering movement
like sea flora
that drapes and swings
above, beside me;
In proximity I must
appear like a sausage
in a too-tight casing,
rolling along behind you,
clumsy, drooping,
pale.

If we had been children
together, would I find you
so exquisite?
Would flat triangle bras
and red juice mustaches
have dimmed your
future beauty?
Perhaps lost
pets and parents
would take the gloss
from your aura;
flower-print tights
and plastic barrettes
equalizing us
before time, growth,
culture could show me
all that you have
and I haven't.

Green Blood

Yevgeniy Elperin

Brainwashed by bureaucracy,
A bandwagon population.
Paving a road of expectations
Toward the city limits of ignorance.
Road signs read routine,
Exit now for the latest craze.
Propaganda drive-in theater,
Big bucket of buttered bullshit.
Media is but a playing field
For the religion of conformity.
Polluted prairie dog pasture
Overrun by puppet politics.
Hectic highway of misconception
Leading directly into town.
The speed limit does not apply
To those who put up the signs,
And road ends up short for those
Who helped to build it.
Rebellion seems mandatory.
Action requires thought.
Thought requires persuasion.
Persuasion lies in the hands
Of those who have the money
To make it happen.
Unfortunately, for them,
Money is thicker than blood.



Mom and Elvis

M. Sehr

Mom was born in January.
(I forget it every year.)
She said to me once,
chastisingly,
that no one could ever

discount Elvis' beliefs or convictions
just because of the way
he lived his life at the end,
or the way he died.
She said that she had heard
the way he sang gospels
and knew he meant it.
I had wondered
for a very long time
just how she could tell.
Then I see the way
she cries every time
someone plays "Amazing Grace"
and hear the
hesi-
tation
in her voice
when she sings it herself.
So I figure that's how she knows
all that stuff about Elvis.
His birthday was in January too.
(She remembers it every year.)

Old Testament Desperation

M. Sehr

I've had hickeys on my hips
and kisses on my lips
but needed so much more.

I've been the surrogate bride
for the wife a man was waiting to find.

Been the go-to gal
and the girl Friday.

I've batted eyes
at battered wives
make-believing that I helped.

I've been the prostitute
on the side of the road—
clawing my way into a genealogy.
Not quite right,
but not wholly wrong.

I've hung off every word
caught my neck in your circular speech
swinging from the bridge over water—
"Heaven, do you hold your breath for me?"

Shawnee, Missouri

Marissa Lynn Wood

When the calves lay limp, asleep in the straw
and the moon meant rest for awhile,
tin buckets would clatter
stirred with the dust by wind
as slow as early sun through the barn.

My mother and her four sisters slept
till grandma put wood on the stove.
Their Daddy was already out with the bulls
and sun had not touched the sky.

"You fix bacon for Marla and Mindy,
We'll get the milking done!"

And if chores were done, then time for school
meant store bought socks and sneakers!
Wearing hand knit sweaters
and skirts each had sewn,
'i before e'; relief from the farm.

When the cows were still, the dogs wandered home,
and Daddy came in from the fields,
milk filled each glass
on their small supper table
and tired exhales, from a day in Shawnee,
were exchanged from each to each.

This Room is Still

Shawla Scott

The day jitters by in a panic.
People park cars
and ask for divorces
go to jobs
make tea
do yoga.

Passing bulletin boards
that tell them to quit smoking
and ask them to buy cigarettes.

Populating their lives
with ten o'clock odes
to the missionary position.

Repulsed by porn they subscribe to.

Trapped by freedom.

Peddling piousness.

But here
only the jingle-jangle of the rusty gate.
Only the faint foot-fall of faded sneakers.
Only one purpose, one plan.

Here
manna in your spoon
three clicks of the lighter to flame
predictable, warm, safe
tie off the world and tap into this
tap...into...this...

People are too busy to understand
golden arches
clogged psyches.

No wonder
this room is still a place you come to.
No choice is better than too many.

Portholes of Summer

Shawla Scott

After dinner I was released into the backyard.
Face ruddy, eyes cracked
to a thick blanket early eve
with the smell of wet in the air.
Cloud smeared sky,
fenced in wild weeds and pickle flowers
bending and bowing to the rhythm of bare feet.
Tugging the bristly nape of Sadie's neck.

Those portholes of summer evenings
transported us.

Mother at the window
soft bleach-spotted terrycloth.
Wrinkles folding and overlapping
up to the pleased rims of her eyes.

Those days have gone,
crawled up into themselves and lie dormant.
I am still that tiny child
shoved into this awkward body of womanhood
looking out a window.



Shawla Scott

Longevity

Shannon Pendleton

I stretch for a moment
in the morning when the alarm clock rings -

But the oak tree stretches
as long as the whippoorwill sings.

Virgin

Andrea Richardson

While lying on my back,
my thighs stood as huge boulders:
chaffing and
with cellulite.
He grabbed whole handedly.
I knew he had man-handled
thighs before
again and again.
My thighs—soft boulders
as a valley ran between.

While lying on my back,
I knew instantly,
my mother must have felt like this:
on the bottom, with the weight
of life, breathing its needs,
in her face.
Wouldn't she have wished to be on top,
in control, on her throne?

While lying on my back,
a new feeling took hold of me:
snake slithering, sliding against
the walls of my vagina.
Then a stronger feeling: indifference.

While on my back,
what was I suppose to feel?
His snake struggled to evoke eruption
within me.
He himself was frustrated
as my face failed to mirror
joy, astonishment with the power
of his snake.
My eyes, instead,
were blank.
My arms were limp.
I was distant,
and behind my eyes, I remembered
I was misused like this
many years ago.

Morning Prayer

M. Sehr

I'll cut the songbird's throat.
Stain my hands
with the blood pulsating inside them.
Lay my head on a pile of stones
the offering on the Lord's altar.
As the sun rises
I'll kill everything I see
in that reflective pool
as I peer into it.

Nonfiction

2007 Litmag Nonfiction Prize Winner

A Billion Gallons of Water

Shannon Pendleton

Two hours after my brother died, I went bowling. Maybe that shocks you. It certainly didn't sit well with my sisters. They didn't understand our relationship—the good and the bad, the love, the resentment. *I raised him. Even if I didn't do a very good job of it.* What else was I supposed to do but go bowling? I'd been crying for days—I'd been crying myself to sleep for almost two years, in fact, while the cancer took the joy from his smile. I didn't tell them that it was almost impossible for me to sleep during all that time. I always tried to be strong for him, but by the time the end came, he was the one being strong for me—for all of us. I wanted to remember him smiling, so I went bowling.

We all seem to have our theories about Shane's cancer. Did it start, as my sister thinks, when he and his future wife, Jenny, were wrestling around and she kicked him in the leg? Susie was never a huge fan of Jenny—it was hard to accept that some wisp of a girl with a face full of freckles and an Elvis obsession was good enough for the big brother Susie adored.

I think maybe the cancer started before Jenny. Was it the time he and I fought and he cut his leg? Or the job he had that one summer when he fell while cleaning some rich guy's pool? Could it be from a football injury? Maybe it was always there, all the way back in kindergarten, back when he was a skinny little dark haired boy who drew pictures of ponies and promised our mother that one day he would marry her and they would ride off on a flying horse together.

I can still recite to you, more than eight years after the fact of my brother's cancer, all sorts of information about osteosarcoma. It is a somewhat rare, usually fatal form of cancer most commonly found in children during their growing years, or in older adolescents and young adults between the ages of 18-25. While no causes have been determined for certain, there are known links between certain rapid growth disorders and this form of cancer. There are also certain risk factors, including exposure to high levels of radiation, especially from treatment of other types of childhood cancers.

My brother had none of the known risk factors and had never had any other form of cancer. He simply developed a limp and pain in his leg. A doctor eventually found a tumor the size of a small grapefruit. He was eighteen.

Some doctor early on—a well-meaning soul fresh out of med school—was trying to give us answers to our questions: *What caused this? Why Shane?* He mentioned this “injury” theory to us in passing. The idea is that the cancer was there in his bone for a while, lying dormant, biding its time. He compared the tumor to water in a reservoir. He said that it could have been there in some form for years. This doctor, in his lily-white lab coat and earnest, school-boy glasses, told us that some unknown combination of factors probably held the cancer back, like a dam, containing it within a handful of cells. It was one possible theory—one that he said had not been proven, but made some sense to him—that the cancer was waiting for an injury, such as a broken bone or a deep bone bruise, to tear a hole in that invisible dam and let the bad cells come pouring out.

It wasn't a bad explanation as far as analogies go. I'm not sure I entirely believe it, but I admire the use of imagery. The fact is, osteosarcoma is usually found in the growth end of a bone, most commonly around the knee. Doctors aren't sure why that's true. But when Shane looked at Jenny and joked, “See, I told you this was your fault for kicking me in the leg,” it was all the explanation Susie needed.

I'd like to believe the cancer was in his bones way back before our mother died. That way what happened to Shane wouldn't feel so much like it's my fault. I know that's ridiculous. I know when I consider it rationally

that I could do nothing to stop this from happening. I still feel responsible. I promised our mother that I would take care of him, of all of us. I believe I let her down. I wish I could have a do-over, like kickball in grade school. Maybe I could kick the cancer clear over the fence this time. I could be the hero for the home team.

