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Sail Away
by Rebecca Figler

“NO, don’t *touch* that!”

I quickly pulled my hand from the slippery steering handle of the boat. I thought I was helping by taking control when the rudder was momentarily unoccupied, but my scowling brother seemed to think otherwise.

“No one touches the tiller but me. Got it?” He spoke harshly, squinting his eyes at me. He had to blink several times as rain and mist from the ocean sprayed his face and got into his eyes. I looked at him apologetically, hoping my innocent expression would appease him. He jerked his head back to whatever he was concentrating on before. “Duck,” he added sharply, just loud enough for me to hear over the crashing waves and the wind and rain. I ducked just in time as the boom swung low across the boat.

I wasn’t surprised by his behavior that day. He was usually angry at something, just in varying degrees. I figured he was annoyed about the storm sneaking up on us unexpectedly, and I knew that he was concentrating very hard on getting us back home safely. I also knew that his anger rarely originated from me specifically, so I tried to forgive him and not take it too personally.

I remember he had been so happy when he was sixteen, when our mother got him his new little Sunfish, a boat big enough for four people. He taught himself how to sail, learned all the special terms, and practiced all the sailing knots. He mastered everything in no time. He even painted the boat and learned how to maintain it himself. One day, I found him staring closely at the side of the boat as he meticulously painted perfect, black letters onto its surface. He usually had a job or two on the side, but I knew that while his friends were using their paychecks on taking girls out on dates and filling their cars with gas, the little money my brother made went toward the care and maintenance of his boat.

One night at the dinner table, over a feast of Chinese take-out, our mother was commenting on how the only thing my brother did was sail by himself, and how “us two siblings” never spent any quality time together. It wasn’t that we didn’t get along; we just didn’t hang out because we didn’t have much in common. But she was concerned that because we were almost ten years apart, we would never be close with each other.

“Hey,” she said, motioning at my brother with her fork, “why don’t you take your sister out in the Sunfish? I’m sure she’d love that.” In reality, I didn’t care either way.

“No thanks,” he replied, not looking up from shoveling lo mein noodles into his mouth.

My mother frowned at him in disapproval. “I think it would be a great idea, spending some time getting to know each other.”

“We know each other fine.” His tone became more defensive, and he glanced up at me for backup. “Right?”

I nodded. “Yup.” I knew that if I had answered with anything else, I’d hear about it later. I looked down at my sweet and sour chicken.

After a while, the conversation between them became more like an argument, and then it turned into more of a verbal fight. My mother was glaring furiously at him from across the table. “Well, from now on, you’re going to take her with you wherever you go, and maybe that will give you enough time to think about talking to your mother like that!”

“WHAT?! *Are you kidding me?*” he retorted, his eyes wide in disbelief and his mouth still full of noodles.

The day after my brother’s sentence, he was the angriest I’ve ever seen him, going about everything in a constant rage, shouting at me about everything. But I understood. It was just his way of dealing with life. And I knew he had other things on his mind. He seemed frustrated because while all his friends were off at college, getting their first apartments and getting out into the world, he was still at home. I wasn’t sure why that was, but I assumed he was most likely stuck here for a while, still living under the rules and financial support of our mother. I often wondered if he dreamed of sailing away and never returning, and I wondered what brought him back home each time.

Since that night, he hadn’t taken me everywhere, like my mother had ordered him to, but he had started taking me with him when he went sailing. Every time was always a little different. Sometimes he’d be annoyed or angry, like the day of the storm, and yell at me for various things. Sometimes he’d completely ignore me and pretend like I wasn’t there, and the whole trip would be silent except for the lapping of the greenish-gray waves against the boat. On those silent days, I never knew if he’d warn me about the boom swinging across the boat.

As time went on, and after we had spent more time together on the boat, he started to treat me like part of his crew, and even his little sister. He’d quietly ask if I was doing okay, or he’d shield me from the boom by gently pressing down on my head with his hand. If he was in a particularly good mood, he’d show me all the intricate sailing knots he was working on, and he’d teach me sailing terms, like boom and tiller. Sometimes he’d even explain the parts of the boat to me, like how the boom was the bottom beam of the main sail, and how it would swing across every time the sail changed sides so that the boat could make the zigzag pattern that allowed the maximum speed. But he would never let me steer or control the ropes of the sails. The most he would let me do would be to hold any excess rope that was lying on the floor so it would stay dry and be out of the way when he was switching sides.

The waves echoed my brother’s aggravation, and they became higher. Luckily, we could see the shore, and it looked like we were almost home. My brother was concentrating harder than ever, especially because the wind had shifted so that it was against us. Even so, we were still slowly moving forward.

I knew he wouldn’t want my help, so I just looked out into the wild ocean and watched the waves roll among each other, their white crests splashing into the boat when they crashed onto the side.

Suddenly, I felt a sharp pain on the back of my head, as if something thudded into it. Millions of colored dots filled my eyes, followed by complete blackness. The next thing I knew, I was submerged in the thundering sea. I struggled to reach the surface for air, thrashing my arms and legs. But the violent force of the waves above me kept pushing me down underneath them. I couldn't manage to get another breath, and soon I would have no choice but to inhale the bitter salt water.

