

WORD

MAGAZINE

for creative prose

HORACE

MANIN

SCHOOL

early spring 11

welcome to WORD

WORD has seen its share of ups and downs, from a hiatus of several years to last year's revival and name change (*Legal Fiction* is no longer!) to our first issue of 2011. It's been a bumpy ride, but each fresh incarnation—and each new generation of talent and energy—only makes WORD stronger.

To every one of the crazy students who chose to write and edit when they might have caught up on sleeping/eating/studying: I thank you.

To the readers: I hope you'll find this issue as meaningful as I have. Forgive me the sappy sentiment, but what you hold in your hands is a cumulative effort made over the course of our journey. It was made possible thanks to the stalwart support of faculty members, the sleep deprivation of our staff members, and the irreplaceable genius of our creative director. Let's hope that WORD's journey will continue into well the future!

What a ride it has been.

*until next time,
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Editor-in-Chief*

WORD MAGAZINE

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BROTHERS

by ALEX MA ('11)

“So I’m sprinting straight outta these massive glass doors, with these huge black duffel bags on my shoulders, and I got at least ten cops on my ass. They’ve got all their guns out, and they’re firing at me. It was like I was in one of those movies. I didn’t get a scratch on me.”

It’s mid-morning, and we’re sitting in the back of Cosmos, some fifties-throwback diner a couple of miles off of I-70. Everything here is red, white, aluminum, loud and seems to be covered in plastic.

Jackie’s telling us another one of his stories from way back, one of the ones where bullets fly inches from his body and he barely gets away.

Alfie comes in and counters, like always. “No way.”

He must be sweltering in his tar-black leather jacket. Alfie’s British. He tells us he’s from a small town near Manchester, and he’s got a half-Scottish-but-still-British accent which his words sometimes get lost in. We picked him up after he tried to con us in Tulsa two years ago.

Our coffees arrive—five mugs, deep and black—and Jackson interrupts, “Alright, alright.”

His voice is calm, with a quiet hint of slow Southern drawl.

“It’s almost noon. Let’s go over

the plan for today.”

Our four heads shift toward Jackie. “Well... the usual.”

“The usual?” Johnny speaks up. His voice is always high-pitched, and he contorts his face every time he speaks, like he’s worried that he’s going to fall out of his seat that very instant. “You mean, like, a couple of gas stations, maybe another diner like this one?”

I know he’s worried most of the time—he’s my brother, a couple years younger than me. He joined us on the road a few weeks ago. He told me he had been in Austin for three years. I guess he failed, just like I did. It’ll be his twenty-first in a few weeks. We’ll finally sit down at a bar and sip beers together.

Jackie’s voice breaks through my thoughts.

“False, Johnny Boy! We’re not going to be doing what we’ve been doing every single day for the past two weeks! Today, we won’t be doing ‘the usual’! We’re going to rob Fort Knox!” He spreads his hands, as if he’s revealed some great trick.

We laugh, half out of respect. Jackie’s a sarcastic motherfucker, but we know he’s always in control.



The sun’s been baking our van for about an hour when we find the perfect target—a rusty Exxon-Mobil in God-Knows-

Where, Kansas. We’ve got two cars. Jackie’s “vintage” Porsche, Sally, has sticky black paint slowly peeling off the edges of her windows. The van, which Jackie has yet to name, is a cream-colored seventies-era Winnebago with no heat and a half-working A/C.

We do all our jobs in Sally. Sally’s the getaway vehicle, Jackie says. Always gotta have a getaway vehicle.

Alfie, Johnny and I take Sally and pull up to the full-service station, and there’s nobody there. That’s good. Usually we deal with the attendant first, but it’s Johnny’s first day, so the fewer people the better. He’s already pretty nervous.

Johnny’s hands are faintly trembling as we throw on our blue cotton masks and walk at a steady pace towards the door. His arms look stiff, barely swinging through his stride.

“Steady, Johnny,” I say. “This is the easiest first job anyone’s ever done. You gotta keep steady.” He doesn’t even look back at me.

The store clerk’s got that clichéd half-surprised, half-horrified look on her face when we walk in.

She speaks in a tiny voice. “Can I... um, can I help you guys?”

Under his mask, Johnny’s face is twisting up again. I can see it in his eyes. He slowly raises his Glock. Always gotta have a loaded gun, Jackie says. We don’t make mistakes.

“Get your arms in the air.” Johnny’s voice has turned into a sort of feral growl.

She stands there, frozen in her diminutive frame.

“You heard me.”

She unlocks, and her jaw hangs as she begins to move her hands over her head.

Johnny steps, almost rushes to the counter. He thrusts his free index finger out, motioning towards the register. This is not my Johnny.

“Johnny?” I say. Alfie’s already backing towards the door. There’s no way he’s going to talk Johnny out of this one.

Her voice is a faint whimper now.

“But you said...”

“Johnny.” My voice is harder, then soft again. The clerk’s eyes are wide, and she’s looking toward me. He doesn’t turn.

“Look, I’m sorry,” I say, “If you’d just empty the register...” I keep my face calm.

“Easy, Johnny. Just step away.” He emits a low grunt. “Come on now.” My brother gives me silence. “Please?” I say. Jackie should be here.

She glances into his burning eyes, and he holds the Glock firm. He tilts his head toward the register. I’m a spectator now. She begins to lower her arms.

Then quickly, she seems to jump for some object under the counter. Stationary, Johnny pulls the trigger once. A drawn-out second passes. I see Alfie’s gray combat boots kick up stray gravel on the asphalt outside.

He pumps the trigger again. Jackie will probably tell me I should’ve left too. And again. His face goes cold, and he gets three bullets into her rigid body before she hits the floor. Then he’s silent.

“Oh fuck,” I say. I squint at the scene outside. The endless fields are quiet. Alfie’s already taken shelter in Sally, and he’s yelling and flailing his arms at me.

I grab onto Johnny and drag

him out the door, and towards the van. From high up above, the sun scorches the clear sky. Johnny begins to speak, but his voice breaks into noise.

“I—” he says. Then a half-sob, like it’s being held back.

“Shh,” I say. I’m cradling him in my arms.

◇

“Well, what a grand fucking success.”

Jackie’s sitting across from me in the Winnebago. Behind him, the setting sun drapes the open wheat fields in a soft golden yellow. We’ve been driving for six hours straight. *We gotta get as far away from here as possible*, Jackie had said. Once they find the bullet casings, we’re all fucked.

