This volume of Blackshear collects creative work produced at Gordon State College from 2010-2012. Student editors Ryan Ferguson, David Kent, Kyle Lewis, James Morton, and Liz Smallwood made selections in spring 2011 and spring 2012. Selections by visiting writers are also included.

If you are interested in submitting art, photography, poetry, short fiction, creative non-fiction, or drama for our fall 2014 issue, please e-mail blackshearjournal@gmail.com to request guidelines.

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RYAN FERGUSON

F r u s t r a t i o n

Feed me bedposts for my madness something to grind and chew until I smash my teeth, shred my gums with splinters, fray and blister everything inside my mouth.

Clench my fists till my uncut talons rip through my palms, overlap my knuckles, invert like empty handcuffs. Release from my arthritic jerking wrists my deflated sense of manliness, swollen, red, and palpitating at the sight of my frustration.
Weird. Random objects
in a clear plastic box.
Taped closed.
From an old college roommate.

A man parachuting;
key chains telling you where you are; save
ten percent with Rite Aid if you attach this card.
Beer caps, guitar picks.
….a Battery?
….Unexplainable items…

A small useless box.
With random useless things.
Priceless, useless, irreplaceable.
things.

And each one:
The paper clip, the screw, the penny, the button
makes perfect
(non)sense
to me.
….Some more than others.

All kept for years—
On a mantle or a bookcase—in that small, clear box.
Taped closed
to keep the Random, useless
Things(,?) and
Memories
in.
All Given to me
Randomly,
by a college roommate.
CURTIS MANN

Life Comes Upon Me

Life comes upon me with obnoxious grace and aging patience. I take in its glory with the eager eyes of the horrified and the depressed, remaining still in spite of the pleasant nastiness in his voice. He makes requests of me with the quiet of two year olds, his eyes bright with kind malice. I reply in a suitable manner, Life halts as if frozen, awed by my counter: resplendent and dazzling in its injury, magnificent in its mistakes, splendid and brilliant at how properly improper my rejoinder.
SARA MIDYETT

Cigars for the Fake

The lie is told from the shift in the air,
She can sense it just as well as I.
Ireful smile tug at my lips,
Daring her to question me.

I'm crass in all my ways,
But she pulls at my hackles like no other can.
It is infuriating.
Mulishly I can let myself be aware that I am purporting
something that I am not.
She notices with a raise of a brow,
But no other tells are told.

I come from a home where cheap cigars are adorned to hands of
the fake,
Egregious amounts of hostility are spoken with our laughter.
It is not something I have come to question.
And yet here she sits in front of me with her cooling coffee,
Expression knowing.
I've come to realize...
The view from my hiding place was clear,
But down here...
The layers of camouflage are intense.
I just need to know...
Which one of my faithful advisors
Remembered to pick up the x-ray vision kit.
Morning rose on a small island beach. The sky was thick with receding storm clouds, distant sounds of thunder and an uneasy sea suggesting violence at its passing. Palm trees lay thrust about at the edge of a small jungle, their trunks twisted and snapped from powerful winds and high waves. Bits of wood planks lay scattered along the desolate shoreline. Soft waves caressed them with every flow, brushing foamy fingers over the beaten and battered surfaces.

“Sasha!” A young girl wandered along the sand, her voice ringing like a clear bell on the early morning. She was no older than six, dressed in a knee length skirt and frilly shirt. The girl’s blue eyes scanned over the area around her, a chubby face creased in worry and concern. Her hands were clutched before her, wrapped tightly around a small silver dog whistle. She walked slowly, searching for someone, a friend she had lost in the storm.

Her skirt flowed with the wind but seemed untouched by the sprays of water that splashed over her. Driftwood planks rose in number as she walked over the sand, following the water’s edge. The girl seemed not to notice, again her voice cutting through the morning air.

“Sasha, come here girl!” The child paused, bare feet not sinking into the wet sand as her eyes fell upon the scene of a shipwreck. Unaffected as if she had not even seen it, she raised the dog whistle to her lips and blew, summoning her beloved pet, yet receiving nothing more than the calls of wild gulls in answer.

She moved through the wreckage, climbing over large chunks as if they were rocks over the shore. The broken bow of the ship, what might have been a large yacht, loomed before her. Again she raised the whistle to her lips, the sound floating unheard to her own ears, a silent summons. Her eyes stared into the ship, unseeing of the ruined craft. It was a ghost to
her, not existing in her world. Clothing lay about the shipwreck. Personal items such as notebooks and pictures littered the ground, wet and ripped by the waves.

Near her feet, the hand of a woman stretched over the sand. The flesh was grey and lifeless; a tiny crab perched upon the back. The arm led beneath a large plank which hid the body from view. Nothing moved here other than sea life. To nature, this was a new home. Suggestions of other such finds hid among the wreckage. Half swallowed by the water, a shoed foot rested exposed to the angry sky, its owner submerged from view.

“Sasha, please come! Mama said we’ll be home soon!”
The child continued onward, leaving the unknown woman’s body behind. No footprints were left in her wake. The sand lay undisturbed at her passing. She paused as the sound of distant barking called to her. Her eyes lit up with glee, laughter catching in her throat. She grinned and broke into a run, skipping over rocks and driftwood. Laughter broke from her mouth as she saw a large collie bound from the water ahead of her.

The water did not affect Sasha. Her fur seemed perfectly dry, fluffy and gleaming as if she glowed with an otherworldly light, for the sun’s light was shadowed by clouds. The dog’s excited barking mimicked that of her owner’s happy laughter. They met inside the shadow of the shipwreck, the girl dropping to her knees and hugging the excited creature. Washing onto the shore beside her, the drowned, ragged form of a similar animal was found by the gulls that descended upon it in a chorus of song. The girl nor her friend noticed their surroundings, lost in a different world where such sadness could not reach them.

“You made it, Sasha,” the girl cheered happily, burying her face in the dog’s chest. “I was so afraid you were lost. But you’re here now.”

She stood, one hand buried into the dog’s neck fur, the other falling to her side, a glint of silver landing in the sand as the dog whistle was discarded. A sea gull landed near, hopping over the sand to snatch up the shining metal, carrying it to nearby nests.

“Now let’s go find Mommy and Daddy!”
Laughing, she raced over the sand, Sasha bounding beside her, barking at the gulls that seemed not to sense them.
Behind them, another body washed onto the shore as the sea relinquished the soul. The clouded blue eyes of a young girl stared toward the sky, skin and lips pale, her life long lost. The ragged remains of a ruffled shirt and knee length skirt clung wet to her body. Calls of gulls echoed over the sands as they settled around her, unknowing of the spirit that now joined them upon the island.
lure her in with
lots of weed and plenty
of smooth talk.
(at this point, if you have a
job, quit it.) have lots
of unprotected sex with
her. spend all of her
graduation money so you
can robo-trip.
ask her to strip for money.
when she says no, make
her feel guilty for weeks.
drop out of high school and talk her into
using her college fund to
get an apartment for the two of
you. when she registers for
college, tell her she is fucked up
because she thinks she is better than
you.
chase her around her apartment with a knife.
break up
with her.
have sex with someone else.
get back with her.
tell her no one else will
ever love her.
blacken her eye.
break up
with her.
get someone else pregnant.
get back with her. (make sure
the girl you get pregnant gets an
abortion.)
break up with her when the
other girl has recovered from her
abortion.
get back with her.
burn her face with a cigarette.
do acid and choke her out
when she gets upset about it.
break up
with her.
find out
she is hanging out with
male friends. call her and
remind her that no one
really cares about her.
get back with her.
tell her that she is
wonderful and
beautiful and
perfect,
but that no one
will ever see that
but you.
cheat on her.
hit her.
break up
with her.
repeat as many times as possible
until
she
says
fuck
you.
In Holding

I believe I have felt
No emotion worth remembering
and no satisfaction in forgetting.
For all of my feelings have been
left in holding
replaying the death of a man.

As I moved within and about the earth,
They have lain covered, buried in his bed
Waiting for his eyes to open and his lips to speak;
They have refused to believe that his chest,
which moves so slightly in rhythm—as to suggest breathing—,
is hollow.

As I combed the flooded streets
of the eastern banks of San Louis,
They have wondered if he remembers
That he was once a man (elegant and charismatic),
And can hear the doe above cleaning the meadow.

As I scaled the mountains
of southern red clay,
They have wondered if he was gone
Before the feedings and all night tremors.
Did he see them watching his transition
And watering his growth?
he has never said,
And they have waited.

As they and he lie,
Covered by the seasons
The stripes and the stars
I believe that I shall not feel
And they shall not rest until
He answers, but he cannot
And we wait in holding.
There is a great way. How the seasons stay, 
Together and yet, they are still apart, 
To listen and hear of summer's tears, 
Brings great warmth and pain to my ears, 
It's the only way I can see and listen to yours.

A great force of a timeless question is answered with, "Of course."

An escape into your season's breath, 
To fill the void of endless depth, 
Would render my soul completely, 
Of words and offerings given discreetly, 
By bringing the colors back into my eyes, 
As leaves fall, I hear your cries...

To exalt the winds that make men weaken, 
And allow the change for deliberation. 
My heart has felt this season come at last, 
As tremulous waves of air crash so fast. 
I see its beauty in her freedom. 
Noticing every angle of her branches, 
And understanding her cycle.

As leaves fall, I must have fallen so, 
By the oak who watches me go, 
Feeling pains of her windswept sorrow, 
Of a world that makes her feel trapped.

To feel rooted by nature and feel close to man. 
In highest praise, she raises her fan,
Of many leaves I barely see. How can this be? 
And I let them all fall as I watch her change.

Why must my heart as it races take me to such forbidden places? 
In truth, she has never seen me stare. 
In truth, I would never allow it.

The scenes that are quickly noticed begin to dim, 
As the sky is extinguished by clouded rims. 
She must leave my eyes… 
She must leave my eyes…

As the leaves fall, so must I. 
And I have fallen hard.

... 
And so this is how the world departs. Solemn sounds become lost arts.