My favorite memories of Shane are all in summer. He liked to be outdoors. Frisbee in the park, football, hiking; as long as he was in the sunshine, he was happy. The day I recall best about all of our times together was a day that we spent at Johnson's Shut-Ins State Park when Shane was about fourteen. The park has always held a special significance for my family. When we were younger, before our parents divorced, our occasional trips to the Shut-Ins usually meant a reprieve from the constant fighting at home. The park was a happy place for us. Going to the Shut-Ins meant that for one day we would all get along and pretend that everything in our lives was okay. We'd visited that park many times as kids, but this trip with Shane was different.

At this park, water from the Black River—for the most part a wide, shallow, slow running stream—was forced through a narrow canyon and cut its way over and around a tumble of volcanic boulders. This formed a sort of rapids, though the water was not very deep in the summer except in a large pool into which the water emptied as the rocks and rapids gave way to calm. Visitors to the park could walk to the shut-ins to climb on the rocks and swim, or they could continue past the swimming area, up a winding path to the top of a rock bluff that overlooks that deep pool. For years the most daring visitors had gone to the top of the bluff and, ignoring the “Danger!” sign, had cannon-balled into the water below. At some point during our visit my then husband, Brett, and my brother decided it looked like it would be fun to jump.

I objected, of course. I'd heard the stories about people being air-lifted from the park, maimed and paralyzed or, even worse, dead. I've never understood the thrill of taking risks with life and limb. I like roller coasters and fast cars, but amusement parks have safety standards, and cars have seat belts. I prefer my risks to be calculated.

Shane begged me to let him jump. He pointed out that dozens of people had already done it safely that day. We stood near the top of the bluff and argued about it. My gut said this was too risky, and I was determined that he would not jump. Shane stomped to the end of the path and waited, staring down at the water.

It was Brett who convinced me. He told me he'd go first and show Shane how far out he needed to jump to land safely. When I still resisted, he told me, “You can't protect him forever. Sometime he'll have to decide to take his own chances. Sometimes you just have to let him go, let him grow up, let him live.”

I was too scared and too angry to watch. They headed out onto the cliff's edge, and I headed back down the hillside to wait for the helicopter rescue I was sure would be needed. I was about fifty yards down the path when I heard Brett land in the water. I turned and ran back, terrified, too late to stop Shane. When I reached the top of the bluff and looked down, my brother was laughing loud enough for me to hear him from where I was standing.

I only let him jump once that day, but it was enough for him. One jump made him happy. One jump and I had learned a valuable lesson in letting go.

One December morning more than seven years after Shane's death, the memory of that trip was brought into focus for me again when I turned on the news and learned of the Shut-Ins disaster: Early in the morning hours of December 14, 2005, the upper Taum Sauk reservoir at the nearby AmerenUE hydroelectric plant gave way, allowing more than a billion gallons of water to tumble down the side of Proffit Mountain and into the park. The force of the water stripped the hillside of vegetation. Mud, trees, and debris clogged the once pristine waters of the Black River. The trees alone were piled fifteen feet high in places. Walkways crumbled; park buildings were destroyed. And the park superintendent's family was washed into the flood water as their home, located near the entrance to the park, was swept from its foundation. The family was rescued, but the children barely survived.

And to think I was worried about Shane jumping all those years ago. All the time we were in the park that day there was a reservoir above us, hold-

ing disaster back. The water was just biding its time, waiting for a breach in the dam. We never even knew it was there. We never knew we were in danger.

I wonder about the superintendent's family. Did they have any idea what was coming? Did they realize there was nothing more than a flimsy dam separating them from life as they knew it and total devastation?

The truth is that none of us know. We will probably never know what precisely caused the Taum Sauk failure, just as we will never know with certainty what caused my brother's cancer. We will never have the chance to do anything differently. *Could we have caught it sooner? Would it have made any difference? Could we have been more vigilant?*

If Shane's cancer *was* caused by an injury, then Brett has a theory that is as good as any I've heard. Brett and I were already divorced when Shane got sick, but he loved Shane as a friend and as a brother, so of course we told him what was going on with the cancer. He knew when Shane's leg was amputated, knew when he died. I guess that it haunts him sometimes, too. He told me his thoughts on the cancer recently.

One night, a few years before the cancer, Shane went out with a couple of his buddies. They were riding around and partying like teenage boys sometimes do. The boy who was driving lost control of his Beetle on a gravel road. He missed a curve, and the car hit a tree head-on. Shane flew through the windshield, narrowly missed the tree, and landed in a creek bed at the bottom of an embankment. The car slid down the culvert and came to rest on its side in the middle of the creek.

When Shane came to he heard the driver moaning in a state of shock, "My car. Oh God, I wrecked my car." Shane asked where their other friend, Rich, was. When he got no reply, he went over to the car and looked inside. Rich was crumpled in the back seat, unconscious, with his face submerged in creek water. Shane couldn't reach him through the windshield, so he climbed onto the driver's side of the car, wrenched the door open, and tore out the driver's seat. He was then able to get into the car and pull Rich out of the water.

The wreck cost Shane ten stitches, inside and out, to cuts on his face above and below his eye. The emergency room doctor and the police said Shane was a hero. The cop I talked to told me my brother had actually pulled the driver's seat completely away from the floor of the car and tossed it into the creek so he could get inside. When I saw the car and how easily Shane could have gone head-first into that tree, I believed Rich wasn't the only lucky one that night.

Brett *doesn't think so*. He told me that he thinks maybe the accident was what caused the cancer. He remembers that Shane limped around for weeks afterward, complaining that his leg hurt. Maybe he did and I simply don't remember. We would have chalked it up to the accident. He'd flown through the air and landed in a creek, after all. Of course he'd be sore!

Brett sees the accident and the cancer as a sort of good and evil situation. I'm not faulting that idea. Why didn't God just take Shane the night of the accident? After all, a few more inches toward the center of the windshield and my baby brother would never have landed anywhere but the morgue that night. Did Shane survive to save Rich, yet end up with a fatal cancer in the process? I don't know if God works that way. I don't understand God at all when I think about my brother, and I don't need to; cancer is a disease of facts and of truths.

There were all sorts of tests, then chemo, then surgery to amputate. There were more tests, lung x-rays, metastasis, more chemo, the nausea, the morphine. That was the science, the *facts* of it.

There was also the initial probability that it wasn't cancer at all, but merely a benign tumor. *A benign tumor the size of a softball? Sure, it's possible.* Then there was the chance that the tumor would shrink with chemo so that they would be able to remove it with surgery. *But then, tumors bigger than my fist don't tend to shrink once they've gotten that used to growing, right?* There was also the slim possibility that they wouldn't have to take the leg. Eventually, the false hope gives way to a sense of finality, of inevitability. It is a sense that you try to block out by putting on your happiest face and pretending that you still believe in miracles. That is the *truth* of it, no matter how you try to act as though you don't recognize it for what it is.

Shane was nineteen when he died. He was married in May of that year and was gone before August. For three days we sat in the hospital room

as my brother's lungs slowly filled with fluid. Finally, the decision had to be made. We held his hands—Jenny, my sisters, and I—as they took away the machines and let his heart stop beating. I remember that they stood, the three of them, on one side of the bed. They held his hand, his arm, his leg. They wanted him to feel them there so he would know they loved him. They cried, and they held and comforted each other. It was everything that most people expect from grieving. I understood what they were doing.

I stood on the other side of the bed, held his hand, and told him stories: *Do you remember the "stolen" go-cart? Remember the time you ran away for ten minutes, then came back because it was too cold? Remember playing the band name game, when you didn't believe me that there was ever a band called Ambrosia? I had to call the radio station to prove it to you, remember? Do you remember the Shut-Ins?*

And then he was gone. I left the hospital. I went and I paid three dollars for a pair of rented shoes. I bowled three games in a row with an average of 118. Not stellar, as far as scores go, but I'd had worse games and would have plenty of bad games and bad days to come.

One of my worst days came just before that first Christmas without my brother. I went shopping for presents, and it was only when I was standing in the check out line, my cart overflowing, that I realized I had picked out a shirt for Shane. It was a beige and blue plaid flannel—nothing fancy—but flannel was popular at that time and I thought the color would look great on him. And then it hit me and I was mortified. Had I really forgotten?

I couldn't explain to the cashier why I didn't need the shirt. I just went ahead and bought it with the vague notion that I could bring it back and say it didn't fit.

But I never returned the shirt. Instead, I wore it to the Shut-Ins two days after Christmas that year. It was my first visit in winter, and I had the park to myself except for an older gentleman strolling with his Labrador. We nodded briefly toward each other and murmured as we met on the path, but we tried to avoid eye contact. I was relieved to escape further interaction; I wanted to keep my grief for myself.

I walked through a couple of inches of snow down to the swimming access, then up to the top of the bluff. The view, in winter, was still and lovely and harsh. Stretched out below me was an expanse of water, shiny and clear like crystals. Standing there at the top, I realized that maybe I hadn't done everything perfect, but I did everything I could for Shane with love. I loved him, so I let him jump. I hope it was enough.

Going Home Marilyn Koehr

"It doesn't matter who my father was; it matters who I remember he was."

Anne Sexton

I shouldn't be excited about this trip down home. We're going to Poppy Teem's funeral, but I can't wait to see everybody. A visit to Naylor, my dad's tiny southeastern Missouri hometown, meant a reunion with my country cousins. They were really Daddy's first cousins and their children, but I'd long since claimed them as my own, ignoring the official, often confusing levels of cousinhood. It didn't matter if they were first, second, once or twice removed, or even by marriage. They were just Kathy, Ronnie, Leon, Marvin, and their parents.