“What’d you think was going to happen? We didn’t give the kid enough time,” Jackson shouts from the wheel. He’s following Alfie and Sally, straight ahead.

“Nah, couldn’t have been that,” Jackie says. “Kid’s not right in the head.”

Johnny’s sitting in the back, staring straight ahead, motionless. He can hear us. I stare over at him, trying to communicate with my eyes. Jackson says something, and Jackie chuckles, but their voices slip away.

I’m really sorry, man. I shouldn’t have told them you were ready. I imagine that we’re back home, lying on our parallel wooden beds, talking about our dreams again.

He stares straight ahead, and says nothing. And we drive on.

◇

Jackie checks us all into a motel later that night. We’re in New Mexico now, we can stop for the night, he says, as he checks in under one of his aliases. Today he’s Jonathon Fisk, a wealthy thirty-something real estate magnate.

All of us—except for Johnny—are sitting in Alfie’s room. It’s got a couch, and it’s the most spacious. Johnny’s probably in the room Jackie

booked us. I don’t know.

“What are we gonna do now?” Alfie spurts out, in the middle of pacing through the room. “We’re just gonna keep doing these small-time jobs until what? Till we actually screw up?”

“Hold up, hold up,” Jackson says. He’s lying on one of the beds. “We agreed to do this because it was better than whatever else we had to do in this world.”

“Yeah, but were you in there? Kid went fucking insane! You think I signed up to murder girls? Who the fuck told him he could even take out his gun?”

“Ok, ok.” Jackie rises from his armchair, commanding. “I do agree.” He stops, waiting for everything to settle. “What happened today was pretty fucked up. And it got me thinking too. I don’t really want to run this kind of low-level shit anymore either. There’s too much risk, and no reward. So we’ve got two options. We could either give it all up, and go back to our old lives.”

“Ha,” Jackson says.

“Or we could pull off one last job.” He takes a dramatic pause.

“What are we talking here?” Alfie says.

“Bank robbery. Phoenix. We could take away enough to buy our own places in Mexico or something like that. And I think we’re good enough to do it.”

“Huh.”

Silence hangs over the room for what seems like a lifetime. The sound of a car stereo slowly filters into the room. One by one, we face Jackie and begin to nod in vague agreement.

“Alright,” I say. Jackson gets up.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m in,” he says, and the room seems to come alive.

We turn on the TV and watch for a little—*Goodfellas* is on.

At about midnight I head back to the room. Johnny’s sitting on one of the beds, illuminated by the warm glow of a single light. He’s got his head in his hands, and he looks up when I enter.

NEXT

**more
BROTHERS
by ALEX
MA ('11)**

"You alright?" I say.

"Yeah." His voice registers high, and he sounds like Johnny again. "Look, I'm really sorry about earlier. I don't know what in the world happened. I just lost control. I'll leave tomorrow, right now if you want. This isn't for me."

"No, no, it's alright. You should stay," I say, throwing myself over the covers of the bed next to his. "This life, everything I've been doing for the past few years, it's all so ridiculous anyway. All risk, no reward. So we're going to do one last job with Jackie, and then we're all out."

Johnny's eyes light up in the dim room.

"Really? And you'll let me stay for that? I promise, I won't mess anything up this time."

"Yeah, definitely."

◇

Sometime during the night there's a knock on our door, fast and urgent. Johnny gets it—I don't think he slept. He peers through the peephole, and then flings the door open.

It's Jackie. "Guys, we gotta get the fuck outta here. Now."

I'm already out of bed. Jackie at night is never good.

"What happened?"

I say.

"Cops figured some stuff out, I'll explain later. We gotta leave, right now."

Johnny's still grabbing his gun while I'm running out the door. We take the emergency stairwell.

◇

Jackie grabs me and we take Sally while everyone else piles into the Winnebago. We take the lead and drive about an hour towards Texas. Jackie rolls the top down, and the rush of the dark early morning air is unusually comforting.

The sun begins to emerge from the ground ahead of us, and Jackie speaks.

"Wanna know a secret?"

"Sure." I'm staring out at the empty plain that engulfs us.

"Well, if we hear sirens—that is, if the cops get any close to catching us—then the Winnebago's completely fucked."

"What do you mean?"

"The thing tops out at fifty. We could probably get away in Sally—German engineering—but the Winnebago's fucked."

Expecting to feel surprise, I brace myself so I won't say anything stupid. But it never comes. It seems logical. It's a shitty old Winnebago, for Christ's sake. How many times have you ever heard of a Winnebago outrunning the cops?

Curiosity comes in its stead.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"We're going to ditch the Winnebago," he says, in a casually monotonous voice.

"Wait. You want to ditch Johnny and everyone else in there?" I motion back.

"Mhm." He's incredibly calm.

"Remember, I said I wanted to get outta this? Well, that's what I'm doing. You believe that we could actually pull off a bank robbery? You think that the cops are actually coming for us right now?" He begins to fade off. "It's all bullshit, just like everything else..."

"Well, why do it like this?" I say.

"I don't really know." Jackie sounds dim, far away. "Your brother, and everyone else, they need to be scared shitless. They need to think that the police are right on their backs, and that they'll be fucked if they even get a parking ticket ever again." He's got this steely look in his eyes. "Everything we did was so... stupid. Immature," he spits.

"What about you and me?"

"Oh, we're going to Mexico." *Meh-hee-co*, he proclaims again as he slaps me on the back. "You know you guys have been keeping all the money

with me? We'll buy a place, you and I. You've got good sense. We'll start a business or something." His jagged teeth break into a wide smile.

"And you expect me to just pack up and leave?" I say, incredulous. "You want me to ditch Johnny the day after he's murdered a girl? You want me to steal everyone else's money so that I can go to Meh-hee-co with you?"

He starts laughing.

"Where else are you gonna go?"

I see him slowly move his hand to his right hip. I say nothing.

"Come on, Jamesy Boy! Where are you gonna go?" His eyes are wide, and cracks of laughter punctuate his words.

I think for a moment. The sun's halfway up, and bathes us in an orange glow. It's kind of picturesque.

"What about Johnny?" I ask again.

"Fuck Johnny! He wouldn't even be able to steal candy from a toddler!" He laughs again, and it booms off into the distance.