And without love, what reason is there to see? 
The candleless flame that burns within me.
I am that cool ass nigga
I’m that friend who listens while you cry about you nigga
I didn’t ask for this but it was given to me
My name is irrelevant because I’m known as Mr. Friendly
I currently reside in a place where no man wants to be
The friend zone where a man will never get pussy
I’m that guy who chills with 7 or 8 ladies
And when asked if they’d ever date me they all respond maybe…
Maybe? I never heard that
I always hear you’re my friend and I can’t see you like that
Or my favorite. You’re my best guy friend
Damn… When will this zone of friendship ever end?
I know all your secrets
Not because I asked, because you wanted to get everything off your chest
I can even grab at tits and ass
But I remember I’m in the friend zone and this barrier I cannot pass
I tried more than once and twice
It always end the same
Looking at porn thinking to myself damn nigga you lame!
It's funny that every girl I adore
Sees me as a friend and even a brother but nothing more
So once a week I am forced into a threesome with my hands… I hate these whores.
I know it sounds fucked up
Well it is. But also very funny
Because I’m not the only one
If you’re reading this random thought or funny poem
You could be one of the many, the shame, the residents of the friend zone
ANNA COGDILL
Everywhere, Nowhere

She’s everywhere:
Orange slices and tootsie rolls
Paper napkins and tiny purses
Avon rings and stretch watch bands
Quilted beds and afghan throws
Sequence sweaters and Diabetic socks
Bingo nights and Black Jack streaks
Rummy bets and penny pots
And nowhere in between:
Frantic hands and ulcered feet
Wheelchair rides and sleepless nights
Empty walls and unkept curls
Broken memories and heavy tears
Forgotten faces and misplaced names
 Forever lost and almost gone
Dementia forced and melting away
WENDY GIERE-FRYE

False Security

It split the sky
two erasers smacked together
The dust mere particles
of what was once substance

smooth, nice
it tickles the nose
but we pull away
we stare in horror

It was not a mistake
It was not unintentional
the message was written
but erased before we figured it out

Can you go back
explain it once more
maybe we will get it this time
This is not the lesson we want to learn

If we understood
if it was for us
the lesson
we would not have failed the test

there is no √911
it is divisible only by one
added to by many
one solution

only death and destruction the chalkboard erased
only residue lingers
once solid, simply dust
W E N D Y  G I E R E - F R Y E

Suicide Bomber

When I close
My eyes

I still see black

When you close
Your eyes

You still see color

But when we open
Our eyes

And I pull the trigger

We bleed the same
Red

We feel the same
Pain

We share
A United State in Heaven
JOSH HUNTER
Mask of Delusion

Characters

Felix: The main character, the one who killed his brother.

James: The brother that returns from the dead to bring peace to Felix in the act he has committed.

Scene

A man stands alone in an office-like room that seems to have been destroyed in some sort of struggle. A body lies a few feet from him, but the head is turned to the side so that it does not face the audience. A gun is at the man’s feet, and he stands with his face bathed in darkness, standing tall and unwavering in the atrocity of his action.

Felix (pause between sentences): I’ve killed him! (He is in more of a state of shock than awe.) I actually killed him?

James (speaking offshore like a distant echo): Why did you kill him?

Felix (looks around as if wondering where the question was being asked from): I killed him because I had to. That man was a monster who never looked back at the people he stepped on and the lives he had to destroy to reach the top.

James (still offstage): But can’t it be said that the same is true of you? How many people have you lied to, betrayed just to reach the status you cling to so helplessly?
Felix: I may be a monster as well, but I’ve paid for my actions.

James: (begins speaking offstage but by the end is onstage) Then why is it that I had to die, but you could live?

Felix (at first is shocked but thinks this is nothing more than shock from what he has done): You died because you would have never paid for your actions, as I have.

James (speaking as if conversationally): While that is true, it only proves your killing me was done only in spite and will only make others think you jealous.

Felix: Jealous? (Hollow laugh.) Until a year ago there was no difference between you and I. We were like a coin with two heads. I was your copy down to that high and mighty attitude; we thought ourselves faultless and looked down upon anyone different, treating them like trash because they didn’t have money or power.

James: All you achieved in this last year was to appease the masses with an act of remorse, but in our life regrets are for the weak.

Felix: So even in death you feel no remorse?

James: I stand the eternal testament to my, no, our, upbringing. We were taught that we were better. We were bred to succeed. We were lucky enough to never have to look at the castle from afar and dream of living within it, because where others’ dreams had limits our lives could be limitless.

Felix: Yes, but even so we stepped upon so many on our rise to the top. When they spent their lives trying to reach their destined place, we stole it from them without care. Where they spent their lives forever trying to achieve something, we could have achieved it without any opposition.

James: So we were set above. It is not a crime to be born with a life of infinite possibilities. (Pause.) Yet you say you regret your
actions, but even underneath that façade your eyes will not lie to me. I can still see the jealousy burning like hot coals. (Another pause.) Your regret is nothing more than a mask that hides the truth behind why there was a death tonight.

Felix: My remorse is genuine.

James: You lie, dear brother. Even with death staring you in the face, you still lie to me. All you have done is cleverly hide the truth from yourself.

Felix (more of a calm reassurance than a yell): I am not lying.

James: Let us think back to a year ago, when your remorse began to surface. You lost everything important to you. Your wife, god rest her soul, killed herself after finding out how much of a monster she had chosen to marry. And your son was killed by a disgruntled employee whose savings you had squandered. Now, among many this could be a sign from God that they need to change, but, brother, there is only one truth about you, and that is why you wear your mask. Do you now see the truth?

Felix: You have done nothing more than prove my remorse as fact. In my families' deaths I sought a change in myself and strove to rewrite the wrongs we had committed.

James: You do nothing more than cling to your delusion.

Felix (angry and on the verge of yelling): I am remorseful. This is no delusion. My remorse is nothing less than genuine.

James: No, dear brother, you are so filled with the delusion of remorse that you bury the truth even deeper. The truth behind tonight is nothing more than jealousy and hatred.

Felix: I can't say that I don't hate your actions, but tonight was a night to bring some sort of peace to those we have wronged, to those we have destroyed. People we have crushed beneath our feet. However, to say I am jealous of you is nothing short of ludicrous.
James (clapping): Your performance is nothing short of splendid, but the curtain has fallen. The only thing left is for you to accept the truth.

Felix: Haven’t you heard any--

James (cuts him off): Enough with your lies. The only reason there has been a death tonight is because you hate that you could not be me.

Felix: I was nothing less than your twin until I could no longer delude myself into believing our actions were just.

James: No, you are nothing more than a fool who remains hidden behind the mask of ignorance.

Felix: Then if I am masked behind the veil of ignorance I welcome the darkness. It has lead me to be the man I am, and not the one who lies at my feet.

James: Your ignorance is nothing more than the delusion that is covered in a remorse that you feel nothing for. You repent like the greatest sinner, but there is no truth behind anything you say. The only reason you came here tonight was because I had not suffered for my actions. Even though I lead a life of cold-hearted domination of others that would not go punished or even questioned. Your remorse is nothing more than the mask of burning and unending hatred that could not be quenched by making amends to the ones you have wronged, and even in the hottest pit of hell your fire of hatred would burn out the strongest flame. (Pause.) Deep down you wanted to live a life without consequences. You wanted to live my life, and in rage and jealousy you came here tonight wanting to kill the part of yourself that is me, in the hope that at least then you could have peace.

Felix (begins to laugh): As always, you know me best. Why was I to toil in misery while you had happiness? Why was I forced to
repent while you, who have done far worse than I, never paid for a single crime? Where God wouldn’t go I vowed to strike you down. If not for me then for everything that you have done and never paid for.

James: In death the lies of the flesh are nothing more than the chains that weigh you down, and in death you were capable of accepting the truth that you were and always will be a monster. (Voice begins to echo as his body begins to fade away.)

Felix: In death? (Slowly a realization hits him as flashes of the truth behind the night come to him in seconds, and Felix falls to his knees.)

James: In death. (Blood forms on Felix’s chest, and James falls to the ground.)
What Is Love?

Love would be when you always want to be together, and when you're not, you're thinking about being together because you need that person; and without them, your life feels incomplete. It's when you trust the other with your life; and when you would do anything for each other. When you love someone, you want nothing more than for them to truly be happy no matter what it takes because their needs come before your own. It's when they're the last thing you think about before you go to sleep, and when they're the first thing you think of when you wake up. Love is giving someone the power to destroy you, and trusting them not to. When they're with you, your heart races. When they touch you, you get butterflies in your stomach. When you kiss, it just takes your breath away. It's when you can't get the smile off your face, and you feel like you've been touched by an angel. You look down on everybody else because you think that they can't possibly feel what you're feeling. Love is miraculous, and when you find it, don't let it go.
Better to be late, than be late.
Speed kills distance over time calculate
Time waits for no one, no need to race it
This is food for thought, bring your plate please
Never go higher than the limit
‘Cause accidents happen every minute
Losing so many precious lives to the machine
Reminiscing on my homeboy Eugene
Wondering who gave it license to kill
Thinking about it gives me chill
Not living enough to write your own will
Or on the hospital bed wondering how you’ll pay the bill
Another episode, man versus machine
Rhetorical question? Who’s going to win?
Another life lost to this damn thing
Died on their way back from their wedding
Legal action taken—manslaughter or murder
Can’t sue the machine, just another human slaughter
6 feet under, people gathered to ponder and wonder
At the devastating views of the SUV Honda.
Kiss on me and never stop
Nibble my ear when you’re on top
Lick my neck and make my toes bend
Lay in bed with me all weekend
Wrap my body in your body
Sittin’ by a fire, sippin’ a hot toddy
Caress my cheek and hold my hand
Experience what it’s like to be my man
Love on me endlessly
Slip into this state of romance with me
Lift your soul to a level of bliss
Follow my heart—you can’t miss
Come join me in this sexual high
There is just enough room for you and I
Grab my supple body and press play
Let’s make this occur day to day
Smother me and drown me in your love
Make me feel like I’m floating above
Dig deep into what makes me crave you
Get me tingling from what you do
Leave me speechless and laying on my back
Having blown my mind from putting down a new act
Take my love and let it flow through your veins
Reciprocating with what I desire most, pleasure pain
Overpower my affection with your affection
Start a contest of love perfection
Take nothing in love ever so lightly
Proceeding with caution only slightly
Throwing yourself full speed ahead
Pumping the brakes whenever you try to climb out of the bed
By chance,
I’m caught in its lure.
Against my will,
I’m drawn to know its full effect.
Step-by-step I work my way up
until I am but a few steps from its promise.
My heart races as the struggle
between desire and fear ensues.
If I pass over the threshold
I will be enveloped by the warmth of its embrace-
And allowed to meld into beauty
that will leave me breathless-
But if I’m swept from this lofty place,
it will surely be the end of me.
While I was walking home I thought about the used syringe that I found lying in the dirt next to the basketball court earlier that day. It was hot; spring was in full bloom and summer was brave enough to peek past a ninety-degree sun which, of course, made my walking home from school every day all the more unpleasant. As I kept walking, I wondered to myself how it had ended up there on the playground all by itself. In a way, it was just like me; it was once clean and pure and now was left all by itself to rot, dirty and used, in an unfamiliar place. I picked it up and took it with me.

When I arrived home, which was a cold one-bedroom apartment in the middle of downtown Jackson, no one was there, as usual. The inside of the apartment was unkempt with clothes strewn all over the yard-sale sofa and empty bottles lying around in precarious places. There was also a smell that lingered, a sort of musty smell, something like a mix between mildew and ammonia. Sometimes, when there was a party somewhere else in town, I was left alone and although I wasn’t afraid of much, I was scared sometimes. The place was old and it made the most horrific noises. I would always turn up the volume to Batman Returns, my favorite video game, to drown out the sound.