Mom had to work, so she didn't make the trip. Grandma had insisted she wouldn't go to "that man's funeral," still punishing him for some long forgotten, possibly even imagined wrong. At the last minute, she changed her mind, and changed the trip. *Swell, now I'll have to listen to four hours of how much better my cousins treat Aunt Helen than I do her. I don't get it. I was really looking forward to the time alone with Dad.* My dad's mother was a taciturn, hard, and often cranky woman. For years, I'd attributed those traits to her advanced age. It wasn't till I was twelve or so that someone who'd known her forever told me she'd been crabby at every age.



Shawla Scott

Grandma's presence made the trip infinitely longer, and my litany of sins seemed to grow with each mile. *"Kathy does all of Helen's ironing. Ronnie goes uptown and gets Helen's mail every day. Leon and Marvin keep Helen's garden weeded and hoed, without her asking them. They actually want to help her. They're such good grandchildren."* Why doesn't she just come right out and say it—I'm a lousy granddaughter. I don't get it. She wears permanent press, our mail is delivered to the door, and she doesn't have a garden. I do things—all the time. I carry her laundry up from the basement, I go to the store for her, I even dust and vacuum her house every couple of weeks. I don't get it. Dad reminded her of nice things I do for her, but for everything he listed, something far better was done by my cousins for her sister. He gave up with a sigh and just let her go on. She never saw the quick eye roll and wink he sent through the rear-view mirror. But that wink made all the difference to me.

It was dark when we pulled into the already full front yard at Aunt Helen's. Cousins crowded the driveway, the wrap-around porch, and the house proper while an oddly tinny Joe Cocker screamed from Ronnie's tiny transistor. An orange glow emanated from every window of the house, throwing the older cousins inside into silhouette. I couldn't wait to unload the Chevy and join Kathy on the porch swing. Tomorrow would be soon enough to remember why we were there.

We woke to the familiar aroma of a country breakfast. Aunt Helen believed that hospitality meant home-cooking. The table groaned under platters of sausage, bacon, ham, biscuits, pancakes, fried eggs, potatoes, and milk gravy to go on everything. *I am stuffed! Food never tastes like this at home. I wonder why that is? And I wonder how she does it. No one would know by looking at her that Aunt Helen is about to bury her husband. The only thing out of place is his empty spot at the table. I expect to see his door open any minute and to hear the familiar, "Well, Helly, it's too bad you can't cook any better 'n 'is. I'll just have to make do as best I can, I guess."* He'd said it every time we were there and always got the giggles he wanted; though I had a feeling he'd said it even without us around the table. They'd never needed company to have a good time.

Cars pulled into the yard around nine, and at ten we all left for Parrent's, the local funeral home, where generations of Hesses, Baucoms, and



Julie Gram

Martins, had been taken at their passings. Gene was my dad's generation's Parrent, and Poppy Teem had been entrusted to his tender care. We followed the hearse out past where Torch used to be, ending, as horse drawn wagons had years before, at New Calvary Cemetery. The old pews creaked as we sat in families and prepared to celebrate a good man's life. New Calvary Baptist overflowed with friends and neighbors: other couples, old now, who had worked nearby farms, folks from church, and good old boys who remembered both Poppy Teem and my own grandfather, Poppy Henry, from their days as silver mine guards in New Mexico. *We'll sing soon! I know I shouldn't enjoy this so much, but we never sing these old songs at church. It'll be 'I'll Fly Away' and 'Over in the Glory Land,' for sure, and maybe even, "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder."* Those were his favorites. And I'll get to sing alto; they never let me sing alto at church. Grandma and the other old ladies say it throws them off when Vickie and I harmonize. Gosh, the church is packed. I may not have much family on Mom's side, but I've got a ton here. Here we go...

"Some glad morning, when this life is o'er..." I heard Pepper's deep, mellow bass, Jean's airy soprano, Ronnie's bright tenor, and Daddy's slightly off baritone struggling to find the right notes. The little church shone with sunlight, music, and love. I would never have a stronger sense of belonging. Saying goodbye to Poppy Teem was okay because as long as that feeling of family existed, so did he. So would I.

Back at the house, folks changed dresses for shorts, and suits for jeans, as the yard filled again with cars and cousins. Kathy and I rode back with her mom and Daddy discussing who would bring which dish to the gathering. Mildred would bring chicken & dumplings, Eva the meatloaf, and Wilma's special potato pie would be there, too. I was crossing the driveway to the little house where Jean and Kathy lived to change out of my church clothes when I noticed Grandma sitting by herself on the washing porch. She seemed a little blue, so I grabbed two grape Nehis out of the cooler by the door and plopped down on the steps next to her rocker. I tried to talk to her, to ask her if she didn't think the service back at the church was really nice, but she just said, "Yes," or, "No," so I finally gave up and headed over to Kathy's. I don't get it. Why does she act like this? Did I do something to make her mad? I don't know what I could have done. I haven't seen her all day. Maybe that's it, but then why didn't she talk to me when I tried? Why do I keep trying?

I got changed and went back out into the yard looking for Kathy and the boys. Wilma, my cousin Stanley's wife, waved from across the yard. She was with a tall, blond, and pretty lady I didn't recognize. The stranger looked to be about Wilma's age, and got even prettier as they got closer, still arm-in-arm when they reached me. Wilma smiled, hugged me tight, stepped back, and started to introduce me to her friend. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Grandma jump out of her rocker, bolt down the steps, and hurry to us. *Whoa! What's the deal? I didn't know Grandma could move so fast. She's run-*

ning. I gave the stranger another look. *Who is this lady?* I was right to connect Wilma's friend with Grandma's unusual burst of energy. She'd raced across the yard to finish Wilma's introduction, "Leslie, I'd like you to meet Ernie's...." "Stepdaughter," slapped across my face.

His stepdaughter? What? Dad isn't my dad? Wait, that means that this isn't my family. No Aunts and Uncles, no cousins. Poppy Teem isn't even mine to miss, to mourn. I wanted to deny it, but the malignant gleam in Grandma's eye told me it was true. I choked on the lump in my throat and tears stung my eyes as I ran, pushing through clumps of stricken cousins and friends, to find my dad. Between tears, I told him what she'd said. I was already hurt and afraid, but the look on his face scared me even more. He was purple with rage, and for the first time ever, I saw him be unkind to his mother as he ordered her into the house to get her things. He put me gently in the car and said that he would answer all of my questions at home, with Mom. A few minutes later, he was pulling his mother down the driveway and nearly shoving her into the back of the Chevy while cousins in the yard clung, cried and whispered to each other.

I tried to sleep on the way home because Dad said I should. Several times, Grandma tried to talk to Daddy, but he wouldn't even look at her. He just squared his jaw and drove on. Mom was waiting when we got home. He must have called her. Grandma disappeared upstairs into her flat before we got the car unloaded, and Dad carried our things up the stairs as Mom opened the door with a shaky smile. There were tears in her eyes as she said...

"Don't worry baby, this just means that it's time to tell you a story." She had married young and against her parents wishes. Less than a year later she had me. When I was only a month old, her husband got a good job in Ohio and moved us there. Grandpa Fitz hadn't heard from her for a few months, so he drove up to check on us. He found us living in a cold-water trailer. Mom, who was almost six feet tall, weighed less than 100 pounds and was taking in other people's laundry to feed me because the man she married was drinking, gambling, and whoring away the money. Grandpa packed us up, found the man, gave him a terrible beating, and brought us home. As the man lay on the ground, Grandpa told him he'd soon be signing divorce papers

and relinquishing his rights to me.

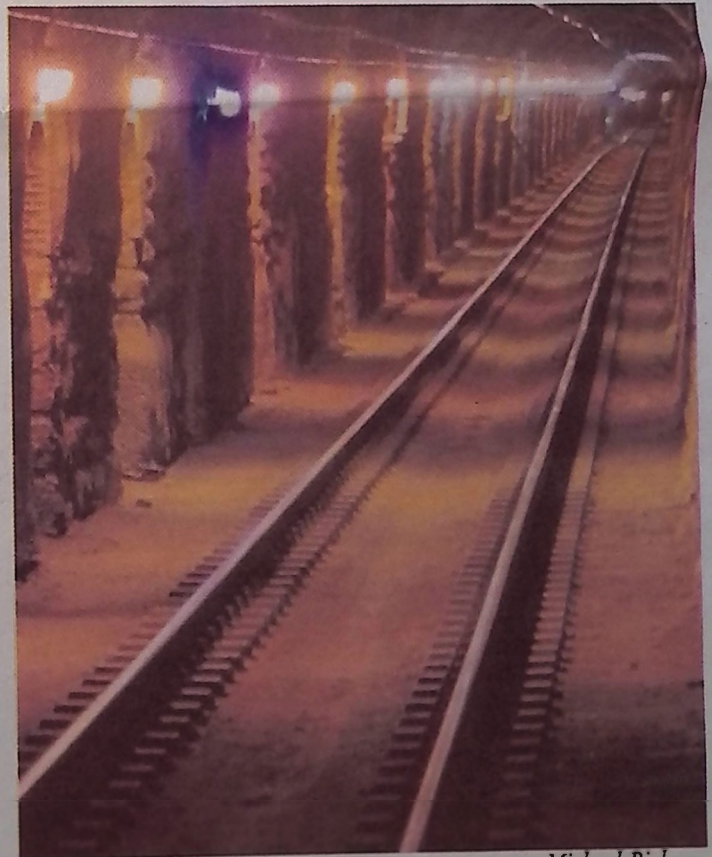
My Uncle Earl was the DA of East St. Louis at the time, and took care of everything (there is nothing anywhere that can prove my Dad is not my father.) I was two when they met. He actually met me first. His brother lived next to my Grandparents. Or as he put it, "I fell in love with you before I ever saw your mother." But I was no fool. He may have thought I was cute, but my long, leggy, brunette mother was probably the deciding factor. Together they told me about our wedding and even gave me pictures. Mom and I wore pale lavender chiffon and taffeta. Dad looked just like Burt Lancaster in gray. When they finished the story, they asked if I had any questions. I had two: was there any way my biological father could intrude into our life and was his family healthy?