"Jackie, can you please stop the car?" It's the only thing I can say. I can hear the Winnebago sputtering behind us.

"*Jackie, can you please stop the car!* Ha!" he mimics back to me. He's taken his Glock out, and he levels it at me.

"Come on, where are you gonna go?" He pushes his face up next to mine, like I'm supposed to accept his twisted smile. His foot pushes down and we begin to accelerate.

"Jackie."

"Where are you gonna go, James? Where are you gonna go?" It's a whisper now, and I feel the laughter coming from his nostrils.

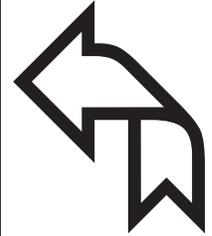
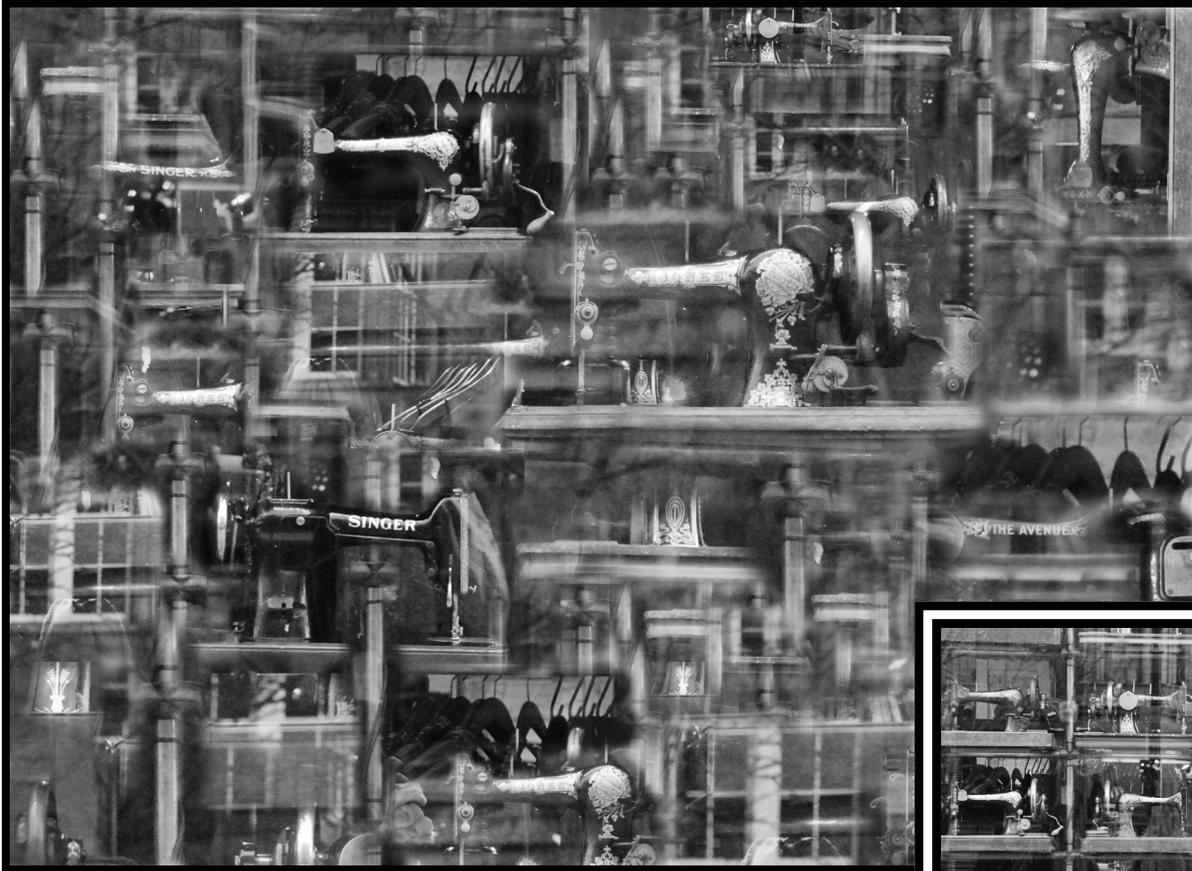
I answer in a matching murmur. He's got the Glock pressed to the side of my head. His left hand is steering, and Sally swerves between lanes.

"Jackie, I'm gonna go home."

His sweaty hands are clasped around the trigger, shaking. He gives me one last manic flash of teeth. He fires. **W**

BEFORE

**more
BROTHERS
by ALEX
MA ('11)**



SCRAMBLING REALITY

original photos + photocollages
by Jazmine Goguen ('11)



UNTITLED

by AMANDA AINETCHI ('11)

I am in one of the most religious places in the world, and I am dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. I did not want to come along on this trip to the Kotel, or the Western Wall, as it is called in English, but I was dragged along by my parents, against my will, from the cerulean hotel pool and the crowded hustling beach to see this.

To my eyes, it isn't much: a large wall, smooth to the touch, made out of white stone the color of dirty coconut meat. A massive contingent of people crowd in front of it, praying, with a large wall dividing the women and men.

My mother hands my sister and I each a piece of paper, and tells us to write our biggest wish.

The square in front of the wall is filled with extremely religious Jewish people, as unlike me and my family as a crow to a mockingbird. It is obvious that we don't fit: my mother,

with her blue angel eyes and short blonde hair, my father, with his skin as dark as wet sand and eyes the color of pitch. Only Maxine and I look like we belong here, and we betray the secret that we don't with our inappropriate attire.

My father disappears in the ocean of black-hatted men on the left side of the divider, and my mother, sister, and I try to push our way into the female's section. An old woman in a black outfit that shows no skin, her eyes lighted by fervor, scares my sister by grabbing her. She wraps a makeshift skirt of pink cotton around my sister's waist over the white pants she is wearing. My mother takes the skirt off of Maxine and tosses it angrily back to the old

woman, who scowls at us, calling my mother a fake Jew, a Catholic imposter. My mother's eyes are alive in a mixture of infuriation and confusion because she speaks no Hebrew, but I understand exactly what the zealous woman said. I spit Hebrew words back at her, mixing "intolerant," "pathetic," and "fanatic" into my speech. The woman's eyes grow colder, and her facial muscles tighten. She does not make a sound as we fight our way through the throng of women, my mother's grateful hands wrapped around my waist, and my hand latched onto my five years old sister's.