Then, as quickly as I had fallen into the water, I felt a strong arm loop around my torso, grab it tightly, and roll me onto my back so that I was above the water and able to breath. The arm began pulling me in one direction and didn't stop until much later, when we finally reached the shore.

We still don't hang out that much, but he does little things like ruffle my hair when he walks by me, or sometimes he pushes me playfully. Although he now makes solitary sailing trips for his much-needed alone time, he still takes me sailing with him, and he teaches me new things about sailing each time, including the right way to steer with the tiller and how to control the main sail. And sometimes, if I'm lucky, he'll let me sail the boat all by myself, and he'll lie down and close his eyes, listening to the calming rhythm of the ocean waves.

Blue Since...
by Daniel Ceritto

Born a blue being
Blue collar
Baby blues dreaming
Arctic aura
Blue since birth season
Snow upon this pole
Other feelings fleeting
Mood ring broken
Another hold I'm leaving
Through this loophole
No more deceiving
Won't let them have a piece
of gold no reason
Pat my back for shooting in the hole
Stuck on the 7th one
This is where all is told
This is where I begin
To get irrational
If the sky is for those
Whose seeds are sewn
Then it's contradiction full
If this is where angels have flown
Then the course of the blue
Has taken control
Everything that's half
Was once whole
Every artery ripped
Can't be sewn
Every coop I flipped
Already been flown
Oh no, loose lips
Can't make a happy home
Can't find sanity
So the streets I roam
No more words of mine spoken
Conversations open
I'm a cellular phone
Take it or leave it
I'm bestowed with a sour tone
Click...dial tone
Could care less
If you continue reading
The rest of the poem

The truth hurts
Now the love Jones
Is long gone
and left alone
I keep a flow
With the seasons
Here today gone tomorrow
Malice and woe
Of actions that will soon bring you sorrow

“Dewey”
(a character sketch)
by Chelsie Sutherland

He had been trying to escape, from the throng of partiers who crammed his apartment from wall to wall and the smell of beer and sweat that clung to their clothes, out into the relative quiet of the New York night. College kids spilled out of the apartment and onto the apartment stoop, milling around the university neighborhood street. It left nowhere to go but up.

Even if the roof below his feet still vibrated to the tune of remixed Nelly and laughter came from the street below, up among the rooftop patios and gardens, the brick chimneys and television satellites, it was blissfully secluded.

“Ey, ‘ey, you gotta cig?” A hoarse, raspy voice came from behind him and made him jump. The source of it smelled of birds, unwashed socks, and much cruder things that didn’t dare be named. If it weren’t for the stench Caleb would never have noticed the old man, because otherwise he shuffled in a way that was completely noiseless.

It was the first time Caleb met Dewey.

Trying to break to your roommates that they had a homeless man camping out on your roof was something you did gently.

“So, you know we have a homeless guy living on our roof, right?”

Caleb was working on the “gently” part. He still broke it to them better than the time he had found mushrooms growing from the toilet.

Darrell didn’t seem bothered by the news in the least, not even by batting an eyelash. Instead, he gave a sort of half-nod from behind his chemistry book. Caleb raised an eyebrow as his roommate claimed, “Yep, he’s harmless. He’ll be gone when it gets cold out.”

No luck there, but Justin didn’t seem busy with anything, so maybe...

“Oh, yeah, Dewey’s cool. Been there forever. He drives the neighbors crazy, so they want him out, but I think that’s more a reason to keep him.” Justin said from around a mouth full of Fruit Loops and soymilk. “What? They’re parking-spot-stealing jerks.”

Caleb gave him a dead stare. “Since when do you even have a car?”

Justin swallowed, and then tipped the bowl to drink the sugared-soymilk out of it, setting the bowl down harshly. “You wouldn’t know it, but I DO have one, it’s just in the lot two blocks away

because *someone--*”

Darrell took command of the situation then, pausing in his intense highlighting spree. “He’s allowed to stay up there if he doesn’t cause any trouble. No biggie.”

Things could have probably gone on without another problem, but Caleb found that he just didn’t like the idea of some rickety old man camping out on his roof. It was one thing to see the homeless in alleys and on church stoops, but sleeping under the stars right above him? Goddammit, that just wasn’t going to fly. He just didn’t want to get the landlord involved (not just because of the damage from last week’s party), was all.

The second time Caleb met Dewey, he stomped up the stairs with the intention of telling the old man to leave. He swung the door open, fully intent on having a serious discussion and possibly calling the cops to forcibly evict the man, but it opened to an empty rooftop and the city skyline. He never would have noticed the ramshackle tarp-covered pigeon coop behind him, if a flock of pigeons hadn’t hurtled past him out of the sky.

They perched everywhere there was a foothold for their scruffy, downy rears. The top of the coop, the roof of the stairwell, the ledge running around the edge of the roof, the old man sitting with his book on an overturned milk crate, it didn’t matter. And they all stared back at Caleb with bright orange, uncaring eyes as he tried to pretend he hadn’t just cursed them out; their bobbing heads and soft coos only reinforced the firm set of his jaw.

“Hey, you. Yeah, I don’t mean to be a-”

“Shhh, you’re interrupting Rukeyser.”

Caleb blinked, the Dewey turned the page of his battered old paperback.

“No, you’re squatting on my apartment.”