I watched my dad's face. He was relieved and happy. Mom was still crying, but they were happy tears. They went on to tell me that I needn't worry about what had happened at the funeral. The only person who'd ever had a problem with my being Daddy's child was Grandma; everyone else was my family, by choice. And, even at fifteen, I'd figured out that it took a whole lot more to be a dad than it did to father a child.

We went on from there, just like before, including Grandma being distant and cold. She never said anything about it, and neither did I. I suspect, though, that Dad had plenty to say to her after we talked. That weekend was ten years ago. My sister, Laura, is fifteen now, like I was then. Grandma Minnie dotes on her, spoils her rotten. But that adoration for Daddy's 'real' daughter wasn't enough to curb her mean streak, and while Laura was upstairs helping her with some ironing, Grandma casually mentioned that we weren't really sisters. Laura reacted much the same way I had. She flew downstairs demanding answers that weren't mine alone to give. I called my parents, who were there in no time. Together, we told her about when Poppy Teem died, and going home.



Julie Gram



Michael Bieker

What's in a name?

Amy Perry

When I was young I tried to make myself as unspectacular as possible by befriending the weirdest in our class and becoming the "normal" among them. Now, for an overweight Japanese boy living in the middle of Suburbia, this was quite a challenge.

My parents were a prideful people and named me Tatsuya Matsuda after my great grandfather. I learned early on that, not only is the American tongue incapable of pronouncing Japanese names easily, but my name simply had too many syllables in it. Americans are a very flashy people by nature but favor simplicity in a name. Don't believe me? Just look at their stars. Brad Pitt. Glenn Close. Tom Hanks. The most popular name is "John Smith." It doesn't get much simpler than that.

For the first two years of my elementary education I suffered the humiliation of hearing my great grandfather's name mangled by a southern tongue. It was horrible really...the English propensity to put a stressor on a singular syllable, coupled with that southern transformation of "u" into "eww" and "a" into "uh." The summer before my third grade year, however, I did something unthinkable. I asked my parents to change my name. To Adam.

I will never know what compelled me to choose "Adam". Its similarity to "Tatsuya" in both sound and form is slim to none. I think because, despite its normality, it still retained a unique edge. "Adam" was no where near as banal as "John," "Matt," and "Tom," but it was still considered an ordinary American name. My parents were not thrilled with this idea. I could tell because their hidden wrinkles surfaced as they conversed in hushed, Japanese tones. At first they refused; they said a name was not something that could be changed on a whim because it defined a person's character. After three days and nights of whining and crying, they relented. I guess the sanctity of my character was not worth losing their minds to preserve.

I was thrilled. In celebration of this assimilation I demanded that my name be present on all of my new school supplies. To finally be able to walk into a store and buy a pencil with my name stamped into the soft wood was such a novel thing. Finally I was validated. Verified. I don't think Americans even realize how reassuring it is to have one's name in print. Still seven years away from my driver's license, pencils served as my form of identification.

Complete with a series of "Adam" school supplies, I stepped onto the school grounds feeling as though the battle of my name had tipped the war for identity in my favor, only to realize I had a larger, much more difficult challenge looming before me. I had no idea how an Adam was supposed to act. Newborn babies are crowned with names much too large to fit them comfortably in hopes that they will grow into the name and exhibit a personality suitable to the "Jennifer" and "Steve" they were meant to become. Babies are pliable, malleable. You get them young enough and you can mold them with your ideas of them.

Here I was though, nine years of age, given a name I had fought for instead of been given, and I had wrestled myself into it with complete disregard as to how it fit or how it looked. I had forgotten that identity was as much what I was perceived as, as it was how I perceived myself. They would know. By the way I talked or the way I moved, how I held my new pencils or how I fixed my hair, they would know that these were the actions of a boy who was *not* Adam.

I turned around to bolt for my father's Toyota, but he was not there. Turning back to trudge up the steps to the school I cursed myself and my foolishness. I had put so much emphasis on *becoming* Adam, that I had put no thought into *being* Adam. If only I had invested more time into learning my new role, instead of frivolously flaunting that I possessed it. As it was, with no escape route visible, I'd just have to wing it. Although I wasn't sure what exactly an Adam was, I knew what one wasn't. Adam *wasn't* Tatsuya, and so I

would have to measure any potential actions and excise anything that could be deemed too Japanese. Hopefully the amount of care I put into my expressions would prevent me from committing a fatal error and exposing myself for what I was. A fraud.

I was frozen. Before class started I stood in the corner of the room near the drinking fountain and watched my new classmates wander around with such ease in their names. Not wanting to look as though I had no purpose in being wedged against the drinking fountain, I bent down every few minutes to take a drink. Perhaps a boy with an insurmountable thirst was more peculiar than a wallflower. After twenty minutes of this my teacher felt compelled to come over and ask if diabetes ran in my family, but it was something to do. With my awkward hands and paralyzed lips and my new name, I had to do something to distract others from my insecurity.

When I wasn't stooped over the drinking fountain I was watching my classmates, but mostly one girl. Her name was Lin. She was the better half of a pair of fraternal twins that had been in my class since first grade. Like all good looking girls she was popular and consequently almost always surrounded by a group of people who were very not overweight and not Japanese. Her brown hair defied gravity with its bouncy curls and her eyes were impossibly green, but what I remember best were the pearly pink barrettes that pinned her hair away from her temples.

They had been given to her the year before by her father as an apology for missing her birthday; she wore them virtually every day after. They were plastic, shaped like smooth seashells and glossed so they glinted when she moved her head beneath the fluorescent light. To me, they looked like candy and I imagined they tasted like candy canes. I wanted to lick them to find out, but of course, I didn't want to be weird.

By the time the bell had rung and we shuffled to our seats, I had lost track of how many drinks I had taken and my stomach was feeling uncomfortably full. I shifted from one side of my chair to alleviate the pressure as the teacher called roll. I was almost counted absent when I failed to respond to the name "Adam Matsuda". Being the only yellow one in a sea of white, though, it wasn't hard for her to figure out that I was indeed present.

Around ten o'clock that morning I was forced to accept the truth that was churning in my bladder. I had to pee. My hand shook as I tried to determine if Amanda had twenty apples and four friends, how many apples would they each get if divvied equally among them. By 10:15 my worksheet was mostly blank and I was questioning the reality of apples and whether or not Amanda was lying about having four friends. At 10:30 the teacher told us to turn our worksheets in so she could explain to us the geography project that would take us until October, at least.

We were to pair up and pick a country in Europe. First we would color in a map of our country and mark the major cities to be cut out and taped to the wall outside our room. Then we would create a project on our country to be presented on parent's day, followed by a one page paper summarizing the presentation. Now not only was my bladder trying to wrench its way out between my legs, but my stomach was twisted at the prospect of being paired up with someone. If we were supposed to pick our own partners I was in trouble, I looked around the room and failed to see one person who seemed open to the idea of working with the spastic chubby Asian kid that didn't even respond to his own name.

Thankfully our teacher did the picking for us. As she paired us off she told us to get into groups and start discussing which country we'd like to pick. My heart beat with the lopsided ferocity of a one armed drummer as she wound through the class to me. She must have recognized the terror that glazed my features because she smiled reassuringly as she scanned the enrollment list to see who had not yet been paired off.

"Ah, yes...Adam Matsuda. Why don't you work with...Lin Hutchinson?"

This was a more menacing prospect than being paired up with some



of the meaner looking kids in the class. I had never managed to speak more than two words to Lin in the two years we had been classmates, and now I was expected to give a presentation with her. I glanced wildly about the room at the students who had clustered their desks together as they poured over European maps before my eyes fell on Lin. Thankfully she did not look entirely disgusted by the idea, she even smiled. I managed to return the smile, weakly, and got to my feet when she beckoned me over and motioned to the empty desk beside hers. Awkwardly I maneuvered myself around my sitting classmates and took a seat next to her. She already had an atlas open and ready, and she gestured to it with one hand before looking back at me expectantly.

"So what country would *you* like to do, Adam?"

I felt my vocal cords freeze up. Open mouthed, I stared at her for a moment, focusing on the barrettes before looking down at the map and pretending to study it, though all the countries' territories seemed to blur and bleed together. I swallowed hard, calculating my response before letting anything stupid spill forth. Now stop, think. What country would *Adam* choose?

"Um...I-I don't know...F-France?"

Looking up quickly to gauge her reaction, I saw her smile. "Yeah, I was thinking France too. You know my grandmother was from France!"

I smiled again, a genuine smile. I liked France. She liked France. We both liked France, we had something in common. We had something to build on. The relief that washed over me was so thorough that I felt it lift from the pit of my stomach and wash down my legs. Suddenly things like my identity and urinating were inconsequential. It was as though I was ten pounds lighter without these oppressive thoughts on my brain.