But the middle of the night was still my favorite time to be awake. Everything was so still. All of the cars, with their bright headlights, would cease to pass by and the voices from the all-nighters next door were faint because by that time most of their excitement had died for the night. I used to stay up and dream about what the future might hold and whether I would ever become the rock star that I always dreamt of being.

Music had always made me feel better no matter what the circumstance was. It gave me a sense of hope. Sitting in front
of the cheap stereo in the back room was how I occupied most of my time. I must have listened to Matchbox 20’s first album at least a hundred times. I always thought of the line in the song “3:00 a.m.” that went, “Baby, it’s 3:00 a.m. I must be lonely,” whenever it rained early in the mornings.

Mama worked a nine-to-five job and when she got home I didn’t exactly see her that much. She would just come in, change clothes, and then leave again and she would not usually be back until late at night. I suppose she was the type who didn’t like to be tied down to anyone, which was fine with me because I was a loner and didn’t mind it so much. A lot of the time Mama would just hang out with our neighbors, who all knew each other and partied together over weekends. Everyone’s lives in the apartments were pretty much identical: work a dead-end, forty-hour a week job and completely wasting all of your hard-earned money by the time the weekend was over. It was a never-ending process.

A great portion of my time was spent hanging out, or rather hiding out, behind the fire department that was directly behind the apartment complex in which Mama and I lived. This was the first place I went when I arrived home and it was the perfect spot where I could examine the piece I had found without disturbance.

“Whassup G?” came the voice of my friend Timothy, who lived one street over with his grandmother. He was in good company with the numerous people who had the tendency to make up annoying nicknames for me. Thankfully, in his case my name was just “G” and not “G-man” or “Ret” or especially “Ret Bug,” which I really despised.

Tim, as I called him, with his blonde hair, pale complexion and almost always shirtless in the summertime, had his usual sly smirk as he rounded the corner.

“What’s that?” he asked as he handed me a cigarette.

“It’s a needle. Whataya think it is?”

“Whoa man, where did you...”

He was cut off as we heard the screen door slam.

“Goddamn it!”

It was Mama, so we had to quickly put away our smokes.

“What the hell are you doing with that? Don’t you know what could happen if you accidentally pricked yourself with that
filthy thing?

“Yes ma’am.”

“Why do I put up with you? Do you just want to go and live with your father from now on?”

“No ma’am. I didn’t mean to…”

“Just don’t ever let me catch you with something like this ever again,” she firmly said as she carefully took the syringe from me. “You’d better behave for Fred. Me and Todd are ‘bout to go.”

“Hey G,” mumbled Todd, Mama’s boyfriend, through the screen door. Todd, who was nineteen, was tall and very athletically built and was about five or so years younger than Mama. They had been together ever since Mama divorced her second husband Robert. But I liked Todd. We even hung out sometimes. He was a lot easier to be around compared to Robert because he wasn’t quite as mean when he was drunk. And he really wasn’t that much older than I was, so we actually had some things in common.

Sometimes Mama would assign one of her friends to “babysit” me while she was out. Fred was one of the usual suspects. Fred, or Catfish, as everyone called him, was a tall black man who usually dressed in baggy jeans and a sports jersey and he almost always wore the same musky cologne. I’m not so sure how he got his nickname but I had guessed it was a nickname that he had been given by some of his former fellow inmates. He didn’t like to stay in one place for too long, much less hang around our apartment. It almost seemed as if he was hiding from something.

I used to go on these long walks at night through town and when Catfish was around, we went together. “Come on little man,” he would say (“little man” was his preferred nickname for me). Everybody that walked along the street seemed to know him. As we went on our walks people would stop their cars on the curb just to shake his hand. I mimicked his every move and sometimes, even when the cars didn’t stop, he would walk into the street when a traffic light was red and people would roll down their windows to just to shake his hand. Usually, Catfish would reach into his pocket before he shook hands with a stranger. It took some time to realize how Catfish made his living, but he always had a pocketful of cash which he used part
of to buy my supper, which I always appreciated. I had grown tired of eating single slices of bread with a small slab of butter spread over it.

I was thin back then—too thin. It’s hard to explain what I had felt but it was something like being constantly hungry, but too hungry to actually eat something when a meal was actually available. Waking up in the mornings was the worst part. I wanted to throw up, but there was nothing in my stomach to throw up, so only blood and water came out. I was sick for a long time.

I remember seeing a videotape that someone had made of me near that time. Besides being deathly thin I had looked ghost-white pale and had this dark bruise-like spot on the left side of my chest which a voice on the tape described as a “murmur.” Not everyone has a near-death experience but I’m just thankful that I only had one. I just remember the only person who even noticed that I was sick or was even concerned about my health was my dad, who I sometimes went to stay with on weekends. He forced me to eat until I eventually got back into shape.

The next day was one of those times that one can replay, over and over again, in his or her mind and still not know how to feel about it. It was just something that happened…
Fingers stained
Breaths heavy
Bodies sore
Eyes dilated
Mouths dry
Lips tender

Both covered in the mixture
The red, the white, and the clear become one
We have created a murder scene
Exhaustion feels like death
Pounding hearts and hanging limbs
A steady drip falls off of a hip onto a thigh
Pure pleasure oozes from paradise
I love this time.
CURTIS MANN

Frayed...

waiting, wanting, dreaming
of a time when I can be free
while knowing full well
that all of your pretty words,
your petty turn of phrases
matter so little to my constantly
frayed way of thinking.

what purpose does your manufactured
point of view have to offer me
in my perpetual erratic stance,
this bewildered state of mind of mine?
who are you to question my motives,
my place and my reasons for having
little to no reason?

I find it quite pleasing
and secretly anxious
to not know what I’m talking
about most of the time.
And for you to stand up there
on that golden pedestal
before me like some all powerful person
who stands up on pedestals
to block out my carefully
and painstaking put together sociopathic psyche....
I just have to say
a no thank you to that.

whether any of what I just said
had any impact, garnered any reaction
or made any sense to you
is something that I don’t really care
to know. As long as it was said,
and in the brief time in which
it was spoken I hope the sincerity
of each statement found you
unprepared and just as bewildered
as my frayed way of thinking.
The simplicity of the question astounded him. Was murder acceptable, if it prevented the deaths of others? Should one life be taken to prevent future losses? Did the ends really justify the means in a situation involving life and death? Adrian sighed and looked back at his classmates: some seemed to watch him, waiting for his response; others were still taking notes, some even conversing in hushed tones, despite being under Professor Marlowe’s watchful eye.

He glanced away, shaking his head as the professor looked on. “Well, Mr. Smith? Is it safe to say that the death of one to save a hundred is an acceptable exchange?” Professor Marlowe asked, his tone something between mocking and seriously questioning.

“No; because, one person’s life is not equal to another, and certainly does not match the value of a hundred,” Adrian muttered back to the professor. “I don’t think that killing someone to save others is moral. In fact I’d consider it a useless prospect, because the people who are saved through that murder would see the death of their enemies or persecutors as their final option to save their own lives,” he explained, his voice growing more confident as he spoke, the layers of reservation falling away as his true views and inner morals bared themselves against the eyes of the world.

Professor Marlowe smirked and nodded as he paced back along the front of the small auditorium he taught in. “Then, Mr. Smith, you’re saying that the wars that our nation is fighting, and has fought in over the years, might have saved us from death or enslavement, but did no lasting good?” The tone was something of a confidence-shattering calm.
Adrian paused for a moment, thinking over his answer carefully before he spoke, his voice calm and unshaken. “Yes Professor, that is what I’m saying. At least in the aspect of inter-cultural relations; if our nation cannot settle its problems without causing death, then every country that follows in our footsteps will believe that there was no other option when they reach a stalemate in diplomacy.”

Marlowe smiled and nodded. “And by no longer using lethal force to defend ourselves, to push issues that other countries would ignore, how do you propose we handle conflicts and settle our disputes?” he asked, his tone changed now, more probing in nature, rather than being filled with a teaching spirit.

Adrian sighed softly and shook his head. “I don’t know, professor,” he responded lightly, letting his eyes fall away, back to the notes he had been engrossed in before Marlowe had singled him out, seemingly just to test his ability to understand the material and express his thoughts.

Marlowe gave a sigh and set about his explanations, speaking in that fake, nurturing tone he was so famous for as Adrian focused back on his notes, taking down everything that sounded important, or seemed to stick out as odd.

When the class had finally drawn to a close Adrian stood and slowly mingled down to meet his professor. He waited for Marlowe to stop explaining something to another student before he stepped forward, clearing his throat, speaking softly, and glancing back as the last of his classmates slipped out into the hall. “Professor…I…I was wondering if you could enlighten me to our other options… once aggressive force is taken away.”

Marlowe looked up and smiled. “I could…but what would telling you actually teach you in the long run?” the professor asked with that sly smile, challenging his pupil to think instead of falling to the basic principles of this society: where information was given and not earned.

Adrian looked at the floor; then met his professor’s gaze. “I suppose that is true…but I don’t think that…based on what you’ve taught us of human nature, that there would be another option. Violence and death seem to be the only languages we understand...”

Marlowe nodded and stepped past Adrian, giving a flourish to the empty room. “And the simple fact that you can
grasp that at such a young age is a miracle in itself,” he muttered, giving a light scoff as he moved to the blackboard, erasing the last bits of the lesson’s notes before he picked up a long piece of chalk, drawing out a diagram as he started speaking again. “You understand that national differences are inescapable, due to?” Marlowe asked, looking back at Adrian, expecting the answers to flow from his student with ease.

“Language barriers, religious differences and physical needs, right?” Adrian said with a small smile, cupping his left wrist in his hand, curious as to what his teacher was prying at.

Marlowe nodded and put those key points down on the board, looking back at Adrian as he drummed his free fingers against the board in an uneven rhythm. “And even if we found a way to pass all of those barriers, there are still matters of internal conflict, such as?”

Adrian didn’t miss a beat. “Assertions for dominance, power, money and elevated status in the community, not to mention inter-racial politics.” Adrian’s mind began to tick, a fire of passion igniting in his veins as he started to seek the answer, not waiting on his professor’s next prompt…feeling that he no longer needed it, but only needed to know.

Marlowe smirked as he stepped to the side and drew a large X across a section of the board, noticed the look in Adrian’s eyes, that lust for knowledge, knowing that such a bright student had fallen victim to the pull of such a mental challenge.

Adrian looked at the X and tilted his head, glancing from it back to Marlowe. “And what is that supposed to signify?” he asked while stepping back from the board, taking all of the notations in at once...eyes drawn to the symbol.