Dewey started humming, a steady tone with no discernible melody. A pigeon took an experimental peck at the pages and he gently nudged the bird from his lap.

“I’m not trying to be the bad guy here, but it’s kinda, y’know, illegal. Once the landlord finds out-”

“I could not tell you apart, one from another. For that in childhood I lived in places clear of you, for that all the people I knew met you by--”

Dewey was only just getting into the poem, voice starting to rise, his rasp only accenting the reading. The pigeons milled about, more of them fluttering to the coop as their perch got louder and louder.

“-Crushing you, stamping you to death, they poured boiling water on you, they flushed you down, for that I could not tell one from another. Only that you were dark, fast on your feet, and slender. Not like me.”

Caleb would have said something, if he currently didn't have pigeon feathers in his mouth from birds that had accidentally fluttered too close to his head in their escape.

“For that I did not know your poems. And that I do not know any of your sayings. And that I cannot speak or read your language. And that I do not sing your songs. And that I do not teach our children--- Oh.” Dewey finally turned around, dislodging the last pigeon from his head. “You still here? Man oh man, the usually stomp off by the first verse.”

Caleb shoved the last bird away, but found he wasn't nearly as angry as he was embarrassed. Somehow, between all those lines, the fight had gone out of him. “I...yeah.”

Dewey shrugged and went back to his reading, the lines coming out raw and strong from his chapped lips. This time, Caleb didn't interrupt.

*Ruthanne**by Patrick William Jackson*

Her razor blade lips keep each word bleeding
as they breathe away from her, staining her teeth.

Mumbling.

Eyes weighed down by those sewing-thread lashes,
the needle interfering when she tries to blink.

So she keeps them open, wet and dry, screaming eyes.

When she stares at the fridge in the mornings

the old orange cat plays with her hair,

knotting it into tangled nests like yarn or a dead dog.

When she sleeps, the old cat chews at her open fingertips,
twitching in dreams.

At noon they are bandaged as she stands at the door
and hands the children their mints.

By three they are seeping as she bears the dull knife
hard into her food.

She is getting worse at grating cheese.

Secret Lives of Teachers
(an excerpt from a novel in progress)
by Margaurita Spear

Homeroom is a failure. Miss Sommers decides to shuffle things up and change the leave-well-enough-alone seating plan. Will ends up way in the back of the room and I end up in the front. Jazz and Ollie are in a different homeroom altogether, so I don't even have a chance to end up with one of them. Instead I get the second seat from the front behind oh-so-obnoxious Brock de los Santos. He's a jock and jocks are the male versions of Primas. To Primas, I'm caribou and it's always hunting season.

After the seating shuffle, the morning announcements come through the overhead speaker. It's mostly static mixed in with birthdays, club meetings and fund raisers. I trace my finger over the pattern on my plaid leggings and fiddle with the zippers on my shirt.

At the lockers between classes, the Primas, Shayna and Maddie, go out of their way to comment on every aspect of my appearance. My outfit is unflattering, my hair too long, my jewelry too sparse and my backpack too green. If I couldn't complain to Will, I would lock myself in the girls' bathroom and wish for a natural disaster.

After the longest most miserable morning, the Freak Squad united, arrive at the lunch room. Will, Ollie and I bring our lunches from home, but Jazz gets the school lunch, which today is mystery meat sandwich and tater tots. Jazz heads for the lunch line while the rest of us secure our usual table, in the outskirts. The jocks and Primas occupy the center tables.

Not two seconds after we sit down, Jazz plops down with her tray and asks me, "Why so glum?"

"I am hideous," I tell her.

"Well those leggings are a fashion don't," she agrees, "but you are not hideous."

"The Primas have been giving her a hard time," Will volunteers.

"Will told me not to wear these pants," I mumble and unzip my lunch bag.

Jazz nods in Will's direction. "You should listen to the boy. You are too short to wear those leggings with that shirt."

I shrug. "I'm too short no matter what I wear." Truthfully I am the shortest person in the entire school, other than Ollie who wins by an inch. Even my twin sister is two inches taller than I am.

I peer into my lunch bag and pull out an egg salad sandwich and some chips. Will has emptied his lunch bag onto the table. He has a hunk of chocolate cake to accompany his cold chicken cutlet sandwich.

"Cut her a break, Jazzie-Jazz," Will offers me some backup. "She had a tough morning."

"Join the club," Ollie pipes in, his first comment since we sat down.

We turn our attention to Ollie as we munch our food. Will swallows a mouthful and washes it down with a gulp of flavored vitamin water.

“What happened to you?” he asks.

Although the question is for Ollie, Jazz answers. “His parents.”

Like always, I’m confused. “Huh?”

Ollie slumps in his chair, which at his height is not a good idea. “I found out I need to wear glasses.”

Still confused, I ask, “What’s that got to do with your parents?”

“Oh, it gets better,” Jazz answers popping a few tots into her mouth.

Done with his sandwich and about to unwrap his cake, Will is getting frustrated. “Tell us already.”

Jazz sits up even straighter and leans forward, her long slender body arches over the table. Her gold hoop earrings sway and brush against her cheeks. “His parents came with him to school today,” she declares.

“So did my mom,” I say.

“And mine,” Will adds, “They dropped us off out front because of the snow.”