When we finally make our way to the building blocks of stone, we place our notes into the wall and say a quick prayer, the words tumbling out of our mouths like hard candies. We back up slowly; never turning our backs to the stones, bumping into women huddled like stray pebbles on a sidewalk and children forced into silence.

When we finally reach the square, my father is waiting for us with a fierce expression, standing alone among the whispering crowd men who surround him, as different as a tropical bird to a pigeon, as different as the enemy they view him as to a stoic Israeli soldier, as different as the color of their skin to his. They are wrong, but would never even stop to hear they have guessed the entirely wrong answer to this question. My parents, standing together, are exotic flowers in jeans in the middle of a sea of wheat and white beards. Different varieties of flowers, but when banded together like a bouquet, the most fragrant. Yet once we leave the stranded square, it is like we were never there. **W**

BEFORE

BROTHERS
by ALEX
MA ('11)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

by JULIET ZOU ('13)

It was a faded pink building, with grimy windows and an uninviting red door. The blinds were always half drawn, with glaring fluorescent lights peeking through. Long strips of paint were peeling off from the door, and the doorknob had long turned rusty.

If anyone cared enough to linger for more than a moment outside the building, they could see bright sheets of construction paper tacked carelessly onto a back wall inside. If anyone was interested enough to stay more than a minute, they could hear the sound of children laughing, talking, and playing, and eventually they might notice the dusty sign that read *Kara's Daycare Center*.

At 7:00 am sharp, Callie marched through the doors of the daycare center, dragging along her four-year-old daughter, Phoebe. Phoebe had refused to get out of bed that morning, and as a result, they had almost been late. Which meant that they had to rush out of the house. Which meant that Callie hadn't been able to make herself some coffee. Which meant that she was in a very sour mood.

"Come on Phoebe," she snapped, "If you don't hurry, I'm gonna be late for work, and I'll

lose my job. Do you want that to happen?"

"But Mommy—" Phoebe pleaded, "Can you stay home today? Just this once? It's my birthday, and I want to spend the day with you."

Callie looked down at her daughter's face, and for a moment, she softened. But then she remembered the landlord yelling her just two days ago, threatening to kick them out if they didn't pay the rent within a week. She needed this job and couldn't risk losing it. Surely making sure that there was a home for the two of them was more important in the long run than spending the day with Phoebe, even if it was her birthday? She felt so conflicted, and in her haste, her confusion turned to harshness.

"No. You know I have to go to work every single day, or else we won't have a place to live. Do you get that, you silly girl?"

Callie looked away. She didn't know whether she was angrier at herself or at Phoebe. Phoebe looked as if she was on the verge of tears, and Callie lost her patience. She half carried, half dragged Phoebe over to the receptionist and walked out of the building. She then sprinted to the nearest subway station and man-

aged to squeeze onto a car just as it was pulling out of the station. She cursed and squeezed and pushed her way through the crowded car.

Four transfers and one-and-a-half hours later, Callie had arrived. Before getting out of the subway station, she stopped at one of the grimy bathrooms and looked at herself in the mirror. Her shirt was wrinkled, her skirt had hiked up, and her hair was a complete mess. She quickly adjusted her clothing and brushed through her hair. Then she dashed out of the station.

Ding-dong.
Ding-dong.

"Why Callie, nice of you to show up," Mrs. Hudson said, glaring at Callie. "We've been waiting for you for ages."

She then launched into a long-winded speech about how Callie should make lunch for the kids, then help Janis set up for her birthday party, droning on about how everything had to be just right and how they needed to make a good impression. Callie nodded demurely.

"Nick and I need to go out for some important business," Mrs. Hudson said. "We'll be back

NEXT

more
**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY**
by JULIET
ZOU ('13)



HIGH DYNAMIC RANGE

photo by Greg Barancik ('11)

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tonight.”

Callie mumbled a hasty apology to Mrs. Hudson and then rushed into the kitchen. As soon as the front door closed, the two kids bounded into the kitchen. James, the boy, was seven years old, and Janis, the girl, was turning five today.

BEFORE

more HAPPY BIRTHDAY by JULIET ZOU ('13)

“Ms. Callie!” Janis yelled gleefully, “Are you gonna help me set up my birthday party? Are you? Are you? I’m so excited!”

“Yes,” Callie replied. “But go help James set the table. We need to have lunch first, and then we’ll prepare for you party, okay?”

Janis ran to the table and eagerly tried to help James with the forks. Really, they were both just making a mess of the utensils, but at least she had them both busy and out of her way. Callie looked wistfully at the Hudsons’ elegant

furniture and elaborate decorations. She sighed. There was no point in lusting after their wealth. It was something that she would never have. Callie hastily took out a box of pasta and some vegetables she found in the refrigerator and concocted a pasta salad-type dish which she hoped was somewhat edible. She handed it to the children, who scarfed down the food.

That afternoon’s preparations went by very slowly. In between hanging up streamers and packing thirty bags of ridiculously fancy party favors, Callie wondered what Phoebe was doing. Because of her job, Callie was spending more of her time with some stranger’s kids than her own daughter. She regretted her harsh words with Phoebe earlier that morning and guiltily vowed to herself that she would spend more time with her daughter. Of course, at the moment that thought passed through her mind, both Janis and James man-

aged to spill their cups of orange juice at the same time, and Callie went to help them clean up. She sighed again.

At that night’s party, Callie was solely responsible for more than thirty kids, all under the age of six. *What kind of parents don’t even spend their child’s birthday with them?* she wondered. Then with a pang of guilt, she realized she was doing the exact same thing. *But I have a reason!* she told herself. *It’s not a good one,* she replied in her head. She was in a bad mood again. She wished that the Hudsons would come home soon so she could get home. It was important that she could get back to the day-care center to pick Phoebe up before it closed at 8:00 pm. If she did not, that would be the third time in two weeks that she would be late in picking up Phoebe. What kind of parent would they think she was? Her mood got even worse.

Callie was relieved when Ja-

nis wanted to see her cake. Maybe this wasn't so bad after all—after Janis and the other kids had had their cake, they could quickly wrap up the party.

She started singing,
“Happy Birthday to you...
Happy Birthday to you...
Happy Birthday, dear
Ph... Janis...”