Little did I know there was a *reason* these things seemed trivial. I offered to go tell the teacher of our choice and got to my feet. Laughter erupted out of nowhere. At first I was confused and looked around to see what everyone was laughing at, but as I followed the downward direction of Lin's gaze, I saw. My khakis were stained with ribbons of wetness that stemmed from my crotch and ended shortly before the knee. Wet. Water. Pee. I had pissed myself.

I was horrified, my ears burned from humiliation as I did the only conceivable thing at the time and bolted out of the classroom down the hall to the bathroom. I was too late of course, but I knew that a bathroom stall would afford me the privacy I needed to ball my eyes at my stupidity. Hunched up with my back pressed against the wall I pressed my hands into my eyes, cried, and wished myself disposable. Disposable like toilet paper so I could flush myself down the toilet and never have to face Lin again.

My dad was called and asked to bring a clean pair of pants. An hour's worth of coaxing finally got me out of the stall, and when I finally emerged I looked drained, deflated, and very un-Adam. It wasn't so much that they convinced me that it was a natural mistake and it happened to a lot of people. I didn't believe that my classmates had already forgotten about it. Honestly, I just wanted them to shut up. Their too sympathetic voices pierced the clouds of my sorrow and rendered me incapable of wallowing in self pity. It was the first day of class with a new name, and I had already soiled my reputation. Literally.

As I was ushered into the classroom I felt eyes glued to me like the tentacles of a squid. There was stray snickering scattered across the room, but it was temporarily suppressed whenever my teacher's stern eyes appraised the group. It resumed whenever she turned her back however, and as I sat down in my seat I heard a boy behind me whisper "I wonder how Lin feels about having to work with Pissy Pants for a month."

It was not the first or last time that year, or the years that followed, that I would be referred to as "Pissy Pants" or "P.P." for short. It was a name that followed me around until middle school, where the student body was diluted by the merging of several elementary schools. "Pissy Pants" was not the name I had been given at birth; it was not the name I had grown into. Nor was it the name I wanted, and the identity that came with it. No, "Pissy Pants" was an identity created, and there was no name that actualized the scope of my elementary school years quite like that one.

I wasn't Tatsuya; I wasn't Adam. I was "Pissy Pants™," complete with bladder exploding action and cheeks that really blush!

Available at retailers nationwide. Suggested price \$10.99 plus tax.

Actual toy may vary from picture shown.

Fiction

2007 Litmag Fiction Prize Winner

The Leviathan

Blake Vaughn

The following has been transcribed from a journal, the owner of whom is since deceased. In accordance to his last wishes, it has not been altered from its original manuscript, save where deemed necessary for page formatting.

October 3, 1903

There are memories I bear which erupt from the formless black of dreams. I still awaken at night crying out for safety and, finding myself alone, I hide in sheets, attempting to assuage a cold shivering that refuses to leave my bones. I have given my account to countless others in futility, but still I know not restful sleep. I pray that in this inked telling I may concretely free myself from this memory, though I admit any faith I once had has long since left me, abandoned me in *that lake* those eleven years ago, never to return. Korta Ves.

Eleven years before my writing this, I was a fisherman on a small schooner which made berth in the miniscule village of Vërrdot in Norway. The village actively traded with the larger towns to the north and south, though it seemed stymied in its size, perhaps forced in by the great mountains which arose in a green and white wall around the lake and village nestled in the valley. The summers here were cool and the winters icy. Storms, a rarity in the isolated grounds, appeared briefly over the enormous lake, the most weather in any year being an occasional rain or snow and a gray fog cloak which regularly rolled in off the lake, filling the valley.

I had come to the village during my adventurous days in Europe and had taken on the fishing work as a means to pay my way forward into the north and east. In my time there I made a begrudged niche for myself, working on the docks as a shipping-hand for a short time before earning my way aboard *The Chaste Shepherd* as a trawler. It was there that I first heard the tale of Der Kortavian. The Leviathan.

The stories, of course, always took place in the murkiness of fog enshrouded night, usually alone on a vessel, though one or two accounts had multiple witnesses. Each of those telling their tale swore to the Lord almighty that they had witnessed a great fish or snake-like form half visible in the swirling mists. Its size varied greatly from tale to tale. In one story, it was long as two men and slithered vertically through the water. In another, it was great as a house and a half, its back faintly visible as it slithered along the surface before disappearing beneath the black waves. The town drunk claimed that on one occasion, his inebriated stumbling caused him to fall into the water and he would have surely drowned when he was suddenly saved by the serpentine creature which bore him to the shore. Though those who were present saw him hide from the back of an errant floating log, he would not be dissuaded from the magical rendition of his tale and would dissolve into cursing and quaffing when the others would poke fun at his story.

Such tales are not uncommon among seafaring folk, especially those in solitary climes. Loch Ness has its own beast and the oceans home to the horror stories of the formidable kraken, but here, such tales seemed supported by the strange and diverse species of fish which were often brought in from the cold salt-lake waters.

Since those days long ago, I have hidden away many hours in libraries immersed in tomes and essays of the aquatic species which exist in the deepest, darkest depths of the seven seas and recognized many there in the queer hauls from Korta Ves. In all my literature, these were fishes untouched by sunlight, save when discovered inert upon sea shores. I speculate now that they were driven from the deep in a sort of migration, for every so often on days three

or four months apart such strange catches would become highly common before diminishing once more. My experiences have pointed to a driving force, one of terror from an unimaginably ancient hunger and a restlessness so colossal and vicious that even the hearts of the thoughtless fishes of the sightless deep might know fear!

It was these bizarre and numerous oddities which gave the tales and town a mysterious air as thick as the fog and vast as the lake and mountains. Perhaps this was why I remained there for four years, casting line into the seas and sharing the terse brotherhood offered to any new blood in the long-generational village of xenophobic fishermen.

The men of this region were well aware of the seasonal moods of the fish in the lake and capitalized on them: the fishing traffic on regular days was doubled and tripled on those days three or four months apart when the waters would bustle with life and the hauls were always plentiful. It was one of these days in August when a younger and more innocent version of my self reported to *The Chaste Shepherd* for the day's work, this long before my transformation into a terror filled, hydrophobic shell.

The air was chill, but the sun and the effort the trawling demanded kept a body warm. The crew hands (men all of them) worked vigorously with little talk save a few grunted affirmations or orders. Among the men on deck there was an unseen social barrier which barred communication on any meaningful personal level, the closest relation to emotional discourse being a perpetual tirade of crude jokes and grunted insinuations which all those on hand were expected fluency in. Between this and the crew's general distrust of outsiders, I had few relations with the men onboard, save a handful. One of this handful, the one most fluent in the vulgar tongue, was Michael.

Michael, a fisherman's son, was a cheerful, lusty lad with a great sense of humor. His wit kept the hands smiling in the colder eves when icy rope cut hands like razors and the air itself stole away warmth save what merriment could provide, as he provided onboard the ship that evening, the men rumbling with laughter as Michael described his night's antics with the town whore. Though the men were prone to such small outbursts of gaiety, they held their laughter in check so as not to forget their jobs on the lake.

I had seen the whore once before by the docks. I was repulsed by her, though I knew not why.

Donald and Watson had come from Britain. Twin brothers, they, like myself, were outsiders who had earned a place among the men in their fifteen years on *The Chaste Shepherd* as hard working and efficient laborers, each knowing what the other needed or was at almost magically, so close was their brotherhood.

Finally, there was Captain Boljdag: solitary and powerful, stern but fair and always open to his crew. Eight lengths tall and bristling with muscle and black beard, he possessed a dominating presence which the men respected and rallied behind proudly as their confidant, ally and beloved leader. His appearance was the result of a solid work ethic, the years of hard labor on the lake producing a body that was statuesque in form, like a Grecian statue, created in the image of physical perfection. These four I felt closest to; the other oafish, lumbering shipmates almost as alien to me as a herd of bulls would be in the modest, fishing village.

Near the end of the work day, Boljdag called the crew belowdecks to a meeting to decide on our course. The captain began by saying, "Today was a good haul, boys. I think we got twice what we'd hoped to bring in and we're going to have to head back to unload our cargo. Is anyone against coming back out tonight while the fishing is still good?"

Of course, all those onboard could use the extra income (most all of the men had wives and children at home they supported) and a few needed it badly, though all merely replied with a solemn nod. "All right then," Boljdag continued, "we'll meet up again by the pier tonight after we've unloaded our cargo." The remainder of the evening passed without event, though even in those early sun-setting moments, a faint mist had already begun to rise from the brine.

That night was thick with anticipation and fog. We hurried aboard as soon as the captain arrived, though we moved slowly due to our night-blind-

ness and the fog.

The mists seemed unusually thick that evening. Starless navigation was difficult and only a dim outline of the coastal lights marked the village docks. Nonetheless, the captain navigated us out to the middle of the lake and there we began our night's work, blind to what fate stalked us in the dark, though each man was a little nervous at the faint electrical current which ran among them.

The catch was indeed a great one. Every pull of the trawling nets yielded a full load and required we haul in regularly. The result was a cold, clammy affair leaving most of the men arm-sore and the hull of the ship full to overflowing with fish of as many shapes and colors as to be beyond the imagination. While we worked, I spoke with the captain of his home and his aspirations. After a time of speaking of affairs of the heart, a smile crept across his stern face and he promised after the last haul to take me out for a drink. "You," he revealed to me, "may be the only man here that I feel close to." A sudden shift of the water caused him to lose his balance. I caught his arm, but his weight pulled me down atop him. For a long moment, I held him and he held me before the ship leveled and we stood, sharing a confused and blushing smile.