Ollie moans into his hummus and sprouts on a pita. “No, mine came *with* me to school today. As in, they came to homeroom to talk to my teacher.” He folds his arms and buries his head in complete disgust and humiliation.

“Oh my god! Why?” I drop my spoon into my yogurt cup.

“To make sure I get to sit in the front in all my classes,” Ollie mumbles through his sweater sleeve. He has barely touched his organic greens salad or his sandwich. And his pressed apple juice sits untouched.

Will wipes chocolate from his mouth and asks, “Why not just write a note?”

Ollie turns his head to look up at Will. “Because they’re my parents. And because I’m me.”

It’s the best explanation he can offer and the most truthful. Ollie was a miracle baby born to a pair of eccentric New Age parents, who go above and beyond to make sure he has the safest healthiest upbringing possible.

“Yup. That’s life in Ollie-wood,” Jazz confirms from her seat next to me. She attempts to toss her empty milk carton in the trash barrel near our table. Of course, she misses. Jazz is tall and built like an athletic WNBA player, but she lacks grace and coordination.

Ollie casts a disdainful stare her way. “I hate when you say that,” he says.

“That’s why I love it,” she says back before standing to retrieve her missed shot.

Ollie finally sits back up and picks at his food. “What’s wrong with your day, Chelsie?”

Will jumps in with an answer before I can swallow my last potato chip. “She got stuck behind a tree in homeroom and the Primas have already begun Chelsie-season. Their rifles are locked and loaded.”

Jazz returns to her seat, “Oh. Poor Chelsie,” she empathizes. Jazz has had her fair share of Prima problems. “Is that what you and Will were chatting about in between classes all morning?”

I nod before throwing away my lunch trash. I grab Will’s and throw it away, too.

“What tree did you get stuck behind?” Ollie asks when I sit back down.

Again Will answers on my behalf. “Brock. He’s like the size of Chelsie times four.”

I jump in with the details of the new seating plan in homeroom.

Will nudges Ollie’s with his elbow, making him drop his forkful of spinach and radicchio. “So, Olls, where are your new specs? I didn’t see them at all this morning.”

Ollie stabs at his salad again, gathering a mouthful of lawn clippings. “Backpack,” he states. “I don’t want to wear them. My mom picked them out.”

“Let’s see,” Will bumps his elbow again. More salad is dropped into the plastic food storage container.

I’m about to take a sip of my 2% milk. Milk makes you grow taller, right?

“You better wait on that milk,” Jazz warns.

Ollie slips his glasses out of his backpack and slides them onto his face. Jazz is right. One look at Ollie’s glasses and I have to stifle a laugh. They are just that awful. They have blue tortoise shell frames made out of thick plastic. Across the table, Will is having difficulty keeping a serious expression on his face. I know he wants to laugh, too.

“Oh, Ollie, don’t ever take those out again,” Will cautions.

I reach over my lunch bag to grab Ollie’s wrist. “You win,” I say. “You’re day is *way* worse than mine.”

Lunch is over and Ollie dumps his uneaten food into the trash barrel.

*Venezia**by Rebecca Figler*

pickpockets lurking
tourists rush to buy nothing
red sky fades to blue
I quietly sit and watch
the stillness of the water

*An Aussie Nursery Rhyme**by Margaurita Spear*

Hey didgeridoo didger dingo
The wombat was out playing bingo
The kangaroo hopped
The koala bopped
But they all spoke the same outback lingo

*Star**by Jordan Pomazon*

She was a star, shining out in space with a light all her own.
She was unlike any other, commanding the universe and shaping the world.
She was perfection, immaculate beauty embodied in radiance.
She was all these things, but at the same time she was nothing.
She never existed at all.

“Deus Ex Machina”
(an excerpt from a work in progress)
by Chromeheart XIV

Now

“I was just wondering,” Alistair says, “why, as long as I’ve known you, I never knew you to go on a single date.”

I pull a face. “You don’t date, either.”

Alistair sips his tea. I can smell it from where I am. Cherry flavored green tea, or something like that.

He picks up a pencil off the table and points it at me. “I have a legitimate excuse: I do not wish to get shot at again,” he says. “In fact, I still have the scars from the last time. But you, on the other hand...”

“What about me?” I ask. I make a subtle point of not inquiring about his having been shot at remark. I look down at the table and realize that Alistair has made a cup of the same tea for me as well. I never used to drink tea; I’d always been more of a coffee person. Maybe my new acquired taste is a step toward change.

Maybe not.

Alistair’s dark eyes search my face, his own face alight with the bright sunlight streaming in through leaded, stained glass windows that had apparently come with the house. I wonder how old this house really is, as it seems as ageless as Alistair, whose eyes in this light appear faintly iridescent like the wings of a dragonfly. He changes position, tilting his head the other way so that his hair casts softer shadows against his angular features, and the eye-glimmer vanishes again. A trick of the light. Has to be.

He taps his forehead a few times with the eraser end of the pencil, then puts it back down and pushes it away from him. Alistair hates to be caught in the act of fidgeting, I’ve noticed.

Alistair takes another sip, cradling the mug in his hands. It must still be reasonably warm. The radiator is on the fritz again, and as it is a radiator and not an old analog television, kicking it does not usually improve the situation. I’ve tried numerous times. It did not work once.