Marlowe just gave a shrug. “It has its own meanings. Be sure to close the door when you leave,” he muttered as he put some papers on his desk into a messenger bag and strolled out of the classroom, hollow footsteps fading as he moved down the hall and out into the rainy night, the door slamming closed behind him.

Adrian fumbled with his words calling out after him, though his voice only echoed in the empty lecture hall. He looked back at the ‘X’ and then sighed, closing his eyes for a
moment, trying to ponder what exactly that particular shape, or letter could hold in reference to his current questions.

After a half hour of staring at that board, learning nothing, Adrian sighed and shrugged, grabbing his things and moving to the door, giving a moment’s pause to look back at the X, leaning against the door frame as he pondered the possibilities. After another long moment of thinking he gave a defeated sigh and pulled the door closed behind him, venturing out into the rain filled night, lightning flashing as he stepped into the torrent, the thunder reverberating through his chest a moment later.

Horrors

It was time to leave. That’s all he knew, and all he needed to know; it was time to go. He didn’t know where, or why, but his body moved without his consent, dragging him along through a twisting labyrinth of hallways and corridors, all lined with steel doors and single hanging bulbs. Some doors were rusted, others seemed brand new…all bore marks that resembled the strike of claws, and in the intense light, stains that couldn’t be washed away.

Adrian tried to stop, but his legs wouldn’t listen and he was paraded forward, moving past open doors, forced to experience the occasional flashes of disturbing images and smells that hit him hard, disorientating him, making his stomach turn with every new step. When his legs finally stopped, he leaned against the wall, his breathing heavy, the burn of acid in the back of his throat as he fought to keep whatever meal he’d had previously down. His eyes went wide when he heard the scream…the wail that echoed off of every surface until it reached an impossible level, the one that covered his soul in an icy fire.

He looked about, standing at a crux of halls; the scream seemed to echo from every direction at once…all just a ghostly remnant of the one previous. Eyes wide and heart thundering in his ears, he moved, heading to his left, passing several of the doors, only glancing at each as he passed them by, heading deeper into the maze. The scream reissued itself from the walls around him and he ran, the wail piercing his every thought,
seeking to tear his fragile reality to shreds. That’s when he saw it, the open door, a light within and the form of a young woman splayed across the floor, a single hand outstretched towards the opening.

He paused for a moment before his body kicked in, moving him to the precipice, and no further. The figure looked up at him through a wall of tangled black hair, icy blue eyes shining with a sense of intellect and dread, staring at him and through him at the same time. He tried to speak, finding his voice failing him…that’s when she moved, clawing herself closer to the door as another scream, her scream, echoed forth and stabbed into his mind. He fell to the floor, landing on his knees, hands holding his head as he winced, glancing up to see her just beyond the door sitting in the same position. Looking up at her and meeting her eyes again, he nearly lost himself in them before he saw the burns, one on the underside of each arm…a simple X on the left and a more ornate version on the right. She gave a smile, her lips cracked, blood flowing across the skin as she tilted her head, still staring at him, and screeched again.

The alarm continued to blare as Adrian sat up, looking across the nearly perfect dark of his room. He looked at his feet, raising his hands into view, staring at them, and past them, watching them shake, feeling his heart flutter in his chest and the sweat drip from his brow onto the covers. He breathed in and out slowly for a moment, if only to try and calm his own heartbeat, still fighting off the images of the woman…still hearing her scream echo in the darkest recesses of his mind.

It was after a moment of internal fighting that he glanced at the clock, noticing that it was no longer six, but seven, which meant that he was running late. The image of the woman flashed through his head, and he jumped, his own visions burning in his retinas. He fought back a cry as he glanced at the clock again. Taking a moment to calm himself down before he moved from the bed to start his day, trying to focus on getting ready, hoping only to rid himself of the images as he passed through more mundane moments in his life.
Recourse

The morning managed to deteriorate from the nightmare, people all seemed to watch him, as if marked by something unseen by his own eyes and until he was at the door of his class. There was a note, in an almost primitive scrawl, reading that class was cancelled today. When he observed the scrap closer he noticed the image pressed into the paper, a single large X with the same ornate pattern from his nightmare. He pulled the note from the door and flipped the paper, finding more of the scrawl.

It read simply: “The door is open. What you seek, you may find within.” The note was signed with an all too familiar signature. Adrian looked down at the door knob, slowly reaching out and giving it a hesitant turn, glancing back at the empty hallway, to be sure he wasn’t seen, before slipping inside, pulling the door closed behind him, looking around the darkened lecture hall. The only noises within came from his own breathing and his slow footsteps as he moved to look at the board.

The X from the previous night was gone. In its place was one on a larger scale with a diamond shape at its center. Scrawled along the arms of the cross were simple words. The two on the left were “Death” and “Chaos.” To the right were “Life” and “Peace.” “Life” opposite “Death,” and “Peace,” of course, opposite “Chaos,” and in the center was a single word, “Nothing.”

Adrian looked over the diagram and gave a sigh as he leaned back against one of the rows of desks. He sat there for what felt like an eternity, staring, letting his mind try to untangle itself from the nightmares and his new reality. It took more time than he’d have liked. The only thing that drew his attention away from the board was the commotion of students in the hall outside, the change of class signaling an hour he’d been there, and discovered nothing. Looking back at the board he shifted his position as a grim realization set in.

Adrian bowed his head and gave a meek chuckle, a sick smile coming over his face. He stepped away from the desks and dropped to his knees, hands rising to his head as it all dawned on him at once. Why hadn’t he seen it? Why had it taken him so long to piece such simple answers together? His form began to
shake violently, his breaths becoming shallow and erratic, his heart beginning to thunder in his ears. A single word echoed in his mind: “Run.” But before he caved to his mind, he stepped to the board, erasing the words there before scrawling his own: “X will be the end of us all.”

With a small flourish Adrian smiled and took his leave of the classroom, never to return to the tutelage of Marlowe or the chains of such an institution. He disappeared without a trace, leaving no evidence of his existence and no memory, for without the peace that once cleared his mind… the chaos ensued, driving him to his own end… his own room with its own steel door.

**Multiplicity**

Another student, another time, another place. Marlowe looked over his new pupils; he already had three or four in this group scoped out… all were promising but all still paled compared to Adrian. He settled for what he could get though, as their classes moved on, pushing their young minds into similar conundrums, all based around the cross and the balanced existence of everything above nothing.

Class was dismissed with a hand flourish as he turned back to his board, erasing the notes, hearing the thundering of feet before the sense of being watched pervaded him. He turned with that sly smile, clasping his hands together in front of him as he faced his student. “What is it, Mark?” His voice was calm and nurturing, a façade he’d mastered.

Mark looked away, then back up at his professor, a hand reaching up to scratch the back of his head. “Could you explain today’s lecture in a little more detail? I feel like there’s something I’m missing…” he muttered, looking almost ashamed of his lack of knowledge.

Marlowe’s smile increased and he nodded, turning to the board and offering a near condescending tone as he started writing on the board again. The click and scratch of chalk filled the room as he asked questions in rapid fire, coaxing Mark into his trap as he’d done a thousand times before.

Mark watched and answered, stepping back when his eyes fell on the center of the board and the cryptic symbol therein. “Professor, what does the X stand for?”
Pink, pastel, paisley
sequins sparkle on sleeves
lace adorns fringes

I never understood his taste
I’m just glad I found clothes
in the furthest corners of my closet
to fit his lanky frame
Through My Father’s Eyes, by Wendy Giere-Frye
Depressing Optimism, by David Kent
Peter Lorre, by Shannon Smith
Paula Sergi, a poet and registered nurse, came to Gordon on November 9, 2010, to meet with students and present a reading of her work. She sat down with the Blackshear staff for the following interview.

**What is the intersection of poetry and nursing?**

The intersection of poetry and nursing has to do with skilled observation. As the details of the work come back to me, so does the memory of my fascination with my patients' homes and lives. I was very interested in the stories behind these details, and imagining what I could not know. Nursing education is skilled observation. I was able to make note of the many physical details that comprise my patients’ lives, and I found myself wanting to record and expand on these details, to explore, develop and fictionalize these realities.

**What poets do you recommend other poets read?**

Follow a poet whose work attracts you. Read contemporary poets. Ask Professor Powers. That's what I do.

**Do you favor a particular approach to writing poetry?**

An approach to writing poetry is like a Nike ad: just do it.

**What is your writing process?**

Find the time that works best for you. For me, it's early morning, when I'm still in the dream state, maybe remembering
Paula Sergi reads at Gordon
Tuesday Nov. 9th 7:30 PM
Alumni House

About Paula Sergi:
Paula Sergi holds a BSN from the University of Wisconsin and an MFA in creative writing from Vermont College. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, and she is co-editor of Boomer Girls: Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation, Meditations on Hope: Nurses’ Stories on Motivation and Inspiration, and A Call to Nursing: Nurses’ Stories about Challenge and Commitment.

What: Poetry Reading by Poet Paula Sergi
When: November 9, 2010
Where: Gordon College Alumni House
Stafford Avenue, across the street from I.C.
Time: 7:30 PM
Free for the Gordon College Community and the public.
Sponsored by Blackshear.
A dream. There's something in those early morning thoughts that are other-worldly. I keep a journal, and some days go through it for single lines that I like, that seem evocative. Then I work around that.

___________________________

Someone’s Angel (a poem by Paula Sergi)

I’ve ignored the season as best I can these long weeks of December, resistant to the goodwill call, the ads for new cars in big bows, the sparkling diamonds, perfect turkey, salty ham,

but now venture out on ice-packed roads for groceries, the bread and milk of our days and I’m forced to stop for the rail road crossing, so switch the radio from carols to news

and chew my fingernails considering the numbers of unemployed and newly deployed, of families going hungry, long lines at food pantries and temporary shelters

when I see her lying on her side no bigger than a glove, her ivory and gold complexion beckoning me to take a closer look, her garments shimmering under a thin crust of ice
crammed inside the rear window of the vehicle ahead, someone’s discarded greeting card stuck behind salt and grime almost hiding her fluffy wing her sweet hairline, porcelain forehead, her calm gray eyes and when the cross bar rises to let us move I follow the blue Cavalier where she’s stationed, the car itself the color of fog easing itself away like some slice of sky on a winter day. I follow her past the budget store and gas stations selling brittle trees and deep fried chicken, follow her to the mall where her driver stops to park behind Penneys and I get out, slop through the brown chocolate shake of parking lot ice and enter the department store where I buy a star necklace for the little girl next door, finger discounted mittens and scarves, then buy some for the boys and girls and a sweater for myself, this newly minted angel.
EC JARVIS

Poet, fiction writer, and playwright EC Jarvis visited Gordon on February 21, 2011. He too sat down with the Blackshear staff for an interview.

How old were you when you began to write?