It was nearing the final pulls that the captain noticed a clearing of the fog and the distinct signs of a gale wind blowing across the lake, the forebear of a storm. The captain bellowed that this would be our last draw and the men agreed. What the captain didn't know, what he *couldn't* have known, was the terrible speed and ferocity of the storm which bore down on us even as we finished pulling in the last net of fish. Only half of this haul made it into our hold before, suddenly, the fog lifted and the ship and crew were battered with black, icy waves, hard, pelting rain and a wind that froze marrow within bone. The sudden torrent of rain swept away what little light of the town could be seen, wrapping *The Chaste Shepherd* in the darkness of a moonless night.

The captain's cries to batten down the hatches could scarcely be heard over the din of the wind and rain and thunder. Our only dim illumination of the chaotic scene came from lingering lightning flashes and rain-washed lanterns, three of which had already gone out. In the calamity, one of the nets fell back into the sea, where it suddenly pulled taut, the draw rope slapping one of the crew to the ground and then suddenly snapping off at the railing's edge. The men, myself included, fell silent upon seeing this and were at a loss for words. The first of us to move was Donald, who cautiously peered over the side, holding fast to the railing, and yelling back over the storm that there was something moving in the water.

The captain yelled out, "What!?" Donald shook his head, when suddenly the ship keeled forward so violently, most of the men were dropped to the floor and the ship was, for a moment, peering straight forward into the murky blackness. It was in that moment that I noticed the peculiar swirling of the waters around us, the violent and great waves giving way to whorls and odd lumps in the surface, these recurring shapes spanning several kilometers from our schooner as far as could be seen by lightning flare. Then, suddenly, we were righted again, wrenching this way and that with abandon, the sudden heave launching Donald and several others overboard into the raging black waves.

The captain began to yell for life buoys, which several of the men were already beginning to grab, when the ship was flung back from the front as something erupted from the water, stealing our breath and filling our hearts with the dreaded notion of running aground. The emotions which followed I have never again experienced save in those nightmares which haunt my waking thoughts.

At first, I believed it to be a cliff face or tree, but when it persisted in form, neither growing forward nor shrinking I peered closer. The fore lantern of the ship illuminated little, save a wet ebony wall, barely visible by the pale yellow light struggling through the torrential rain. Damn my eyes, I then looked up and up into the night sky, peering through the blackness for the top of this pillar but search as I might the heavens, the clouds blotted out the moon's light. I was still searching upwards when there was a great, persistent flash of lightning which stole the red from our icy cheeks and paralyzed most on deck.

I know it was an unnatural thing, an abomination. Black-scaled and serpentine in nature, its neck was thick as a small house and its head, reaching

as high as the clouds, tapered to a bone-jagged eel's muzzle. The creature's head was easily as large as our ship. The thin outline of its maw was hooked into a bestial countenance. Great, looming yellow eyes peered down on us from that lightning flash before it faded into blackness. I stared on in mortal terror. Once more Zeus' fury flashed through the sky, but its thunder boom was overwhelmed by the bone-shaking roar of the Leviathan, revealing rows and rows of dripping serrated fangs.

What happened next occurred so fast that all I recall are flashes; if, indeed, it was the speed of the horror which causes my memory to falter: I tentatively suspect my mind attempted to conceal the truth of the event from my recollections, though it may have found the sheer size of the beast to be uncontainable.

There was a sound of vast, swift movement above us and I remember the frightened, impotent look on a crewman's eyes as he, along with the whole of the foredeck, vanished into that ravening, descending maw. I remember the sound of splintering wood as the fore of the ship was cleaved from the aft, causing it to buck wildly back on its keel. I remember my muscles ached and my arms stung with the strain of grasping desperately at the aft deck rail which flew up to meet me. Several men were launched overhead when the ship rocked back violently, their screams and splashes formless in the blackness and rain.

Still I clung to the railing on bobbing half a ship, already sinking below. The aft, and I along with it, was being wrenched to and fro, though the bulk of the storm had now passed. I distinctly remember that cold dread that grasped my heart upon the realization that the wreckage I clung to was being moved from *beneath* the waves. My god... Even while this terrifying creature chewed at the heavens... the bulk of the beast was still below the waters!

Suddenly the lake erupted again and the roar which followed caused my muscles to seize against the hull of the vessel and I opened my own mouth. I know not if I screamed or cried or was paralyzed from fear, but I know my mouth was open for it was suddenly filled with choking black brine, causing me to wretch and sputter and loose my hold on the prow, plummeting helplessly into the icy death below.

The sudden slap of freezing water sucked out what little warmth there remained in my blood and left me in shock, clambering at a deck board which had floated near me. Suddenly I was thrown back again when the ship I had previously been on was exploded by the Leviathan tearing through the center of the cargo hold, swallowing whole the fish within and consuming the two crewmen who were trapped in the ship's coffin.

Knocked back a second time, I sunk below the waves and I struggled futilely to the surface for air. Feeling a massive rubbery slithering against my leg, I clawed at the water enveloping me to get away from that undefined form and once again found the damp air my body screamed for, the rain having now nearly stopped.

For the longest time, the only sounds were the shrill cries of the surviving crewmen, one of whom was laughing manically though I know not which. I could still feel the weight of the volumes of water being shifted around me and I knew the creature was still below us. Suddenly the laughter ceased with a squawk and a crash and a warbling roar and I know I then began to scream frantically, one hand clinging to the barrel I had secured myself to and the other violently flailing at the water, trying to get away from the invisible terror though I knew it surrounded me for countless yards on all sides.

Voice after voice was silenced, some with the gurgling screams of lungs filled with blood, others with nary a whimper, till I was sure that I was alone and resigned myself to my fate, sobbing salty tears into the salt lake. I was beyond cold at this point. I was numb from the icy brine, my whole frame shook senselessly from hypothermic shock and my hands were frozen into clutching claws. The storm having all but gone and the turbulent waves now calm once more, all was still and silent when suddenly the water before me exploded yet again and I was cast back and away by the large choking waves that almost certainly heralded my death.

It was then that the dense clouds broke for a moment and moonlight spilled forth into that grisly scene. All about me were the scattered corpses of men and fish. The remains of the vessel were torn asunder, floating timbers soaked with icy water and cooling blood. And there, in the midst of this carnage, the serpent, the Leviathan stood, the moonlight shimmering dim rain-

bow patterns across its slimy black scales, its yellow eyes glowing in the pale moonlight. The moon was but a crust of unleavened bread before it. I did not cry out then, nor did I sob when that vast, insurmountable head peered down and surveyed its damage. I did not even scream when its eyes fell on me, I was so resigned to the death I was sure awaited me.

The Leviathan stared. I looked back. For a moment, the world stopped and I knew that this was the sensation of death: immense, inevitable, soundless and cold.

Then it quietly submerged once more into the cold, stark water. I felt the water beneath me shiver and then calm. The storm had ended, yet I still lived.

When I regained consciousness, I was in the bed of the village doctor who was startled to attention when I groaned with a belabored breath. "You are very lucky, my boy," The doctor began, nervously looking me over, "most of your shipmates died and many of those who were brought in did not survive the night."

What he said was true. Several of the men had died shortly after being pulled from the sea by the crew of *Fearful Nancy*, which spotted our wreck while traveling out that next morning. Donald, his brother Watson, Michael, the captain and I were the only ones pulled alive from the bloody remains of *The Chaste Shepherd*. Of those who survived, Donald and Watson were most permanently scarred: Donald's fall and subsequent struggle for life had permanently crippled one of his legs. When I spoke with them, I noticed that the trauma had robbed the two of them of their preternatural bond and their interactions were clumsy, as though their force of brotherhood had been stolen from them. Michael and Captain Boljdag were mostly unaffected, like myself, though I sensed a chip on the captain's shoulder, his proud and boisterous demeanor now somewhat hushed and undercut by a humble, emotion-filled tone. I was fortunate to have made a full recovery, bodily at least.

After that night, the men of the village refused to associate with me. Despite their own tales of the Leviathan, they saw my rambling about the horrors that I witnessed as madness and, when I would approach them, they would act awkward, stumbling over words and acting terrified of physical contact, lest I infect them with my outsider's insanity. The other four survivors refused to support my claims. Donald and his brother returned to England, Michael and Boljdag began spending their days in the bars, drowning themselves in rum and whiskey. It was not long before I left that town and fled to my old home in the Americas. I know not how I managed to get across the ocean to return home without truly going mad, save through the grace of God and a daily allotment of alcohol strong enough to blind a drunkard.

It is here, in the middle of a vast continent, that I have stayed for all these years, unable to sleep, unable to think freely without being reminded of the bloody violent screams of invisibly dying men and those terrible, yellow eyes. I still have a scrap of wood from *The Chaste Shepherd* which I keep on the wall at my bedside. Touching it...calms me in some way, as though by virtue of this scrap's existence, the boat and crew still exist intact in one form or another. I know now that I will never be rid of this memory and may never gather within myself the courage to venture out into the sea once more. I hear of the exploits of the brothers Wright and am inspired by their bravery, though I am still not foolish enough to act on such inspiration. They are brave to fly, but know only of the seen world and act in ignorance of the ocean, that unseen depth as vast as the heavens and the unknown horror which claims it as its own dominion.