“You are not unattractive, Elissa,” Alistair says cautiously. He teepees his hands on the table for about two seconds and a half, then puts them in his lap, determined to leave them there. “You don’t have

any obvious flaws, or a mental disorder to speak of.” He pauses. “And, you can even be rather charming when you’re not taking great care to be a pain in my ass.”

I pull a circus peanut out of the bag that I’d left open on the counter earlier this morning and throw it at Alistair. My aim is true. It bounces off his smooth cheek and lands in his tea with a wet plunk.

I cannot help but giggle at the way he scrutinizes the peanut, squinting at it as if it were some kind of an insect spread apart beneath the fisheye lenses of a dissecting scope. He plucks the circus peanut out of the tea with his thumb and index finger. Then he sniffs the mushy thing and pulls a face.

“Is this supposed to be edible?” he asks me, brandishing the soggy lump of stuff that used to be artificial marshmallow.

In response, I grab two more out of the bag and stuff them in my mouth. “You should try one,” I mumble.

“No, thank you. You’re avoiding my question.”

I chew. Chew some more. Swallow. Have a sip of tea to get rid of the aftertaste. Good tea. I make a mental note to tell him so later. “And your point?”

Alistair gets up from the table. He comes over to me and leans against the counter, hooking his thumbs in his belt loops partially to do something with his hands and partially to keep his pants from falling off as he stands there. He doesn't think I've noticed the weight he's lost, and I get the feeling he doesn't want me to.

All he needs to do is look at me. If eyes really are windows to the soul, I wonder what kind of a soul I have that he seems to want to spend so much time looking at it.

It is all that he ever needs to do.

I avert my eyes, twisting another circus peanut in my hands until it breaks. I notice that a good amount of my absinthe green nail polish has chipped off. Maybe I’ll fix it later. Maybe I won’t. I rub the marshmallow pieces between my fingers, then I realize what I am doing and how silly it probably looks and put the mangled candy on the granite countertop for the time being. Now I find myself staring at it. Orange-white goop sitting against a beautifully gray slab of stone that sparkles with various-sized chips of mica.

“People are funny,” I say slowly. “I don’t think they’re worth the things I’d have to sacrifice to let them get to know me that well.” *Except for you*, I want to say, although I do not consider Alistair to be any kind of a sacrifice and he doesn't deserve to be thought of as such. But other people...

In my mind, a vivid picture erupts of Leroy, my ex. For someone who thought he was in love

with me, he sure didn't seem to care very much what I wanted.

I force myself to think about something else, but it is too late. Alistair is looking at me funny, having probably sensed the alteration in my thought patterns, in that uncanny way of his.

No matter how hard I tried, I could not wish away the past.

I become aware of a quiet, simmering anger in my companion, but the realization that he is angry at my ex for making me into this kind of a person, and not at me for being the way I am, is slow to dawn. Because he already somehow knows that I was a very different sort of person before Leroy came into my life.

Alistair looks at me for a long time, his expression melting slowly from protective rage to the tranquil softness I have grown so accustomed to, tinged with hints of deep anguish that, as much as I hate to admit it, I have also grown accustomed to seeing in him.

Sometimes he cannot help it, as I can't help but be an irredeemable wise-ass sometimes, but other times I almost feel as if he is showing that part of himself to me on purpose.

I look down at my hands and see that I've dug my fingernails into my palms in the absence of a circus peanut to twist and maim. I hide them in my pants pockets.

"Let's make a bargain," Alistair says.

I do not trust my rebellious mouth, so I only nod.

"Good girl," he says affectionately, and I do not smack him this time because he isn't being condescending. His kind face swims before me, the kindest face I have ever known, and I am suddenly overtaken by the fear that I might someday lose him.

"I won't let another man hurt you again and you'll keep your past where it belongs—in the past."

I nod again.

Alistair shakes his head, more at himself than at me. "Elissa, I need you sane," he says, looking more vulnerable, more *disarmed*, than I have ever seen him. "Mental illness is almost hereditary in my family. I can't *let* that happen to anybody else who doesn't deserve it, much less someone I—" he bites his lip. "Do you understand?"

I nod, feeling guilty for no nameable reason. He *is* my light. I cannot darken him.

I gaze upon Alistair and a small part of my inexplicable mind wishes that I really was the sister to him that I almost felt like I should have been. I wonder to myself how one person can mean so much to another person, and both of them be insignificant?

Gerrit's House
by Eric Lomen

My father
rescued old stories
onto magnetic black tape
from the dying

This is my art
it's been passed
down

far

inside

Books fill every wall

from entrance around
up and down
to exit
from floor to ceiling
cats and
dust
bowls,
cups
coffee and
Gloucester water
Ascending stairs
floating piles of yellowing
papers
squeezed between the books
are Thorpe drawings
paintings and
framed letters
from poets. Each room
is strewn
with paper
bound, stapled,
tacked up, rolled,
stuffed, crunched,
and folded
into categories
of aging years
of interests, obsessions

building a tender
brain whose still
trying to find
his typewriter among
the monsoons of
uncountable walls of books.