Thirteen. I had spent a lot of time kind of by myself at that point, and I needed something to amuse myself. I would work out little stories or skits, junk like that.

What would you say is step one for new writers?

If you want to write, go out and subscribe to two or three literary magazines. That’s the first thing that you have to do. There are a couple of resources that you can go to, like New Pages. Go to newpages.com. I think that they come out with a new issue every two months, and they have reviews on a bunch of different magazines so you can get a feel of what the magazines are about and what would be best for you. Another resource is Duotrope. That will also help you know where to submit. But I would say before you send anything out subscribe to two or three literary magazines just so you can see what is out there.

Where do you see your career going from here?

In the shitter. No, I mean, I was actually talking to Dr. Powers about this last night. I think there is a sort of stratosphere that a very, very few writers crack, and the reason for it is there is not a lot of room. There are so many writers trying to make it, and
BLACKSHEAR JOURNAL PRESENTS

POET FICTION WRITER PLAYWRIGHT E.C. JARVIS

READING IN THE EVENING
ALUMNI HOUSE
MONDAY FEBRUARY 21
7:30 PM

TALK IN THE AFTERNOON 2:00 PM  ACADEMIC 114

E.C. Jarvis received his PhD from UW-Madison, where he worked on Cream City Review in a variety of editorial capacities. His work has appeared in Initial Cooke, REAL, Indigo, Redeye, and The Tachist, among other places. ECKE nominated his short story "Artificial Heart" for a Pushcart Prize.
there are so few readers these days that it is hard to crack into that stratosphere. But then there is this big kind of bloated middle, and that’s where I think I have kind of cracked into, and that’s where I will probably stay forever. I don’t really expect to be going on a national book tour every year. A part of that is the life that I have picked: I have picked a life with a wife and kid and a teaching job, and I’m okay with that. I heard David Malouf talk once about this weird, very business-oriented decision that he made about his writing, which made me feel at that point that writing becomes more like a job instead of something I enjoy doing. So I think that there is a value to being in the middle and not feeling bad about it. Bob Uecker, who was a baseball player in Milwaukee, and he was not very good, but you know he was a pro ballplayer. And he sort of made a career out of being okay at baseball, and people really rallied behind him because they were like, “I’m mediocre, I’m not going to be great at anything, but it is okay to be mediocre.” So he was a huge fan favorite because he was not outstanding. He had this weird sort of Zen, Big Lebowski view on life, and people kind of tapped into that.

Gotham (a short story by EC Jarvis)

I’ve seen Batman exactly three times. The first was when I was just a kid. My family was out at night, coming out of a movie, in fact. Commando. I remember because I wanted to be this tough guy, and there was Batman, on the rooftop chasing someone down. I couldn’t tell who from the ground. But just seeing him, I felt like there was good in the world.

The second time was different. And, to be honest, I really only saw the Batmobile, not the man himself. But it ripped through the streets, fast and loud. I’d just got my driver’s license my previous year. I so wanted to be him.

This last time was recently. After I’ve become a grown
up, I guess. I was walking home, and I cut through an alley. Stupid in Gotham, I know, but I was pissed off and wanted to go home and have a drink. So, part way down the alley, a backdoor gets kicked open, and out pops the Joker, waving a gun and laughing. He was tall and scrawny, but he was just exploding. Hair a mess and doubled-over kind of laughing. He stumbled toward me and I looked up at him. Actually met his eyes. All I could think to do was whimper and ask, “Are you going to kill me?”

He stopped laughing, but he kept a smile. “Oh child,” he said, “How I wish I had the time.” And then, and I don’t know why, he leaned over me and kissed me on the forehead.

After that, he laughed and ran away. About five seconds later, I was slumped in the water and the garbage of the alleyway. I was crying. And then Batman comes running out the door. And I’m sitting there crying. I managed to choke out “He went that way.” Batman took off in the direction I pointed. Before he did, though, he gave me this look that I could see even through his mask. A look that said that I was a grown man crying in a puddle of garbage, and he was Batman, off to kick the Joker’s ass.

And that was it. I don’t expect I’ll see him again. And I feel bad, but I do know something. I watched the news that night, through some drinks. And I watched it the next night through more drinks, and the Batman didn’t catch the Joker. I told him which way to go, but he still didn’t track him down.
Chad Faries stopped at Gordon on November 3, 2011, to read selections from his recently published memoir, Drive Me Out of My Mind. He also shared his poetry with the Blackshear staff.
Why Is It Bad to Sleep With Flowers in Your Room

The reason is a very good one. They may no longer be as beautiful as they once were, and they are constantly exposing their beautiful genitals which makes the world envy and creates war and destruction, makes magazines like Barely Legal and Young Dumb and Full of Come. Their Tiresian ambisexuality is worthy of wonder as well. They are cunning reconcilers. When you sleep with flowers in your room, you are sick with ecstasy as they spoil the air, which, if not changed, can hurt you. You see, flowers breathe like you, though very much less, so they spoil everything. Also, cut flowers are slowly dying, like us, and as they die they are changed and things are given off from them which are probably not good for you. I have some ideas but it is best that I keep this information from you. Neither cut flowers nor living plants are good to sleep with, for both of them in the dark do nothing but help to poison the air in the room. I do not say that this is very important. I would much rather you slept with your window open and had a few flowers in the room, than with the window shut and no flowers; but still, it is worth remembering. Be skeptical of delivery. This is for you.

From The Book of Knowledge (Vulgar Marsala Press, 2011)
J. MICHAEL DEW

Novelist J. Michael Dew read a chapter from his novel, All the Bad Things, at Gordon on February 8, 2012. He also agreed to an interview with the Blackshear staff.

When did you know you were going to become a writer?

Like many pursuits, it was less me choosing to become a writer and more the craft making the actual choice. I had no say-so in the matter. It's what I do even when I don't feel like it. Some people paint. Others play a sport. I write. I think that the craft approached me, though, in two ways when I was younger. The first was when, after a meal at my grandparents' house, the men would retire to the living room to zone out in front of the TV and drink stale coffee while the women would stay in the kitchen to clean up. There they would chat, tell stories, and gossip. I chose to remain in the kitchen and listen, just listen. After a while, I would take my journal and document the rhythms in language, the diction, the unique ways stories were told. I was fascinated by it, still am. I was a student in the kitchen. Any aspiring writer should think of him/herself as a student of the human animal. The second way the craft of storytelling approached me was when I would go for walks with my family, though mostly it was with my mother and siblings. Like many people in northwestern Pennsylvania, we didn't have a lot of money. In fact, we were destitute much of the time, though looking back I never knew it. We went for walks because walks were free, and there weren't really any other options for entertainment. One of our favorite places to walk was the cemetery. I vividly recall walking around the burial
J. Michael Dew Reads from His New Novel!

Wednesday February 8th 7:30 PM
Nursing and Allied Health Sciences 123

Sponsored by Blackshear. Free!
www.jmichaeldew.com
plots while my mother in particular imagined out loud what the lives of those buried there were like, what they did, how they lived and died. We were very inventive. After a while, I, too, joined in the game of making up stories to go with the names engraved on the gravestones.

**Do you have a favorite place to write in? What time of day do you prefer writing?**

I'm afraid I can't afford the luxury of taking time out of my busy day to go to a specific place at a specific time to write. I have three little girls, ages 5, 3, and 1, and they keep me and my wife pretty busy. Still, if I'm able, I like to pull out my notes after everybody has gone to bed and sit by myself at the kitchen table and hope a character pulls out another chair, sits down, and begins to unload what's on his or her mind.

**What tips would you give to up and coming writers?**

Anybody can write a ten or fifteen page beginning of a story, but only someone with vast amounts of discipline can complete a manuscript. Passion gets us started, but only discipline can get us to the end.
Dr. Edward Whitelock, Dr. Stephen Powers, David Kent, visiting novelist J. Michael Dew, and Liz Smallwood with Dr. Max Burns, president of Gordon State College.
ACT IX

These walls, they confide within me a new secret, a new revelation from the pages of a hidden book. They murmur the echoes of truths which will boil the blood, sought after for the self satisfaction of vindication, a thought only they can ponder. Again they cast the orbs which dance under the light of the moon into the depths of a chamber, whose iron-cast stairwell hardens the mind. These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they change in their glory, bathing in the virtue of the very nature of their ethics, they compare themselves to the grand cathedrals of Medieval Europe, Hagia Sophia and Notre Dame they dare say, their names do not honor the glory of such. Enter into the kettle scrapped mahogany doors, into the basilica, the pillars of triumphs lines the corridor. These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they welcome me to the Church of Whore, meet the minister who preaches his own twisted idea of faith, drink from the blood of acid on his breath, as he stains the very heart of innocence, which he himself makes in a statement of despair, caught off guard by the demons’ gaze which feeds his mind. These walls speak not the truth...

The choir, they praise the background for his selfless nature, the blue eyed snake of grappling arms reaches out, the pews they break with the weight of the congregation, as they sample his sermon. Taking in all trains of thought on the situation, purity he declares is the only way, to dabble in the depths of adultery is
the ultimate sin, the ultimate question of Eve's commitment to the faulty game at hand. These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they gaze upon me as the sermons continue, the choir rejoicing in the victory, PRAISE THE WORD, vanquish the Holy Grail, and crucify your soul, the Curse of Cane shall not become upon us. He declares the cure lies in the hands of the doctor, the magic of the doctor who can save us, follow me and you will see. These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they guide me through the corridors, as light bathes through the stained glass, with memories of stories past, the story of the cafe, the city of wonder which sits on the tip of the land of dreams, the bellows of the beast from within your mind, they grasp me as I run through the hall of a thousand arms which refuse to let go, the light it stops, and there lies nothing but a shadow. These walls they speak not the truth...

These walls, they conquer the land, they kiss the tips of grasped lovers, and they beckon to the wish of ever-after life, pick the rose from the patch of thorns, and your wildest dreams will come true. We begin through the briar patch, scratches as the cat's claws pierce our flesh, for which we have brought no armor, this battle field can only be fought with fire, but alas is it really worth it? These walls they speak not the truth...

These walls, they continue their banter, they cave in upon me, faster and faster and the ground shakes, and the flames disperse, I have made it to the door, through the danger, through the darkness, and through the briar patch, of ole time sake let there be lamplight standing in the corner, fueling the ship which has set sail from Eden, her army will relive, free from the prisoner at hand, caught in the corner, chained to the dagger of his bitter sweet chapped lips. These walls they speak not the truth...
These walls, they relieve me of their hold, allow me to enter into the chamber behind the door, the chilling sight of what I see, a mirror image of myself on the doctor’s operating room table, his scalpel slides down my chest, and pries my beating heart from the wound, still beating in his hand, he places it within a jar, on the shelf number all the ones before me, and perhaps all the ones after me, the minister joined hands with the doctors and cackles in his delight, his own virtues caught in the picture, frozen amongst the dry cold of the Arctic.