The passing years have wearied me greatly. I only look forward now to that long rest robbed of me eleven years ago by the light of the moon. If it does not come, I fear I shall be compelled to feel the choke of the waters one last time. I wonder if I will ever brave the uncertain seas again, for a mortal dread holds me in check, the same dread which stays my hand from ending my own life: I fear that in death I may cast myself blindly into an even darker and vaster sea than that which surrounds me and which I recoil from in futility.

Memoirs of a Music Box

Patrick Culleton

The green glow of the world outside passed through the dusty window, falling upon Lucy in her chair with a gray murk. She had been cleaning throughout the morning and had just finished lunch. She was tired. She had been tired for a long time, but on this day it seemed as though it had planted its roots deep in her bones. Her dull, milky eyes were affectionately fixed on the small music box set before her. She leaned her slumped body forward and gently cranked the small metal arm. She melted back into her chair and clenched her eyes shut as the small chiming tune caused the deep creases of her worn face to shift and rearrange into a subtle, content smile.

The music box had been bought in a little knickknack shop in Hannibal. Lucy and her husband, Steven, had grown up there and they had once had family to visit, but since then, they had all gone or moved. They would make the trip each summer, stay with Steven's sister, and spend the days wondering and reminiscing about the quaint streets and their childhoods. As she could remember, it was the last trip with the entire family, before Steven died and all of her children moved away.

They were walking down Church Street on their way to watch the river when she saw the little music box. It was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, there were only a few puffs of clouds in the sky, and the cool breeze, rolling up from the Mississippi, carried the sweet smell of honeysuckle like the laughter of an old friend. As they passed Clemens' Crafts, a ray of sunlight flew down from above, passed through the front window of the little shop, bounced off of the music box's gold horn, came back through the window, and grabbed Lucy's eyes. She turned her head and there it was, sitting among a scatter of cheap souvenirs. To Lucy, its perfect gold horn, delicate crank arm, and little gears didn't belong amidst the Huck Finn slingshots, Tom Sawyer whitewash brushes, and Mark Twain biographies.

She begged Steven to buy it for her, but he said that they didn't have money for trinkets. She started to argue with him right in the middle of the street, something that she never did, until he conceded to possibly buying it later, which she knew meant no.

She sulked for the rest of the morning while Steven teased her; the children threw stones into the Mississippi, and the barges lurched either north to St. Louis or south to New Orleans. When midday came around, Steven ran back to his sister's to get the lunch that they had prepared that morning. When he returned, he handed the picnic basket to Lucy to lay out. She took the basket and put it on the grass next to her without even looking at him. When she opened the basket, there, sitting on top of the blanket, was the music box. She stared for a moment at it with softening eyes, then at Steven, then back to the perfect little music box. She gently picked it up, cranked the little arm, and listened for the first time to the soft, sweet chime.

Lucy spent the rest of the afternoon lying on the blanket with Steven, watching the Mississippi lazily make its way south while the children ran and played with their cousins. The river seemed so much more peaceful there than it did in St. Louis. But it had been years since she had seen Hannibal. In fact, it had been years since she had seen anywhere beyond her backyard. Lucy had grown old and the memories bouncing around in her mind were beginning to make her head swell to the point of aching.

You see, Lucy had seen Hannibal and she had seen St. Louis, where she had lived since she had been married, but that was it. It was more than her parents, though, who had only seen Hannibal, and her children had seen more than her, which, to Lucy, was how it should be. How much they had seen,



she couldn't be completely sure because she hadn't seen them in a couple years. She talked to them on the telephone now and again, but that wasn't the same. Lucy knew they were off raising their own families and taking their own family trips, and that pleased her.

The gentle chime of the little music box was beginning to slow, so Lucy leaned forward and gave the small metal arm a couple more cranks. She leaned back into the chair with her eyes still glistening at her small musical souvenir. It was in the shape of a small gramophone. It reminded her of the old Victrola that her father had brought home

when she was little girl. At that age, it was her favorite thing in the entire world.

She was eight at the time. She was lying on the floor of the front parlor, reading a magazine by the orange afternoon light streaming in from the large front window, when her father, with the help of Lucy's uncle, came through the front door carrying what Lucy thought to be some odd sort of furniture. It was a tall wooden box with a metal horn coming out of the top. She stood and followed them to where they sat it down in the corner. Her father ran back outside and came back in with a large square envelope. From it, he slid out a glossy, black disk. Lucy watched as her father opened the top of the cabinet, placed the disk inside, and cranked the metal arm that stemmed from the side of the wooden box. Lucy's father and uncle began to laugh as her face perked up with the complete innocence of awe. They listened to that record over and over again. Through the night, they sang and laughed, and Lucy stood on her father's feet as they danced around the room. It was the earliest sweet memory that she had.

For many months, Lucy's life revolved around the Victrola. She wasn't allowed to play it by herself, so during the day she would sit by it as if it were a close acquaintance whose silent company she truly enjoyed. She studied every detail of its cabinet, looking for recognizable shapes and figures in the grain of its wood like a child would do in the clouds. She ran her hands across its surface, searching for every little blemish. She wanted to know everything about her Victrola. Then, everyday, when her father came home, he would crank the arm for her and the front parlor would become a lavish ball in her honor. Thinking of the old Victrola made Lucy's body tingle with joy. She thought at the time that that gramophone was the most amazing thing in the world, but now there were telephones, computers, and who knows what else that she couldn't possibly begin to imagine or understand.

The music was beginning to slow again, so Lucy again leaned forward and, this time, picked up the small music box. She held it close to her face and gave it a close inspection. Through its clear plastic casing, she could see the gears slowing down. Her vision blurred as the notes grew further and further apart. Through the growing fog, she continued her examination. On top of the casing, the tiny needle arm was broken and mended with clear tape. The little plastic horn that protruded up and out from one of the corners came to a flourish of flower petals and was painted in a scratched gold. A couple of the petals were missing, leaving jagged gaps in their place. Lucy's breathing began to slow with the melody. Softly, her arm lowered until it was limp on the cushioned wing of the chair, letting the music box fall to the floor with one final lovely note.

2007 Wednesday Club Winner

Ellen's Reprise

Delany McKenzie Allen

The alley wasn't cold yet—not so early in the evening. Below and between high walls the rubbish heaps kissed the pavement in a trickle of tin cans and crumpled paper. Weak sunlight tripped over the surrounding barricades, falling upon rusted ladders and spilling down brick. Forgotten rainwater seeped into the pores of the alley; the air was damp and tasted metallic and old.

It was an organic and serene place to take refuge, and thus Ellen was out on her fire escape, ready to take comfort in her customary evening smoke as she flipped her lighter nonchalantly. Her cigarettes remained an uncomfortable lump in her jeans pocket; she had only begun carrying them a month before and was as yet unused to the burden. Peer pressure had not been an issue in her conversion—something in the simple and powerful lines of the cigarette itself, and in the vision of quietude and stark romanticism that accompanied lighting up and breathing out that first relieved stream, had struck her as beautiful. Thus, to give in to weakness for aestheticism and to become something timelessly enchanting, she strode boldly into a grimy gas station and bought a pack. After her initial fumbling and coughing fits, she had relaxed into a practiced routine. Now she could express her misery or exasperation or fear or passion and look striking and sophisticated at the same time.

Soon afterward she realized how foolish she'd been, as the nicotine raged through her bloodstream, laying claim to her willpower and leaving desire and need in its wake. *It'll be easy to quit*, she had thought in those first few moments. *I'm not smoking to relieve stress, or to forget...I'm just smoking because it looks good.* But then life had become all the more complicated, and she found in smoking relief. Earlier today she had been on the fire escape once again, smoking away the aches and emptiness as her most recent complication put on his clothes and left without a word.

She turned and leaned against the fire escape's railings, watching the sun set in her window's reflection. The apartment seemed strange to her, now. The living room was neat and orderly, magazines stacked on a plain black coffee table, the couch and chairs riddled with small purposeless pillows, the carpet vacuumed and the kitchen floor swept clean.

The apartment looked as though it were waiting for someone to arrive. Untouched. Not lived-in at all.

With a wry smile she slid a cigarette from its package, gripping it tightly with her lips as she began her weary ritual. *How pathetic*, she mused. *Bound by repetition.* She gave way at last, flicking tired metal until she could contrive a fire, and raised the lighter to her lips. A sudden wind interrupted the flame in her hand, and she turned toward the bricks for shelter until the fire took at last. Pulling smoke down her throat, her eyes fell upon the window below hers, and she choked.

He was stunning. His curls shifted from strawberry to gold as they dripped onto his collar. Liberally tanned skin traced the lines of a button-down, with sleeves rolled to frame sweetly tapered forearms. His fingers were delicate and gentle upon the shelved books he carefully rearranged. She drew closer to the window, kneeling on the weathered metal and gazing into a diorama of an unsurpassable moment. As though watching TV, she could at once imagine and not-imagine herself within this world of his. His nicotine wormed its way through her veins as stripes and jeans became a suit and tie. His books, leaning crazily on a solitary bookshelf, were passionate: a tour de force of intellect and reason; his living room quickly became neat and ordered as mess gave way to carpet and cloth. She slowly backed away from her landing, straining every muscle to keep the stairs from moaning as she made her way down to his level. But he left the room, stepping lightly to avoid the debris so invisible to her, and she crumpled.

Ellen turned away from his sill, bringing the forlorn cigarette to her lips again, taking comfort in the feel of clouds trickling through her lips. He had left her vision before turning, and she found herself on the end of an unfamiliar ache, fallen for a faceless entity. Already her cigarette was halfway gone.