Callie felt sick. How could she stand here singing Happy Birthday to some other woman's child when she had just left her own daughter at a run-down daycare center on her birthday? Afterwards, while the children were busy stuffing slices of birthday cake into their faces and their friends' faces, Callie looked for Janis so that she could hand her her presents. Surprisingly, Janis was not with the other kids, with whom she had talked so eagerly before, nor with James. After ten minutes, Callie found her sitting all alone in a corner, her head in her arms. Callie was surprised.

“What's wrong, Janis?” she asked.

“Mmmm... No... Nothing...” Janis mumbled.

“Come on, you can tell me.”

“I—I wish—I wish my mommy were here with me. She's almost never at home, and whenever she is, she almost never plays with me, or pays any attention to me. I just wish that this once... this once... she could spend the day with me.”

“I'm sure she'll be home soon, honey.”

“If -- if she doesn't spend any more time with me, I'm -- I'm gonna just run away and ne -- never come back!” Janis screamed somewhat hysterically.

Callie was distracted for the rest of night, even as she was busy comforting Janis. As soon as she was given the word to leave

by the Hudsons—they had come home at 9:00 pm, Callie rushed to grab her handbag and was almost out the door when she remembered that she did not even have a present for Phoebe. She had no cash with her or at home, and the money she earned today would be just enough to cover the month's rent and this week's groceries. Yet how could she return home empty-handed? Phoebe must be expecting something. So, Callie had sneaked back into the kitchen to grab a few leftover slices of cake and put them on a paper plate, grabbing five candles along the way. As an afterthought, she also snatched a small bunch of balloons which had been tied to a nearby chair. This would have to do.

She dashed down the steps of the Hudsons' townhouse and ran to the subway station. Luckily, there was a train available right away. By this time, it was already 10:00 pm, and the train was basically empty except for a man in a green hat and another guy who was looking at her curiously.

Callie slumped into a seat. *Oh my God. I messed up so bad. I hope my baby's okay,* she thought. She put on her sunglasses so as to avoid the stares of the other passengers in the car, and fell asleep. When she woke up, they were almost at her stop. She walked to the daycare center with heavy steps weighed down by dread. What would Phoebe think of her? What would the caretakers think of her? She must have mentioned to them at some point when Phoebe's birthday was.

Callie opened the door of the daycare center and walked inside gingerly. The place was eerily dark. At the end of the first hallway, there was a lighted room, so she walked towards it. Inside, Phoebe was lying on a blue mat on the ground, and two women

were standing in the corner of the room, having a conversation in hushed tones.

“Um,” Callie said uncertainly, her voice cracking. “Uh... I'm here for my daughter.”

The women looked up sharply, and then looked at her disheveled appearance disapprovingly.

“Why did you leave her here?” one of the women asked shrilly. “She's been asking for you for hours, and it's her birthday too. Great example you're setting.”

Callie bit back her tongue and did not reply. Instead, she tenderly picked up her daughter and carried her all the way home. At home, she set down the cake and the balloons on a table and carried Phoebe to her bed. She sat for a while, watching her daughter breathing peacefully in her sleep. She started humming softly. Then she whispered,

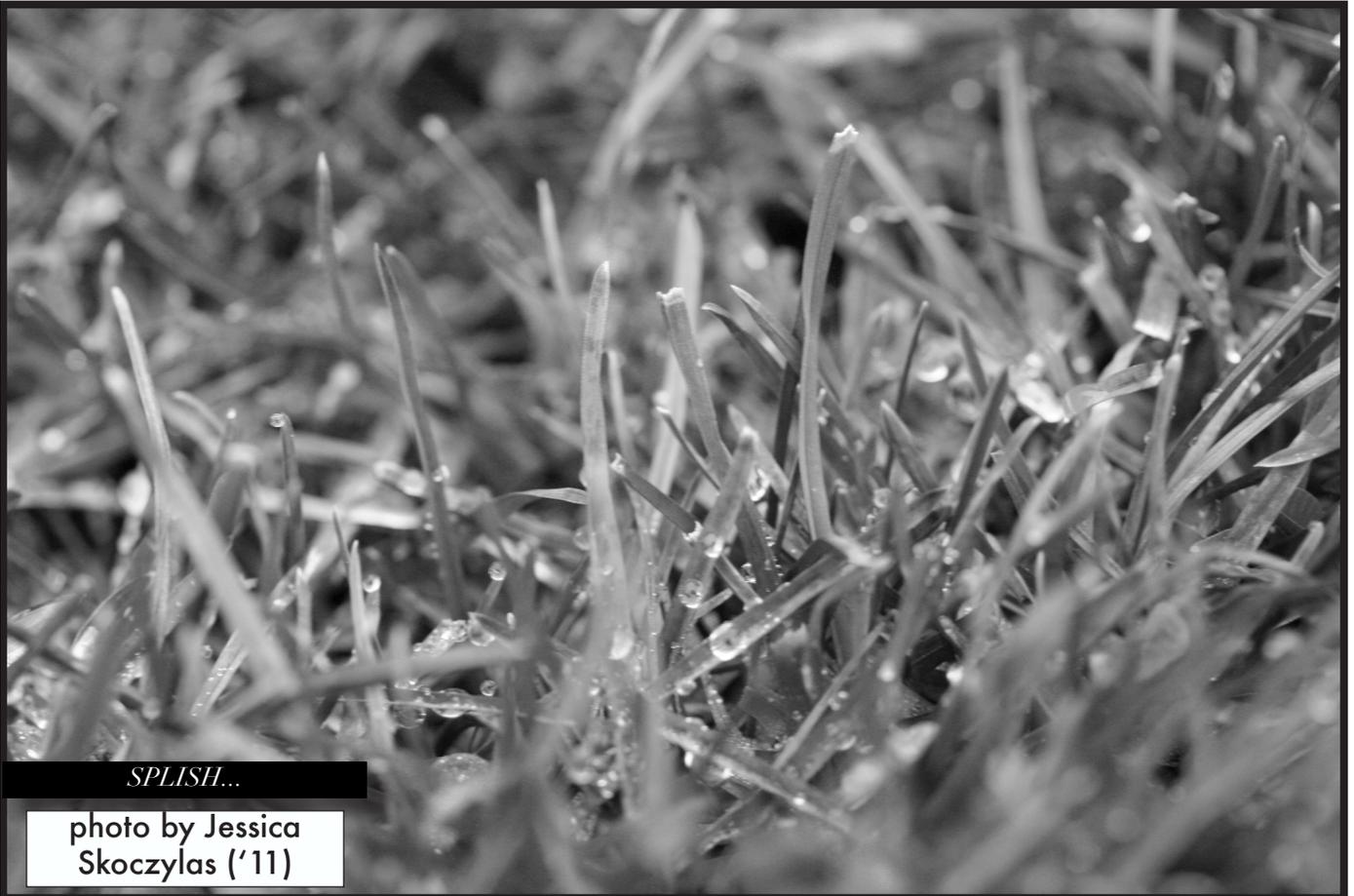
“Happy Birthday to you...
Happy Birthday to you...
Happy Birthday, dear
Phoebe...”