These walls they speak not the truth...

These walls, Jezebel they shout, take thy leave, Sodom and Gomorra, fire to ash by the hands of the Lord himself, taken from the pages of biblical scripture, why? Answer me not, answer me nothing more then a murmur, stare into the blue eyed snake, his radio plays in the background a somber tune of revenge, the ground it shakes with rage, the jar falls off the shelf, the formaldehyde allows my core to rot, to ash, to dance with the grave stricken maiden, her cause unjust looking for nothing more than her love...

These walls they speak not the truth...

These walls, they creep through the shadows of the chamber, broken glass cuts the brick and mortar flesh, exposing the blood and tears of the gazing demon of my mind, your weapons of modern destruction are useless, only sheer will of the mind can fight off this fear, stunned and paralyzed, I wake, my heart no more rotten in the flesh, the operating room constrains my hands, bands of worn leather, easily broken with rage...

These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they play the music of ballet, the experiences under the stars of Moscow, they whisper into tone, a ghost, a haunting experience, castrated by only your ignorance to your beliefs, Minister, I will have the last laugh, your Church of Whore will leave a bad taste on my breath, smoke your cigarettes, because eventually I will smoke you.

These walls speak not the truth...
These walls, hallowed land of the cemetery, you cannot step foot here, where I lay myself to rest, celebrating my own funeral I will wear white, a new beginning and a new birth, here I will start all over. Born again, I will not die, I will follow you until you fall, your congregation will leave one by one to the other side, briar patches and moats of sunken petrified widows will not stop me, they will see. These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they beat with the sounds of Doom’s approaching drum, the call of war rumbles the ground, through the skin to the bones. The last battle the choir sings, praise the damned, and kill the forsaken, tainted purity of the virgin will linger in my glass of wine, pry open the box and see inside a spinning funnel of tossed cascade junk blossoms, water them with the hose caught on the hook of a pickup chasing down the banshee lured by the Siren.
These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, they deliver me to the maze on the grounds of the Church of Whore, the minister pierces the veil of the haze and he stares at his own reflection in the fountain, spewing rapids of wells, and doves sink to the below the waist of hypocrisy, then the Minister’s reflections takes off into the labyrinth, a fixated master piece of psychotherapy babble, for the very nature of this maze lies in such a simple concept, “What would drive a mad man sane, would drive a sane man mad...” Easier said than done.
These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, for once they cower at the sound of the brontide, as it draws near. A jester of hearts hysterically plays chess with the ghoul of boyfriends past, his laughter is on the verge of a spiral spinning fast and spinning faster, till the tide washes them ashore, break through and fight for the core, silver and pink mesh together as the bells of the fedora ruffle in secrecy, “RUN MINISTER CATCH YOUR REFLECTION!”
These walls speak not the truth...
Act X

These walls, they whisper a ballad of a somber tune, a dove hung frozen for a moment in the clouds, cast with the plague of a ghoul’s laughter, he preys on the passers-by, the black top fedora of the Tommy Gun’s lovers, in the vestige of a burlesque stripper whose own pride and glory denote the very meaning of her character, the dim lit room of the lounge and the soggy ridden haze of a cigars huff, he drinks another glass of his toxic elixir, taking only enough to beckon the grin of the girl, she sways in the veil of the dust, biting her lip for a chance of lust.

These walls speak not the truth...

These walls, confidence is burden and bare on the floor, the pole her tree of life, and she rides music smooth as her arms flow, they pierce the brick before them, urging the purge to cleanse her meaning, sweat glides over the skin, the princess of erotica concoction, brewing her spell, breasts exposed for the world to see, this is the game of no-name riddles, and the only prize available is shame.

These walls speak not the truth...
RYAN FERGUSON
Narcissist

Can you hear me?

Yes.

Do you understand what I'm telling you?

No.

You've got to end this, end yourself.

Why?

Your narcissism consumes your faint hope in humanity, your hope in yourself. Self-preservation is not worth dying alone. That's what will happen. You're going to die alone and your quest for ingenious lunacy, coated in stylish flamboyance, will be in vain. No one watches you like you watch you. Do you know that?

Of course, I do. But they watch me some of the time.

What makes you think that? What makes you believe that you even exist to anyone other than you? Don't you realize that if you died today, it wouldn't matter?

Why are you saying this?

Because you need to know. You need to know so that you stop spending
your money and time trying to please the wandering eyes of others that pay you no mind. You will die alone, and so will they. You are no one and no one is anyone.

Alright, I'm done.
“You may now kiss the bride.” A phrase that puts an end to an era of one-night stands and those awkward mornings trying to get dressed and out the door without waking up the female in bed, whose name never seemed to come up. Leading up to that life-altering phrase lies a road of very eclectic women and bad choices. Some potholes in the road to keep an eye out for are the gold diggers, tramps, and of course little Ms. Priss.

Now the most deceitful women of all are the one and only gold diggers. They are not looking for love or romance. They’re in it for one thing and one thing only, money! This woman will more than likely be at an upscale cocktail party. The suit and tie dress code will make her more engaging and easier to approach, because after all she’s in the game for a high-class and wealthy man. Cocktails will be flowing and sparks will fly as the chemistry builds in anticipation of a great evening. After the party, the first few weeks of dating are filled with passion and sensuous love making. Buying things for her is not looked at as a necessity but a want, in an attempt to please her. After all it is love right? The relationship progresses and the money in a once plentiful bank account decreases. The realization that she is in love with the bank account behind the man sinks in and once again the heart splits in two. Money lovers unfortunately are not the only pothole to look out for on the road to love, tramps are just as devious and all the more hard to resist.

Swerve right! Don’t want to run into the tramp. That crack in the road is full of nothing but deception and heartache.
Tramps tend to be very beautiful and scantily but elegantly dressed. Beneath that beauty lies an unethical two-timer that has a couple of lifeboats on the side riding in her wake. Upon entering the bar men flock to her like a siren luring her prey to their demise. It feels like a bomb exploded; the chemistry is so powerful. The flirting, the touching, and of course the suggestive dialogue enrages such a euphoric sensation that the after party is unsubtly hurried back to her place. The next few days are filled with tantalizing sex and erotic stimulation. Everything is perfect; cloud nine is an understatement. She must be the one! As soon as that feeling sinks in and begins to pay its toll, she slips up. Her answering machine beeps with a raunchy message of another man describing the wonderful night he had with her last night. Climbing out of that crack in the road is painful and tiring but not near as much upkeep as little Ms. Priss.

Now this girl is a dip in the road that will send the car airborne with frustration and anger. She was daddy’s little girl growing up and she developed into a beautiful brat. Shy, quiet, and innocent are the images she portrays as she walks her miniature schnauzer through the park. It starts out with dinner and a movie ending with a sweet kiss goodnight. Already this girl is different from the ones in the past. A few things come off as weird, like how she never seems to run out of daddy’s money to shop and she has everything she ever wanted, but after all this girl is something special so why not take up for daddy’s job and buy her things. As the weeks progress her true self comes out. When she was told “No” she didn’t know what to do with herself and the temper tantrum was just embarrassing. This girl is obviously too spoiled to know how to be in a give and take relationship. Just chalk that one up as one more lesson learned.

Deceitful, money loving, skanky, two-timing, spoiled, and bratty women can send even the finest of drivers fishtailing into a ditch. Now that I have set cones in the road pointing out all the
potholes, cracks, and dips it should be smooth driving to that life altering phrase. “You may now kiss the bride.”
MEGHAN HAULK

Desolation

Here, she is alone,
And here, she weeps.
Here she feels the worst emotions
And here she never sleeps.

The life she never wanted
Has been forced upon her now.
The door to the life she always dreamed of
Has been slammed shut in her face.

They say it was her fault;
‘She brought it on herself.’

The tale, in short,
Is nothing of the sort.

Truth be told, they are cold,
And have no pity for a poor soul.

She wanted someone to care,
She needed someone to love.
When those things both disappeared
It was too much for her to bear.

She slipped away,
And came here one day.
I hear her cry,
She wants to die.
I long to ease her pain.

It is almost too much to bear,
And yet I cannot stop my care.

She lives alone in desolation,
Haunted by memories of past creations.
Lydia climbed the set of stairs leading to her apartment. The only thing that was on her mind was a hot bath to relax her tired body. She walked into her bathroom and turned on the faucet, making sure the water was nice and hot. She leaned over the tub and lit a few cheap tea candles that were half melted on one of her mother’s nice China plates. She grabbed a bottle of Dawn and squeezed a bit of the liquid into the tub, and bubbles formed on top of the water. She unzipped the back of her stiffly starched dress and slipped it off. Next, she removed her nude colored pantyhose and faded set of underwear. She turned and faced the mirror as she took the clip out of her brown hair which reached just past her shoulders and was streaked with dark gray. She stared at herself in the mirror. She looked at the dark bags under her eyes. Her long, tangled hair almost reached her sagging breasts, and loose skin was starting to hang from her chin and arms. She took a deep breath and turned toward the tub, now resembling a large container of white cotton candy. She slowly entered the water, and broke through the smooth layers of bubbles. She slumped into the tub, only her head emerging.

When Lydia opened her eyes, she noticed the bubbles from her warm bath had disappeared. At this point, she had only one thing on her mind: Dennis Harper. She turned the water faucet back on. He owned Big D’s Plumbing, which happened to be two blocks down from Lydia. The only men she had seen that compared to Dennis were the ones she had seen on T.V. She touched her neck as she closed her eyes. He had thick black hair,
kept trimmed short and neat, salt and peppered with light gray strands. Her breathing slowed down, then instantly sped up as she opened her mouth. She pictured his dark, intriguing eyes. Even though she had only seen Dennis in his navy blue coveralls, she could tell that he had a fit body. She imagined running her hands over his broad chest. Her breathing became more rapid as her chest rose with intense satisfaction, and as she exhaled slowly, she opened her eyes, just as water began to leak over the tub. She quickly turned off the faucet and let out a long sigh.

Lydia awoke the next morning to her alarm going off. She heard the familiar DJ voices as she did every morning. She laid in bed for a few minutes, listening to them ask their listeners to call in with opinions on sex change operations. She couldn’t help but to let out a chuckle.

As soon as Lydia was able to drag herself out of bed, she washed her face and brushed her teeth. She slipped on a different starched dress as she swished Listerine around in her mouth. She quickly put on her black patent leather heels, the same type of shoe she had seen her grandmother wear so many years before. She turned to the mirror to pin up her hair before heading to the kitchen for a quick breakfast. She stared at herself for a long time in that mirror. Lydia wasn’t ugly, but she wasn’t beautiful. She was just plain, and she knew that she looked way past her 41 years.

Dennis would never want her.