A Time of Need
by Tommy Hirsch

While most kids ran around, played games and made new friends, I sat in the corner staring off into space. Unlike all the others who ignored the fact that their parents had just left them alone in a scary new place called school, I was consumed with fear and I didn't want to be there. I had no interest in joining the others or making new friends. As I sat there, gazing off, a short little girl with chin length brown hair sauntered over and plopped down next to me. With three simple words: "Hi! I'm Claire!" my life had changed forever. From that point on we instantly became friends.

Although each of us spent most of our time with other friends throughout elementary and middle school due to the fact that our schedules varied vastly, we still managed to always keep our friendship connected. It wasn't until we began high school that our friendship really began to blossom. With all of our newfound freedom, we found plenty of free time to cause trouble and in the process became like family. I considered her family, as she was like my sister. When I was down, she knew how to make me feel better and unlike my real family, she listened to what I had to say. She never made me feel like I had to continue the act I put up for everyone else because she allowed me to be myself. It was because of this that Claire helped me accept a part of myself and in the process made our friendship even stronger.

It started out like every typical Friday night, a simple text message, asking if I was free. As if it were hardwired in my head, I responded yes and found myself quickly getting ready. A new shirt and jeans to replace the ones I had worn in school that day and a quick glance in front of the mirror to make sure everything stayed in place. I told my parents I was going out and rushed out the door to find the familiar steel gray Honda waiting for me at the end of the driveway. Music was blasting out of the windows and the bass thumped in a slow rhythm, causing the car to vibrate. I opened up the passenger side door, allowing the music to escape its cage and crawled into the low compact car.

As I adjusted myself in my seat and fastened my seatbelt, I glanced over at my friend, Claire, fixed behind the steering wheel scrolling through her iPod's music library. Unlike the Abercrombie and Fitch clones at my school, Claire was unique. Tonight, she sported her favorite ruby flannel over a floral shirt, a black skirt with leggings and a pair of cowboy boots. Drawings of skulls and random notes decorated her hands and fingers between her oversized fake emerald rings. Her mid back long brown hair fell down in a tangled mess of hairspray and a light pink headband nestled its way within the nest of

hair. Within seconds I was thrown back in my seat as we sped away towards the mall, our typical hangout. Like many of the other teenagers in the area, we spent most of our free time there. As we sauntered down the polished eggshell white tiled floors, we gazed over window displays and searched for friends. Unable to find any, we made our way back to the car in disappointment. Although I was looking forward to a night partying with a group of friends, I needed some alone time with Claire. Lately, my head had become crowded with thoughts that just needed to be set free.

Soon we found ourselves parked in front of the abandoned field next to our old elementary school. The air was thick and hung around me like a quilted comforter. We sat in silence staring at the empty field sprawled out in front of us. With a flick, she turned on the reading light between the front seats of her car and picked up her iPod. As she searched through her music library for the perfect song to blast on her dilapidated speakers, my mind began to race. I felt light headed as I contemplated all my options and visualized all the possible outcomes. A light click broke the silence as she chose a song and motioned for me to turn up the volume. Quickly the sound of music mixed with the suffocatingly thick air and surrounded me.

The dim amber car light radiated down and lightly flowed to the crevices of the car, giving us a sickly complexion. I briefly glanced at the light switch and shut it off. My eyes adjusted to the darkness, and I refocused my attention to the empty field. Unlike the field, my head was crowded with thoughts and I felt like screaming.

We bobbed our heads methodically to the beat of the song and silently lip-synced the lyrics. She leaned forward and violently turned the volume knob to the right, causing the car to vibrate with each beat. I leaned back in the plushy vinyl seat and waited for the music to drown out the incessant clamor of thoughts in my head.

The air grew thicker and became muggy with our breathing. Like a menacing shadow, fog began to creep up the windows, and soon our view of the field was blocked. I slowly sat up and held down the switch to open the window. Light spring air wafted in and began to clear out the thick, muggy air that was trapped in the car. I glanced down at my shoes and focused my attention on the hole forming midway down the side of the right shoe. I took a deep breath, looked up, and turned down the music.

As if it was planned, our eyes connected in the darkness. With a puzzled look she asked me why I shut the music off. I fumbled over my words like a toddler as I searched for the right thing to say. I quickly looked away and began to play with the hole in my shoe.

“What’s wrong?” she asked as I continued to play with my shoe, making the hole bigger. My head began to throb and my heartbeat raced like a stallion. Sweat began to form on my brow as I ventured to meet her gaze again.

“You know how you said we would always be friends? No matter what, right?” I quickly blurted out. Worriedly she shook her head yes, never breaking her gaze. The puzzle pieces of words and thoughts that filled my head began to piece together and my fear began to subside. For a second, I listened to the light breeze whistle outside and rustle the tiny fledgling leaves that were forming. I moistened my chapped lips and pieced together the two simple words that have been the source of my fear: “I’m gay.”

The wind continued to lightly blow in through the window, occasionally blowing a stray strand of hair across her face. For a brief moment, she broke her gaze and glanced down at her hands. I searched the darkness for the familiar gleam of light her eyes reflected, but did not find it. Inside, I began to feel nauseated and completely convinced that I had made a wrong decision. As much as I wanted her to accept me and continue to stick by my side, I couldn’t expect her to just be okay with it. She had every right to think whatever she wanted and ultimately the future of our friendship rested in her hands. I slowly leaned back in the seat and attempted to melt into the darkness that fell around us. Once again, the air grew thick and weighed my body down. Looking back at the empty field before me I silently awaited her reply hoping that it would be what I wanted to hear.