Happy Birth-
day to you...”

Her daughter remained fast asleep, oblivious to her mother's presence. Callie got up and left the room. She got the balloons and cake that she had left on the table and walked outside, wondering what kind of state she had descended to where she actually had to steal birthday presents for her own daughter. In the backyard, she released the bunch of balloons and watched as they drifted out of sight. Then she walked back into the kitchen and smashed the cake into the trash can. They would not be needed anymore. She would do better. W

NEXT

SHORT STORY
by ALICE
TARANTO
(11)



SPLISH...

photo by Jessica
Skoczylas ('11)



...AND SPLASH!

photo by
Jackson Siegal ('14)

SHORT STORY

by ALICE TARANTO ('11)

Smack. Smack. Smack. Brief, sharp wetness hit her back, and the earthy fragrance of moisture lethargically crept to her nostrils. The blades of grass bent under the weight of the raindrops, leaning here and there, creating a little field of dance for her to see. All around, she heard the sound of little mouths smacking their lips together, but it was only the rain against concrete. This small-scale, relaxed-pace tribal drum she heard was just the gutter's ample raindrops meeting the hollow pipe below. On the banked edge of the road, she saw the miniature curbside creek swelling in height and content—leaves, wrappers, paper cups from yesterday's lemonade stand—all was prey to the flow of water. She hunkered down on the curb, feet in the water, her ungraceful galoshes disrupting the warm smell of rain with their unfading, artificial rubber scent. She spied one leaf making its way to port down the newfound river—the leaf was large in proportion to this small body of water and encountered many an obstacle on its way towards that curb-inlaid, ocean-bound giant's mouth. Whirling its way towards her, the leaf trudged around her imposing boots, and she'd later swear to her brother that she had heard the Doppler effect as it zipped past her left foot. She stared at the leaf as it got smaller and smaller down the river. The leaf was becoming so distant and was on the point of disappearance when the giant swallowed it up and that small piece of a tree was lost to the local sewer. *Splash!* A trucker sharply interrupted her sensuous indulgence. Water seeped into her socks and underpants, and she wished to not sit on that cold roadside stoop any longer. **W**

NEXT

ONE STEP
BACK,
TWO STEPS
FORWARD
by MIA
FARINELLI
('14)

ONE STEP BACK, TWO STEPS FORWARD

by MIA FARINELLI ('14)

Harry Winston gracefully took his grey suit jacket off the back of his office chair and took one last look at the computer screen. It would be a ten minute walk back to his studio apartment, where he'd heat up the leftover Chinese food in his fridge and look for something good to watch on TV. Of course, he knew he would end up watching the news for two hours, but he pretended that this wasn't the case.

BEFORE

SHORT STORY
by ALICE
TARANTO
('11)

He casually stepped out of his office and locked the door, watching the lights turn off automatically. He spun around and gave a friendly wave to the lone secretary sitting in a nearby cubicle. Like every other day, she paid no attention.

Harry took several of his famously large steps to the elevator, where he waited, tuning out the overplayed elevator music. He remembered thinking on his first day at the job about how high-end a company must be to have elevator music. Now, he just found it irritating.

He stepped out into the cool evening air of New York City, and his ears opened up to a taxi driver angrily honking at a run-down mini van that refused to move. *Typical evening*, he

thought to himself, as he turned right and made his way down the block. He would have to walk five blocks down, then make a right onto the subway station, where he'd board the familiar E train to Canal Street before walking straight into the entrance of his apartment.

However, on this particular cool evening in New York City, something was out of place in Harry Winston's regular routine. He could hear boys shouting some twenty blocks down, where the buildings started to display wondrous works of graffiti, where dark-skinned kids would loiter and chase each other around and pull out a pack of smokes to split up. Without thinking, Harry avoided the steps down into the underground and quickened his pace towards the voices.

He soon discovered the source—or, rather, the remnants—of the outburst. On the cracked asphalt of a shadowy alley, a frail boy swallowed up by a large trench coat was kneeling, hugging himself and sitting perfectly still. His olive skin, or what showed of it, was disrupted by scratches and bruises.

"Hey, you okay?" Harry asked tentatively. Slowly, the boy lifted his head and looked at him with skeptical eyes. Blood dribbled down the side of his mouth.

Jesus, Harry thought to himself

as he pulled out a tissue and knelt down next to the boy. He was lanky and tall and yet somehow had managed to become very small. Before Harry could wipe the blood away, the boy snatched the tissue and roughly brushed it away.

"What happened to you?" Harry demanded, resting a hand on his own knee. The boy responded with silence. He couldn't have been older than fifteen.

Harry repeated his question louder.

"Nothing," the boy muttered, turning away. He crumpled the bloody tissue in his fist.

Harry sighed, wishing the kid would just cooperate. "That doesn't look like nothing," Harry continued angrily. "Tell me what happened."

"I said, nothing." He stood up, annoyed, and Harry caught a glimpse of the interior of his trench coat. There were pieces of fabric clumsily sewn on. Harry came to the conclusion that they acted as pockets.

"What do you have in that coat?" he asked.

"Nothing!" the boy repeated.

Harry was starting to get angry. He grabbed the boy's wrist. "I asked you, what's in your coat?" he demanded.

"I'm serious! Nothing!" he shouted. It only took a moment of fear in the boy's eyes to make Harry let go.

The boy immediately crossed his arms. “They took everything in there. I don’t have anything.”

“Who took everything?” Harry asked.