As she put her dry, instant oatmeal in the microwave, Lydia began to daydream about a life she had desired since she laid eyes on Dennis Harper. She pictured waking up every morning and putting on a pink cashmere robe. She would go downstairs to a beautiful, bright kitchen with cabinets fully stocked. She saw herself starting a pot of coffee and pulling out pots and pans to cook breakfast for Dennis before work. Just as
she would put breakfast on the table, Dennis would walk down the stairs. She would know how to make his coffee just the way he wanted it because she would be the perfect wife…

Her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the microwave timer going off and she was snapped back into the reality of her own dreary life.

After she finished eating, Lydia slumped down the stairs from her apartment, opening the door at the bottom of the stairs. The door led to a small gas station store, which was dusty and smelled of stale cigarettes. As she walked toward the front entrance to unlock it and turn the sign around to ‘OPEN’, she remembered when she was a little girl. She and her friends would run to the store right after school and head straight to the candy aisle. She pictured her mother standing by the register and instructing each child to only get one piece of candy. She always got a little box of Good & Plentys.

Her mother would be so disappointed if she saw how rundown Lydia had let the little station get. The pumps outside hadn’t held gas in years.

She hated her parents for leaving that stupid store to her. Now, instead of the upstairs room being rented out to random strangers, it was Lydia’s home. She felt trapped and lonely.

Lydia’s thoughts began to focus on her parents. Lydia’s father had a stroke when she was 18, which left the right side of his body paralyzed. She and her mother tended to him for three and a half years before he passed away. After his death, Lydia’s mother barely said another word. Lydia sold her parents’ house in order to pay for a room in the local nursing home for her mother. Lydia had no choice but to take on her parents’ store and the apartment above it. Her mother passed away when she was 25 and she had lived in the apartment ever since.

Lydia’s thoughts were interrupted by the jingle of the bell on the store door as it opened. It was the first customer of the day, and she knew exactly who it would be. She took a deep
breath as she saw the girl walk through the door, same as she did everyday at 6:30 a.m.

Of course this day won’t be any different, Lydia thought as she picked up the latest Enquirer magazine.

“How’s it goin’, Taryn?” Lydia forced herself to smile.

“Mornin’ Lydia! Such a purtty day, dontcha think?”

Taryn was dressed in the same clothes she had been wearing for a week. She smelled of faded cheap perfume and Lydia could smell the faint scent of stale beer on her breath as she approached her. Taryn’s hair was in a messy bun on top of her head and it was apparent that she was still wearing the same make up from the night before.

“Oh, yeah. Great day.”

“Lydia! Where were you last night?!” Frankie’s was outta control! I bought three of the purttiest colored pills I’ve ever seen, Girl! I met a man and when I went home with him, I didn’t even make him pay nothin’! I felt so good! He must not have ever come in Frankie’s before cuz I have never seen him. And I thought I knew every man around here!

Lydia kept her eyes on Taryn, but couldn’t help thinking about how she hated the slut standing in front of her.

“Hey, ya know what? I think I’ma try to see him again! He was GREAT, Lydia. It was like I had a pass to pleasure palace…”

“Impressive!” Lydia quickly interrupted. “and I was here, Taryn. You know I don’t go to that bar.”

“Well. You should. Why don’t you ever go nowhere? You rarely ever leave this place. And when you do, you only go to the damn grocery store! That’s so fuckin’ boring!”

“Mind your business, Girl.” Lydia reached behind her and got a pack of Marlboro reds and set them on the counter. Taryn approached the register with her normal breakfast: a honey bun and a can of V8 vegetable juice.
“Christ, I’m sorry. I just feel so bad for ya, always sittin’ here all by yourself.” She handed Lydia a 5 dollar bill along with 3 quarters. “I’ll see ya later. I’ll need to get more smokes before I head to the Frankie’s later.”

“Bye.” The bell on the door jingled as Taryn closed the door behind her.

The rest of the morning went by as usual; the same people buying the same shit, talking about the same things they were talking about the day before: who was pregnant by who, whose mama had died, who moved away to go to college because they thought they were too good to serve tables at the local diner…

By the time early afternoon came, Lydia had seen half the town, smoked almost 2 packs of Virginia Slims, and read all the new magazines that came in the mail the previous afternoon. As her stomach started to rumble, she walked to the front door and locked it. She taped a note on the door that was barely legible, but it got the point across; the store would reopen in 25 minutes.

She grabbed a bag of bbq chips and stomped up the stairs to her small apartment. Lydia frowned as she started digging through her freezer. All that was there were a couple of meatloaf T.V. dinners. She grabbed a can of chicken n’ dumplings and ate it straight from the can, along with her bbq chips and a can of off-brand soda. She sat down on her recliner and turned the television on with the remote. She stared blankly at the soap opera playing on the screen, paying no attention to what the controversy was today. She closed her eyes and imagined her perfect Dennis standing behind her, massaging her tired shoulders.

The afternoon was slower than usual so she decided to play a game. She picked up the phone and called Big D’s Plumbing.
“Big D’s Plumbing, we clean up your mess! How can I help ya?” The girls answered the phone after half a ring. Lydia figured that with that much enthusiasm, she must be new.

“Uh, yeah. This is Lydia at that gas station two blocks down. My toilet is acting up and I can’t seem to fix it. Do you think you could send…”

“Yes, Ma’am! I’ll send someone over right away!” Lydia couldn’t even finish her sentence, but it made the lie easier to tell.

“Great, thanks. Hey, you could send Mr. Harper if he isn’t busy? He always seems to know what the issue is.”

“Yes, of course! I’ll have him over in just a jiffy!” The girl hung up the phone and Lydia got to work. She headed to the bathroom in the back of the store and unhitched a nozzle underneath. The toilet was old and it was easy to tinker with in order to make it seem broken. Just as she stood up, she heard the bell on the door.

“Hello?” Lydia could recognize Dennis’ voice anywhere. She glanced at the bathroom mirror and pushed her hair out of her face, then smoothed down her dress.

“Well, hi there! Sorry to trouble you, but my toilet isn’t working again.”

“No trouble, Ma’am. I’ll see what the problem is in no time.” Dennis walked to the back of the store and Lydia turned around to follow him. As she took a deep breath and began to walk to the bathroom, she heard that damned bell.

Fuck.

“I’m back! I really should quit smokin’, dontcha think?” Taryn had caked more make up on her oily, unwashed face and had obviously doused herself with 5 dollar perfume to avoid bathing herself.

“Yeah. Me too.”
As Taryn walked to the counter, Dennis walked out of the bathroom.

“Alright, Ma’am. It’s all fixed. I’ll send you the bill…” Dennis’ voice faded off as he set his eyes on Taryn. Her huge grin revealed her rotting teeth and Lydia’s jaw tightened as she looked back and forth between Dennis’ face – eyes wide as hell and mouth slightly opened - and Taryn’s smile – so wide her eyes were squinted shut, crust emerging from the corners of her eyes.

Dennis rushed out of the door, muttering something that couldn’t be deciphered.

Lydia was speechless as Taryn squealed with excitement. The room began to spin.

Taryn ran to Lydia and gripped her shoulders tightly. Her whisper wasn’t a whisper at all.

“That was him, Lydia! The guy from last night!”
There once was a girl, with her eyes sewn shut,
Getting hurt in life, dark limbo, endless rut.
How beautiful this girl with luscious figure and face,
With a mind so evolved, a heart in a glass case.
How withered this vixen, with imagination sublime.
Makes me wonder where she’s headed this time.
She walks among men, yet in her own reality,
As if a queen of her world, not a soul deserving fealty.
Though her glass heart is cracked, her skin yet of steal,
She knows she wants better, not just another meal.
She is but a girl walking on water, seeing countless drown,
Men call her a queen, yet give her no crown.
So the girl wears her armor, protecting all she has,
That she has only herself most times, the feeling won’t pass.
Time after time, men and people ask her about her sewn eyes.
She does not mislead, web weaves no lies.
They ask, Why are your eyes sewn shut so uncouth?
"I see with my heart, that which tells me the truth."
Just before sunrise the nymphs fervently bloomed from the black and white damask printed wallpaper carrying baskets of soft cheeses, vinegar wine, and crusty bread. They would skip and sing to the edge of the stiff red curtains and lay the baskets at the hems. The nymphs knew to never get too close to the curtains or they may be sucked behind them and thrown into the world of darkness they covered. So they laid their baskets to Dionysus and “skipped” across the dressers, chairs, and bedposts from the left side of the room to the right side where she lay.

On the bed post they sat braiding each other’s silver strands and swinging their feet. “Poor little keenahmohn left out to dry in the moonlight. Your spice will rot and you shall not eat,” they sang. She ignored their taunts. They carried on in that way every day before he came. They would not stop today. The nymphs, realizing their song had gone unheard, picked flowers from the wall print and adorned their hair and tendrils. They disrobed, exposing their breasts and bottoms, and began to bathe each other in nectar. Her breasts began to leak at the sight of the nymph’s freedom. How she wished for a world unlike the one she inhabited. She tore a page of scripture, patted her breasts dry, and sucked the milk from the fibers.

“He comes,” they said.

He cumbersomely opened the door with his freshly soiled green garden boot. The dirt had slightly crusted and clumped around the boots’ edges blending from red clay to mud.
He treaded in equal intervals across the black and white rug Kizzy had commissioned from little women in India who had eleven children a piece to feed and left marks behind.

“I’ve brought you sugar, cinnamon toast with extra butter. Even removed the ends.” He placed the tray down on the left side of her bed. She didn’t move. “Sunlight or lamplight light,” he asked, but she did not respond. He was getting used to that and did not wait for one. “The garden is getting so full. Strawberries are ripe. I picked some for you. See? The birds are awfully bothersome without you getting on them. They expect it. You have trained them well. They don’t listen to me. Let’s open up the curtains to freshen up the place.” The nymphs’ bathing stopped, and they gasped. He unlocked the curtains, and revealed a man digging under the magnolia tree. He secured the curtains and turned on the lamp. “Tomorrow you shall be moved to the east wing. Would you like that?” Kizzy shifted her hip and returned to her original position.

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The afternoon arrived as did Sifa with more food. The scene was as he left it. He moved the breakfast tray and placed the lunch tray in its place. He moved the full breakfast water glass and placed the lunch water glass in its place. “Your mother made your favorite stew with extra okra and roast. Brought some for me too.” He placed his hand around her arm, and had enough mind to do the same to the other. He wanted to shake her and scream that they would become parents even if they had to bury an eighth. But he didn’t. He said, “sit up for me.” She sat up and turned on to her other side. The aroma of the stew wasn’t enough to curb her appetite for the word. It made her want it more. She fingered two scriptures and consumed them.