As I sat there motionless in my chair, she began to fidget with her shirt and her clothes rustled as she readjusted herself in her seat. Without a word, she picked her iPod back up off the floor and continued to search through her library. After a few seconds of her songs noisily clicking by, she selected a song and lightly turned up the volume. Leaning back into her chair, she set the iPod down and looked over at me. Once again, she held me under her gaze.

“When I said we would always be friends, I meant it. Whether you are gay or not, I love you and I will always be here for you.” Slowly a smile crept across her face and the familiar gleam of her eyes began to shine brightly. She outstretched her arms, leaned over, and hugged me close. Instantly I was filled with her warmth and kindness and for once, some of the fear that had welled up inside of me began to subside. With her by my side, I felt complete and it gave me the courage to accept who I was and share it with those around me.

Our hug lasted for what felt like hours, and regrettably I let her go. Each of us fell back in our seats and once again focused our gaze on the field. With a growl, the engine started as she switched on

the ignition of the car and turned on the headlights. The field was instantly illuminated in the dull white light from the headlights. "Let's get out of here," she said. She wrapped her long delicate fingers around the black leather steering wheel and switched the care into reverse. With a sudden jump, the car began to move and the field that lay before us was replaced by the empty road that sprawled out ahead.

Sailing Off Winter Island
(the last visions of a dying sailor)
 by Eric Lomen

I hope he saw

...

His glasses
 banked bends
 around the world
 like
 eyes

kelp curling senses

 his eyes
 Their curves
 murky

 optical cut
 shot magnified
 pupils

into
 working waning
 moons
 sanctity of sky

typing sparrows
 out on
 sand-sinking
 raw hide

like rows
 of paper dolls
 falling from grasp

spiral traffic
 against the bright
 blue
 levitated knots
 keeling sharp
 whipping woodwind

through water, whirl breezes
 beneath teeth
 and now

a graveyard
of shadows
stretching looming tombs
of schooners
last dropped
against searing sun
rattling masts

but no more
ocean
breeze
to breathe

Lemonade
by Georgia Bolender

“Jeannette,” I chortled, “It’s a damn beautiful day, isn’t it?”

“Ha ha!” she laughed, and her mouth made a huge red gash in her tiny face. The deck chairs were hot like metal. I let the lemonade jab my tongue and life was damn great. Life was just damn great. The sun was not shining, but it was not going to rain, I couldn't smell any rain, so damn the rain. I laughed again spontaneously and the lemonade spilled.

“Let’s see the world, Jeannette,” I said frantically. “Let’s see the world and go everywhere and conquer things.”

“Oh, Jason,” she said, grinning so fiercely I thought her eyes would pop out and roll all over the textured green deck. Suddenly I saw her blood pumping under her skin. It was blue and ugly.

“*Oh, Jason,*” I mocked sharply, beginning to lose face. “Is that all you have to say, Jeannette?! I told you we could go conquer the world and all you have to say is *oh, Jason?!?*”

“Jason!” She cried, grinning so very falsely under her wide, wide eyes and touching her neck with her gloved fingers. “I would like nothing better than to dash all over the world just *conquering* things! Is that better?”

“Yes, Jeannette, yes, so much better. How’s the lemonade?”

“Like acid.”

“Great. Damn great.”

We had bought so many bright yellow lemons and got on a boat and went out to the middle of the lake so they couldn’t find us and that’s all we did all day was make lemonade and only talk about lemonade and how beautiful life was and drink the lemonade we made. The lemonade was so tart it burnt our insides but that’s how we wanted it. We made it so sour that we could feel it in our toes. It would shock us through and we would keep drinking it until our bodies were phosphorescent. We’ll light up the whole damn lake tonight, I said. We’ll shimmer all over the surface in every direction, flat sour-white flames lighting up the whole damn sky.

The lake seemed to go out for miles in all directions. The lake and the trees were ablaze with shocks of intense greens and blues. The water was clear, like a pocket of earth saliva. The clearness went down, down to the bottom where the monstrous beasts of the lake were waiting to swallow us whole, and there the water was murky wet layers of black. Follow the black water up to the horizon and

it goes all the way up to the white sky where the birds are swarming and beating their wings like lunatics in the smell of the weeds, a sour wet smell.

The boat smacked the little wave currents and its nose bowed up and down. I turned to Jeannette and grinned feverishly. She beamed back, sucking the bitter lemonade through a straw and just grinning like life was never better. It wasn't ever better, I thought while I swallowed and swallowed that damn lemonade. Never better.

The Cycle
by Brittany Lavallee

The light falls through the cracks,
tiptoes past my bed
and springs onto the ledge.
It's self-proclaimed suicide,
It's all a lie.
For the dawn breaks
every one of my windows
in the morning time.
Shining so effortlessly,
the noon sun stretches
and lingers above my head.
Glow of the setting sun
tucking itself
snugly into the horizon line.
And when the night falls,
you can hear the sun crash,
as a million little pieces
turn into the constellations.
I lay under my covers,
eyes open,
waiting to catch tomorrow's sneaky rays,
to grasp them in my palm,
as morn arrives,
with a whisper
and dances upon my sleeping face.