“My customers. They got fed up with the prices and just raided me.” The kid furrowed his eyebrows, and a dead silence filled the space between them. Harry realized he wasn’t much taller than the boy, and Harry knew he was a little taller than average.

Harry sighed and quickly ran through some options in his head. He closed his eyes and said, “Listen. You look hungry. You should go home and get something to eat.”

“I can’t go back there. Never.”

The boy’s response was so direct that Harry’s eyes flew open. “And why is that?”

“They took my money too. And my mom won’t let me back in. Says I’m a shithead of a son. Guess they’re right.”

Harry wasn’t quite sure how to respond to that. He rubbed his forehead and considered the options again.

“I’m gonna leave now, ‘kay?” the boy asked, moving quickly. “Thanks for the tissue.”

“Wait.” Harry reached for his wrist again. The boy stopped, wearing a surprised expression on his face. Harry heaved another sigh.

“I have leftover Chinese at my place. Come grab a bite with me. Then we can call your mom and tell her where you went.”

Harry doubted he’d agree, considering how almost every kid knew not to follow a stranger. But he also felt that this kid couldn’t get any more desperate. The boy looked down at the ground blankly and crumpled up the tissue even more. Harry let go of his wrist.

“Fine,” the boy replied. “Lead the way.”



Harry watched on with exhaustion as the boy ravenously ate the pile of lo

mein heaped in front of him. Sometime during the walk back to his studio apartment, Harry had lost his appetite. Maybe it was the feeling of the kid’s eyes boring into the back of his head. He’d requested more than once that they walk side-by-side like civilized people, but the kid had insisted that he follow behind Harry.

He looked over at the wall, where his eyes found the old clock whose colors were like those of a pizza. It was five minutes past eight. Suddenly, he heard a belch, and he turned his attention towards the boy, who was now leaning back in his chair and wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

“What’s your name?” Harry asked the kid.

“Everyone calls me Dodger. Not really sure why, since my name’s Ruben. But whatever,” he replied.

“Well, may I call you Ruben?” Harry proposed.

“Eh, whatever you want. I don’t care.” To be safe, Harry decided he would refer to the boy as Dodger.

‘Dodger’ got up and ruffled his matted black hair, looking around and shoving his hands into his pockets. His trench coat hung from a coat rack next to the door. “Nice place you got,” Dodger noted.

“Oh, um, thanks.” It was the first compliment Harry had received on his apartment since he’d first moved in.

Harry watched Dodger walk around the room, and noticed he walked with a slight limp. His eyes seemed to be bloodshot, and the bags under them hung like purple velvet curtains. His shirt and baggy jeans were loose on his body.

“What did your customers steal from you?” Harry asked, knowing full well what the answer would be.

“Weed, coke, you name it,” Dodger replied with ease. “Got a friend up in Montana who’s growing them. He sells them to me, I sell them to people on the street. It’s how I make a profit.”

“Don’t you go to school?” Harry asked, trying not to sound incredulous.

“Nah. Mom gave up on that a

long time ago,” Dodger replied. “She knows what I do, so she just stopped spending the money. Not like she had it in the first place.” He stared out the window. “Not a bad view. Could be better without the building right there.”

“Yeah, they built it a few years ago, before I moved here.” Harry felt awkward watching Dodger roam around his apartment. He’d never met anyone quite like the boy before.

“I could go for a joint right now,” Dodger mumbled, turning to the wall with the clock. “Where’d you get that? It looks pretty old.”

It took a minute for Harry to realize he was referring to the clock. “Oh, that was just a present from an ex. I like pizza a lot.”

“Obviously.” Dodger plopped himself on the couch in front of the TV. “Was she hot?”

“Uh... sure,” Harry replied. He had never thought of his ex in that way before. “Shouldn’t we call your mom now?”

“Not worth it,” Dodger said. “She disconnected the phone. Says the phone bills are too much money. Besides, she doesn’t care where I am anyway.”

“I’m sure she’s worrying about you right now,” Harry insisted.

“Oh boy,” Dodger started, getting up. “You, sir, live in a bubble.”

“What?”

“You heard me.

You live in a freaking bubble. Never knew

what it was like to fail at school and come home to a drunk mom who couldn’t care less, huh? Never knew what it was like to live in a neighborhood like that?”

Harry didn’t answer. Looking down at his lap, he seriously considered that question. After several seconds, he could not come up with any feeling or memory or emotion that even compared to Dodger’s description.

“Thought so,” Dodger said

NEXT

more **ONE STEP BACK, TWO STEPS FORWARD** by **MIA FARINELLI** ('14)

finally, sitting down at the dinner table again.

“Well, didn’t you ever consider that you could change all that?” Harry asked.

Dodger’s mouth gaped.

“No, seriously. Didn’t you ever think that you could get good grades in school? Go to college? Get a job? Drop the drug business? You know what you’re doing right now isn’t any good for you at all.”

“But it’s how I live,” Dodger answered. “Those things are out of the question. It’s too late now.”

Harry was about to retort that it was never too late, but no sound came out.

Dodger looked at him with his bloodshot eyes. “Unless you’re one of those people who believe that you can always be successful if you try. Well, reality check, there’s something called *failure*.”

Harry blinked. “Are you scared of failure?”

“Hell no,” Dodger replied. “I’ve seen more than my fair share of failure. I don’t need any more of it in my life. That’s why I don’t try.”

“But haven’t you ever thought of what you could do if you tried?” Harry asked. His question was met with silence.

Harry eyed at the empty dish of lo mein, then decided to swipe it up and toss it into the sink. He’d wash it later.

“Why didn’t you call the police on me?” Dodger asked quietly.

Harry’s eyes widened. “Excuse me?”

“I said, why didn’t you call the police on me? It was obvious that I’m a drug dealer. Why didn’t you just send me to juvie?” Out of the corner of his eye, Harry could see Dodger slump in his chair, crossing his arms.

“Because...” Harry began, leaning on the lip of the aluminum

sink.

At that time, calling the police had been an option in his head, but for some reason, it was the last thing he wanted to do. He chose his words carefully.

“Because I didn’t think you needed that,” Harry replied slowly.

Dodger didn’t answer. Harry turned around to face the boy, and noticed there was a long scar going along his collar bone. It reminded him of chapped lips. Deciding to keep quiet about it, he walked over to his briefcase.