He walked his hurt, his bowl of stew, and his spoon to his
white linen chair that faced her bed. He spooned the stew into his mouth. He chewed and he thought. He remembered the time they hiked Rabun Bald. She crawled across the peak crying that the height was too much. He had never seen her so. She was a rooted tree. But it was too much for her to bear. He remembered the rolling trees beyond distances of measure and the fighting winds. When they descended, he walked beside her as she crawled. And when she was able, he held her hand. That night he took that hand and placed his face into it, and wrapped his arms about her waist. A child was conceived. Its birth—its death—confined her to the bed he sat across. He chewed, he swallowed, and he cried in no particular order. The nymphs laughed, caught a tear and carried it to the hem of the curtains.

“A man cannot pretend.” He walked to the tray and placed his bowl and his spoon on it. He sat at the bedside, and the nymphs gathered into the chair he evacuated. He caressed her hair and tried to count every strand to hold back the feelings. She shifted. He looked at the reflections in her hair. He knew his life was within her.

The nymphs sang, “Poor keenahmohn, you have been left to rot.” She sucked the milk from the fibers and swallowed it all whole. He continued his speech, “Life leaves no room for such luxuries.”

She began to cry, but not for any one reason, but them all. It seemed like the only meaningful thing to do since words had escaped her moons ago. She didn’t miss them either, but they missed her and knocked upon her tongue as children long removed from home. “Not one missing by my will,” she whispered. A tongue unused has no power. The nymphs froze. “They all huddle together under the magnolia tree. In the fruitful months, they will climb to the ends of the branches and bloom for their forsaken mother. I will pluck them and adorn my hair and naked body, as the nymphs have taught me. Let me
demonstrate."

He caressed her hip and searched for her hand and reached the book. He slowly brought it to him. He knew, that in times like the ones they faced, there was something good to be had in it. He opened the book. Many pages were missing. Revelations and Genesis were no longer there. He searched for something of use and found Leviticus’ procedures of offerings. “They are all missing,” he said.

“We have no need for them. I have consumed what I need. I am full.”

“Full?”

“So much,”

“Exodus, Revelations”

“All gone.”

“Since?”

She exposed her feet and exited the bed. The cool floor creaked a greeting of return. She walked to the window and pulled back the curtain. “There,” she pointed to the circle of graves and saw a freshly prepared one baking in the sun. There was no headstone, just dirt blending from crusty red clay to mud. She paused. Suddenly, the sun made her robe too hot. The padding between her legs was too thick. The blood clots were too big. She grabbed the hem of her robe and pulled it above her head and threw it from her body. She stood there with her leaking childless breasts. She had done what they begged her not to. She exposed them.

The nymphs gathered their ribbon and nectar and returned to their damask. They sang the poor keenahmohn song once more without the joy. The time had come and they could no longer trust her inside their world. She was to return to her beginnings. Kizzy stumbled. Sifa jumped to her aid. “You are weak. You must eat,” he commanded and pulled her to the bed.

“I am full. I am full.”
“Life has left us without the luxury to pretend. You must eat. You must get well. You must regain your strength. We can try again. We can. We can try as many times until we get one. What do you say? Please, eat something for me.“

She stared at his hairline. She did not move or speak. She swayed. Then, she slapped herself. For the first time, she felt something. It wasn’t pain or hunger or something the body involuntarily responds to. It was something purposeful. The blood ran between her legs and she lowered her head to see. She counted the clots that gathered around her knees. There were twelve.

“See,” she pointed, “I have counted them all. You see them? Count them. Each time these are what we are left with. Gather your bottles and blankets. You shall cradle them to sleep tonight.” She touched his cool forehead and fingered the premature wrinkles above his brow. They were not there before, but were pronounced as if they had been there since his beginning. She swiftly ran her nails deeply in the crevasses and ran out the door and down the steps through the side door taking his skin and blood with her. They mounted the fresh grave, and shoveled the dirt into her mouth. “I am full,” she howled.

The nymphs cried and wrapped their ribbon around their necks. Sifa looked out of the window at the woman he loved still hunched over the mound. He locked the stiff red curtain, turned, and descended the stairs. He entered the mud room. The digger stood looking out at the scene through the screen door with his shovel in hand. “Another hole,” he inquired.

“Yes, another,” Sifa replied as he walked out the door.
OLIVIA E. GUNN

Splenda

To add flavor to a society whose pallet is bored
Let us shock the system by pushing ourselves away from the table
Instead of having seconds of whatever artificial dish they have re-heated

We obsess over buying “organic,” natural grown, overpriced products
To keep our children “healthy” and cleansed from high fructose corn syrup
But while we’ve been shopping
They’ve been surfing the net, obsessed with Vampire Diaries instead of writing in their own

We are so easy to spread our legs to chaos
We make ourselves peeping toms
Escaping into the edited misery of the lives of strangers
(Lives that should have remained private)
In an effect to live in denial about our own

And since misery loves company ratings rise
But will we choose to hear wisdom?
It’s in the streets, she cries,
Though muffled out and ignored
She cries as loud as she did
To our grandparents before.
MEGHAN HAULK

Tonight

She sleeps in peace for now,
Content not knowing how
Tonight her heart would break
And what toll it would take

He will dream of her tonight,
Her beauty and her light,
Remembering her voice
And weeping at her choice.
THOMMY HARLESS

A Crucible’d Heart

Passion boiled strong within his skin
Threatening to overflow his crucible’d heart,
And glistening crystals filled his ocean eyes
Sinking deep and true into its infinity.

Ah, the wicked minds and hearts of men,
How they puncture even iron’s wintry silver,
Splintered the bones of passion,
And to darkness, gave darkness unto all.

And the fantastical, malicious lies
That spread deep and wide, like ink in the looking glass,
Veining out to touch unseen worlds
Poisoned by the nefarious thoughts of men.

His song pierces through the midnight chill, frozen in eternal ice,
Never reaching those who never mused to hear his song.
And the venom of the world seeps deep,
Stretching to the marrow of his verbally beaten body.

And to the boy, they bind his insecurity,
Wrapping the silenced chains of the heckler upon his body,
Choking out the golden, innocent euphoria,
And though he strives, he falls.

And when the world finally hears his desperate, beleaguered plea,
Merely an echo is heard.
For passion has boiled his crucible’d heart,
Glistening crystals filled his ocean eyes,
Surfacing no more to take the desperate breath of candor.
Billbo blew his face up. But before he did that Lee, Bob, Pete, Juju, Billbo, and myself had been standing in the traditional circle. The smoker’s circle. It was that time of day.

That time of day when we were lucky. Lucky enough to have the money for pot, lucky enough to have a connection for pot, and lucky enough not to get caught with the marijuana driving it back.

By this time we were in week four of the seven week long party. My mother had made the mistake of taking a trip overseas to see the Eastern world and entrusting the house to teenagers; we just decided to take a trip and go nowhere. The person who rolls the blunt always goes first, the buyer usually second, and whoever jumped in rotation got their spot accordingly.

While avoiding the empty bottles and vomit left over from previous nights, we were careful not to knock over the dirty dishes that were stacked nicely in the sink. I couldn’t tell you the order decided on…because I was smoking pot, probably, but I know I wasn’t first or second.

When the herbal remedy was extinguished we all went to our own devices. Me to my room for music, Lee to the piano to hammer away notes, Pete to…well who ever really knew what the hell that guy did, Juju to talk to the girl of the hour, and Bob and Billbo to seek out the nearest trouble they could find.

After many minutes Pete appeared in my doorway, tilted his head to the side, and with an almost puzzled look said to me
in the most exclamatory, monotone voice one could ever hear, “Dude! Billbo just blew his face up…”

He emphasized the “Dude.”

As I stormed from my chair I knew my mom’s house would be in pieces. As I passed the bathroom there was Billbo, standing in the mirror picking over his face, yelling, “I lost my fucking high. We just smoked. Just smoked. I could at least be high for this shit.”

The living room was in one piece, but the dishes were still in one place. And I was pissed. While rummaging through a desk the idiots had come across old black powder cartridges once used to reenact the Civil War.

Billbo had poured the black powder on to a railing, put his face to it, and as he was calling out, “This ain’t no damn black powder,” he put a lighter near it as well. The combination of the heat outside along with the proximity of the flame caused the powder to ignite.

It also caused first and second degree burns to his face. But the only thing that bastard cared about at the time was that he wasn’t high anymore.

By the time I figured out that it wasn’t a joke and he had caused some kind of serious damage to himself, everyone was gone. The place was a ghost town. The girls showed up and everyone chose Taco Bell, leaving me to figure out what to do next…

Well, we couldn’t call an ambulance. What kind of idiot calls an ambulance after they blow their face up from being too stoned-stupid. No, we couldn’t make stupid mistakes twice. So we did the next best thing we could think of…we stuck his head in the freezer to chill until we could think of the next best thing—or at least think.

“Let’s try some of the Aloe plant,” I suggested.
As soon as it hit his face he screamed, and this time it wasn’t about being high. Now it was pain…it was setting in and faster.

The next idea was to drive to the hospital. Made sense. The Honda CRX is there. We would just get in and go. I would pull up, open the door—at least a block away—and shove him out, drive off, and that would be that. But by the time we got in the car, got the air conditioner on his face and to the end of the driveway the car quit.

The sun beat down on his face and the heat from the asphalt bore up. He had no choice but to run and put his head back in the freezer.

An hour went by. All he could do was lean his six-four self down and keep his head between the ice and frozen vegetables.

I think he said something about ice cream being in there somewhere, but it could have just been the munchies. Pretty sure cheese doodles and Bubba Cola got caught up in this mix somewhere.

At some point our delivery weed service girl happened to stop by. It was great times. I mean real luxuries. Sometimes the weed delivery girl would just smoke with us just because. Hell, one time she gave me a quarter to wash some clothes…what the hell did I care? I didn’t care if she went in and used it with a little soap. A blunt to sit down and watch “Mr. Rogers” and “Sesame Street” with her three year old and eat ice cream, cheese doodles, and Bubba Cola…oh wait, now I know where that comes in…right after Cookie Monster… It was good, high times.

When she got there and saw Billbo’s in the freezer there was nothing to be alarmed about. So I had to explain what happened, by this time Billbo’s mouth was getting to the point where it was burnt shut.

She offered to take him to the hospital. And I was relieved. Mostly for me, but also because I knew Billbo would
get some medical treatment...and Morphine.

As soon as I got rid of those fuckers I took the opportunity to sleep. There is nothing, and I mean nothing, like having a nice central heating and air unit turned all the way down to fifty degrees in the middle of July, in Georgia, so you can find the biggest blanket to get under to stay warm. Who the hell wants to be cold? That’s stupid.

Suddenly there was a knock. No, a bang. NO! More like a pounding, it could only be the drug task force is kicking the door down. Then there was yelling.

“BILLBO!” Then it came from another door. And then another; and then seemingly multiple doors at once. And that was when I met Billbo’s mom.
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