The Waitress
by Margaurita Spear

The bells over the door gave a loud jangle as more customers entered the restaurant. Two women, mid-seventies, toddled over to the booth farthest from the entrance. As they slipped onto the worn out bench seat their bodies creaked more than the splintered old floor. Their silver-blue hair resembled spider's webs as the morning sun glinted through the pane glass window. One carried a cane that she balanced on the edge of the table. The other hunched forward carrying the history of her life on her back. They gazed at their menus through thick lenses and a magnifying glass. From my seat at the counter I could already guess their order, two decaf coffees with sugar substitute and maybe some poached eggs or blueberry muffins. In a past life I had done this too often.

I watched the waitress exit from the kitchen through the swinging door. She wore the standard uniform of black pants, black sneakers and a polo top with the restaurant name embroidered over her heart. Her apron was cinched tightly around her average-sized waist and some paper covered straws peeked out of the front pocket. Her hair was up and she wore little to no makeup. She carried three plates balanced carefully across her left forearm and another plate in her right hand. With ease she wove around the tables to deliver the undercooked pancakes and overcooked eggs to a family of four. The children ran their crayons off the edge of the picture placemats and onto the scratched surface of the melamine tabletop.

The waitress tucked a stray hair behind her left ear and extracted an order pad and ball point pen from her apron pocket. She paused at the booth in which the two older women sat. A few quick scratches of her pen and their order was taken, committed both to paper and to memory. Another jangle. Another customer. Maybe a regular. The man looked fortyish and had a two-day-old cropping of facial hair. He sat a few seats down at the counter, unfurled his paper. No menu. The waitress gave him a nod and brought over a steaming cup of fresh-a-few-hours-ago coffee.

"Bacon 'n eggs. Wheat toast," she said with a smile on her face, but not in her eyes. He nodded an affirmation. The waitress disappeared back through the swinging door.

More jangles. More customers. A wave of people flooded in, filling the tables and upping the volume from a low hum to a consistent buzz. The waitress was alone in her task. It must be unusual for the place to be so busy or perhaps her counterpart had called out sick. She emerged from the kitchen, arms loaded and a frazzled expression on her face. She delivered the food, grabbed a full pot of coffee and made her way to all of the new tables, filling cups and jotting orders. As she did this she dropped off checks to existing customers and gathered pitiful tips that had been tucked under napkin dispensers.

In and out of the kitchen, the waitress carried full plates and empty plates. Back and forth. Non-stop. The patch of wood near the kitchen door was more worn than the rest of the floor. She cleared and cleaned, set and served. People came and went. There wasn't much thought required for this sort of thing, just a good memory and

a fake smile.

She seemed to own both. There were no errors. She knew all their special quirks. Sugar-free syrup. Extra butter. Bacon on its own plate. Half OJ/half cranberry in a small glass over ice. She remembered them all. But I was new and she didn't know me yet. She refilled my coffee three times, each one with a smile, even though I did not order a scrap of food to accompany the bottomless cup.

When all of the food was delivered and the checks paid, the waitress paused by the counter. There was only myself and two stragglers in a corner booth. They were a young couple, seemed to be early on in their relationship. They held hands between half-empty plates and crumpled up napkins. He seemed too eager and talked too loud. She seemed too uncomfortable and laughed too much. Otherwise they were the same, both young, both blonde, both hormonal. It had been a long breakfast and the waitress had to regroup before the lunch crowd began. With the restaurant near empty, she had a chance to feel the aches in her arches and the burning between her shoulder blades. Her smile faded. Her strong and slender fingers ran across the back of her neck. Stray hairs escaped the ponytail that now drooped lower than it had when I first sat down. She surveyed the modest expanse of leatherette booths and aluminum chairs. There were sugar caddies to refill, artificial maple flavor syrups to remove, menus to replace, lunch specials to be written on the board out front. But first there was this brief moment of rest, this passing reprieve.

The stragglers rose from their booth and left with an over the shoulder good-bye and an overhead jangle. The waitress summoned her fake smile and a convincing wave of her hand. She then began to pull all the breakfast items and place them in a bus bucket. She replaced the breakfast menus with ones that promoted soup and sandwich deals and apple pie ala mode. I fiddled with the check that she placed on the counter before me. A dollar seventy-five. She went into the kitchen again, this time to ask the cook for the lunch specials. Probably corn chowder or a hot-pressed sandwich.

Looking at the check and back towards the door through which she had left, I wanted to give her something that would make her week, but I knew I couldn't. I didn't have that kind of money. I opened my bag and pulled out a pen and a twenty dollar bill. On my check I left a note in large bold print. Nothing fancy. Thank-you for your time. I placed the twenty beneath the check and gave my own jangle as I left. She would come back to my spot, expecting two ones. She would look up toward the door wondering who I was and why I left the money and the note. I wouldn't be there. Her eyes would smile as she slipped the twenty into her pocket, not her apron. For a second, she would forget that her feet ached and her back was sore, forget that her skin felt covered in kitchen grease and that her blouse was stained with ketchup and coffee. She would forget and then, later on, she would remember.