Startled by the sound of an admitting door, she turned, following the noise to the window beside her original focus: the bathroom. Delighted, she minced toward the edge of the landing, leaning over the railing for a counterbalance. And again she could see his bright crimson ringlets shifting in the light, and she sighed.

He turned his head side to side, staring archly into his own reflection, unmarred as it was by falling leaf or thirsty lips, and gave her the full benefit of blue-green eyes and chiseled features. He threw himself a roguish smile, and with a knowing and understanding look, began: "My, what a specimen you are."

She flew upright, startled into momentary flight. His soft and breathy treble sent trills down her spine, settling in her stomach like honey. "You are..." She whispered, trembling.

His warm hazel eyes traced his figure approvingly. He leaned forward, scrutinizing his flawless complexion, searching for a clogged pore or a missed blemish, and, upon finding none, began refining his eyebrows with a pair of tweezers. He hummed tunelessly as he perfected himself. Ellen smiled, charmed by his sweet music and overjoyed to find in him a man who cared about his image. At last, here was a man who would appreciate the time Ellen took with her appearance in the mornings.

He poured styling gel into his palms, running it liberally through his auburn curls, shaking his hair out before setting each and every ringlet in its proper place. Ellen stared hungrily at his delicate fingers as he sculpted his hair with an artist's hands, smoothing down flyaway strands and twisting curls into a deceptively simple but elaborate confection.

She started at the distant sound of a buzzer. He grinned at his reflection and left the room.

Ellen sighed resignedly, and leaned back into the stairs, certain that he would be gone at last. But he returned a moment later, TV dinner and wine glass in hand. With a dull horror she watched helplessly as he sat on the bathroom counter, staring idly into his mirror between bites. He ate daintily, sipping his wine, sitting in silence; Ellen could not tear her eyes away from the man so entertained by his own countenance. She bit back a sob as his hair faded into a dirty blonde, his eyes now a dull brown, his lips frozen in a satisfied smile, and she turned, backing away up the stairs, retreating into her sanctuary in a twelve-step ascent. Before he faded from view completely, she caught a glimpse of his face, inches from his face, whispering, "It's really too bad, isn't it? No one could ever compare to you, and yet they still try. What utter futility." He chuckled, and left the room.

Ellen hugged her knees to her chest, shaken and exposed. She could still hear sounds of habitation drifting up from his den, sounds so alien and familiar as to only intensify the forlorn confusion she persisted in. As she drifted in this reverie, struck dumb by her own delusion, she could hear his window open, and saw through the rungs of her ledge the colors of betrayal and bemusement leaving his apartment. He stood on his landing a moment, long enough to light his own cigarette: one more overlooked and absentminded concession to the realm of commoners. Watching him, she could feel his paper between her lips, could taste his filter against her teeth, and she sucked air in with him, breathed out with him, fingers itching for something small to hold. He tapped away the dead skin, and started for a descent.

She reached for him, extended shaking fingers toward his balanced frame as he walked just below her perch. His gel-soaked curls slipped from her grasp as the inches separating contact grew. And he walked away.

She sighed and rolled back against her window, disgusted with her own impotence. Helpless against the tumult of self-loathing, she pulled her addiction from her pocket, setting fire to it, taking it in and expelling it, and trapped herself in another long drag to forget.

"What utter futility," she murmured, and, in a satisfied way, she tilted her hand, watching the cigarettes tumble into the alley below, one by one.

Author Biographies

Delany McKenzie Allen is a junior studying Anthropology and Biology. She is pursuing a Writing Certificate in Creative Writing. Called "Kenzie," she has never previously published, but edited the literary magazine at her high school and was president of its Creative Writing Club. She enjoys writing poetry, juggling, and reading Ray Bradbury and Stephen Dunn.

Patrick Culleton is currently working on his BA in English to be followed by an MA in Creative Writing. He aspires to some day be done with school and make as much money as possible for as little work as possible. He enjoys walks on the beach at sunset and dinner by candlelight, or something like that. If you would like to contact Patrick, he is around.

Yevgeniy Elperin was born in Ryazan, Russia. She moved to the U.S. at the age of nine in 1996. Her favorite authors include Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, and Anthony Burgess. Her poetry influences range from poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac to musicians such as Rodger Waters and John Lennon. As she sees it, poetry is merely an extension of ones self just as art and music are. Self expression is a beautiful thing, one that can be made ever more tangible by people who choose to make it so.

Julie Gram is an administrative staff member in the College of Optometry since 1990, and she appreciates the stimulating intellectual atmosphere of academic settings. Before coming to St. Louis for her MLA degree, she worked at the Universities of Georgia, South Carolina, Portland State (Oregon), and Arkansas. Photographically, Julie has a particular interest in abstract images, her selections herein notwithstanding. Her work in Optometry keeps her mindful of all things visual every day. A digital photography rookie, she is most grateful for the delete function. Now a devoted Cardinals fan, Julie grew up in D.C., gamely following the fabled Washington Senators baseball team.

Ellen Herget was born and raised in St. Louis. She has been an avid bookworm throughout her life and a poet since the 8th grade. Her apartment in U. City is shared with two cats and a personal trainer. She is an anthropology major and a senior, and plans to graduate in May of 2008. As her next step, she is considering getting an MFA in poetry, and also hopes to teach English in Japan. Her other interests include Eastern culture and Buddhism.

Marilyn Koehr has the honor of being the first Valedictorian of Harris-Stowe State University, and is currently pursuing her masters in Secondary Education English through the joint Harris-Stowe/UMSL masters program. She recently read one of her poems and short story that were chosen for presentation at the Sigma Tau Delta convention held in Pittsburgh this year. Upon completion of her degree, Marilyn hopes to teach writing to college freshman here in St. Louis and continue her lifelong ambition to be a storyteller.

Brittany Maine lives in Swansea, Illinois, with her family and dog. As the title of her poem would suggest, she commutes (via the Metrolink) from her home to UMSL as she earns her B.A. in English. She is an avid reader, and enjoys writing both poetry and fiction.

Jake McDonnell, a.k.a. Wut Metaphysical, is a previously published poet as well as an underground hip hop artist from the St. Louis area. He is scheduled to graduate from UMSL in the spring of '07 and plans to work with humanitarian efforts in third world countries. For more information please visit www.wutmetaphysical.com.

Julia Murphy is a transfer student to UMSL from St. Louis Community College. She has an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Deaf Communications and works part time in the community as an interpreter. She is a Psychology Major and a student in the Pierre Laclède Honors College. Julia and her husband of 20 years, John Murphy, are the parents of four children. Her written work is about her mother-in-law, Kitty Lou Young Murphy Dees (1937-1971), a woman she has only met through stories and photographs.

Shannon Pendleton is a senior pursuing her B.A. in English, a Writing Certificate, and an Honors Certificate. She has been fascinated by words since she began reading at the age of 4. When she isn't writing or working, she spends time with her family. She lives with her sweetheart, Ricardo, with whom she shares a passion for music, wine, and horror movies.

Amy Perry is a Psychology Major currently in her second semester at UMSL. She enjoys Chuck Palahniuk books, Wes Anderson movies, and referring to herself in third person. She has no children, considering herself much too young to be a mother, but does have three cats: Aniki, Neko and Sing. They are a source of great amusement and inspiration when they're not taking turns sitting on her laptop and keeping her from writing.

Andrea Richardson is steadily working on her B. A. in English and French. She's also working on the writing certificate. The more she writes, the more her obsession grows to find the perfect word to create the perfect phrases or the perfect sounds that fits the exact mood, idea or thought.

Caitelin Sappington will graduate this May with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, a certificate from the Pierre Laclède Honors College, and a Writing Certificate from the English department. She started writing poems when she was six and began delving into writing courses at UM-St. Louis when she found her Psychology courses weren't providing ample opportunity to liberate her creativity. After graduation, she will be heading to New York for graduate school.

Shawla Scott has a BA in English Literature from Missouri University. She is currently working toward a MA in English Literature at UMSL and aspires to teach English at the college level after graduation. Shawla is passionate about reading, writing, and analyzing poetry, and she plans to continue writing throughout her career.

M. Sehr revels in the details of life. She has recently fallen in love with: an addict, the only song she knows how to play on the harmonica, dance hooping; at UMSL: the only random girl at the fireside lounge who accepted s'mores she made there, a guy she saw wearing a kilt, and whoever wrote "don't trust gov't" on the inside of the concrete gateway by the parking garage. People often explain themselves by careers or music they like. She tries to live her life to be defined as one who truly loves God and people. Her work is written for both.

Blake Vaughn was first published in Pendragon, the literary magazine of Francis Howell North High School, with an untitled haiku and is now enrolled as a full-time student at UMSL. His avocation is anything that will keep a roof over his head but the career he is most interested in pursuing is professional writing. Blake is currently working towards his masters in English and is finishing a pre-made adventure for Dungeons & Dragons titled The Tournament of Champions. His inspiration for "The Leviathan" came from a vivid nightmare, and because he can't draw or paint well, he wrote.

Marissa Lynn Wood was born in Des Moines, IA. She moved to Missouri with her family when she was around eight years old. As a child she remembers spending weekends out at her grandparent's farm, near Clinton, Missouri. She and her two siblings, an older sister and a younger brother, would enjoy bottle feeding calves and playing in the milk barn. Marissa wrote "Shawnee, Missouri" to be a tiny glimpse into her mother's life on a dairy farm with her four sisters.