He felt Dodger’s jet black eyes stare at him as he opened it and pulled out his wallet. “Do you owe anything to your friend up in Montana?” Harry asked, fingering through the green bills.

“Oh yeah, lots. I can’t even count it anymore,” Dodger replied, sitting up straight again. He rapped the wooden table with his bony knuckles. “Something like five hundred bucks.”

Harry closed his eyes and breathed in deeply through his nose. He was saving up for a round on the house for his friend’s birthday. Slowly, he pulled out the dollar bills and briskly walked over to Dodger, offering them to him.

Dodger looked up at him like he was crazy. And maybe he was. “You’re jerking with me, aren’t you?” he asked doubtfully. He stood up.

“No, I am not jerking with you,” Harry echoed, placing the money in Dodger’s hands. “I have faith that you’ll pay this guy back and get back on the road.”

“Why the hell would you trust a messed up kid like me?” Dodger demanded.

“Because you’re not messed up,” Harry simply replied. “Come on, it’s late. You should get home.”

It felt like an eternity, having to face Dodger’s stare like that. Harry was determined to defy, though, and he held his confident stare.

Finally, Dodger crumpled up the cash in his fist and slipped past

Harry. He briskly walked over to the coat rack and tore his trench coat off.

“Do you need an escort?” Harry asked. “It’s not exactly safe out there.”

“It’s never exactly safe anywhere,” Dodger argued, slipping both arms into his coat. It enveloped his skinny body again. “Don’t worry about me; I know my way around.” They both glanced at the pizza clock, and Dodger reached for the doorknob.

“I can give you money for a taxi,” Harry insisted.

“No way,” Dodger said. “You’ve given me enough.” He twisted the door knob and the door gave way to a dimly lit hallway. “Thanks for the food,” he muttered before stepping out.

“Wait.” Harry was about to reach for his wrist again, but this time Dodger stopped. Harry ran his hand through his graying hair. “Pay that kid back, okay? And don’t get yourself into any more fights.”

Dodger sighed and rolled his eyes, but Harry could sense a faint smile on his lips.

“Yessir,” he replied sarcastically. Harry smiled back.

“Goodnight, Ruben.”

“Goodnight...”

“Harry,” Harry filled in. “Harry Winston.”

“Well, um, goodnight Harry. It was nice meeting you.” Dodger gave Harry one last blank stare, then closed the door behind him.

Harry stood there in silence, the dead air buzzing in his ears. He felt a draft run through the studio apartment. He knew he had to clean the dishes. He knew he had to do some laundry. He knew he had to make a phone call.

He placed his hand gingerly on the door, where Dodger had once stood. Something felt missing from Harry. Something had been taken away.

He quietly wished Dodger good luck, then turned around and started to get ready for bed. **W**

BEFORE

more **ONE STEP BACK, TWO STEPS FORWARD** by **MIA FARINELLI ('14)**

THE CARNIVAL

by MELANIE TOTENBERG ('14)

When I was younger I adored carnivals. They were an opportunity for me to escape the dull drabness of my everyday life—to suspend belief and envision unexplored possibilities. The twinkling lights, the bright swirls of colors, and the roaring laughter were all so exciting. My nine-year-old self saw carnivals as pure magic. Of all of the rides, my favorite was the Ferris wheel, with its colorful chairs where I could sit there for hours, just watching, waiting, and dreaming. Those were my three favorite things to do. I loved to observe the throngs of people below and to see the blinking lights, the brilliantly colored booths, and the rolling hills in the distance. I felt so far away from it all, yet so near. *W*



FLYING OVER
SANTA CRUZ

photo by Megan Lu ('11)

NEXT

ERNEST
AND I
by MOLLY
LEVINE ('14)

ERNEST AND I

by MOLLY LEVINE ('14)

While I was trying to find the way, I kept thinking to myself, *The orange trees are looking a little down.* After living on the hill for ten years, the one thing I'd always taken pride in were my orange trees. No matter what was happening in life, my trees were always in tip-top shape.

In the first couple of years Ernest and I lived here, that's all

BEFORE

THE CARNIVAL
by MELANIE TOTENBERG ('14)

I did. He worked in the city, and I tended to the trees, because that's all I ever did. I never understood why he wanted to move to the country if he was in the city so much, but he'd wanted to since

he was little, so I did too, because I loved him.

When Ernest died years later, I considered moving back to the city. After all, we were the only ones left on the hill. Everyone else had left because of family or jobs or the fact that the hill itself was just too quiet.

Ernest had never wanted a family; his father had been abusive and his mother had died when he

was young. He had no brothers or sisters. I wanted six kids, but I hadn't wanted to upset him by asking for them. I didn't want him to be mad at me, so I just pushed it aside.

Ernest had never liked to make plans with our friends. He just liked to come home everyday, sit in his rocker on the porch, and stare into the distance. When I would call him in for dinner, he would tell me to leave it on the table—he would heat it up later. I spent most nights alone at the table, hearing my fork and knife clatter against the ceramic plate, while I heard his rocker go back and forth on the rickety wooden porch.

Before we moved to the hill, Ernest and I always used to go out with the couples we were friends with. When we went dancing, he had spun me until I thought I was going to be sick. All of my friends used to be so jealous that I had a husband like him, and I'd felt so lucky. All of that had changed one night.

Today, as I looked at the orange trees while finding the route on the map, I thought, *What would Ernest say if he saw these right now?* Ernest had always loved the way the trees looked, all bright and happy. I'm allergic to oranges, but I made him fresh orange juice every day, just so I could see him happy for

a few seconds. I didn't want to upset him after what had happened—I felt bad. I just wanted him to say more than two words to me again. I wanted him to say, *I love you*, or even, *Thank you*.

Ernest never knew any of this bothered me, of course. He really was a sweet man. He just had some problems letting go of that night. When he died, I knew it was for the best. He hadn't really been living since that night. It was as if he were a dead body, going through the motions of life.

I looked up from the trees and said, "Ernest, I'm leaving the trees, and the hill, and the porch, and the silent dinners, and your rocker, and all of our memories from this terrible place, because I want to remember us before that night. I want to remember how we used to spin until we fell, and laughed until we cried. I love you, Ernest, but I can't pretend any longer."

And I know, somewhere, Ernest heard me and finally smiled. And I know he watched over me the entire seventeen-hour drive back home to the city. It was his way of saying *I love you* and *Thank you*, all at the same time. And even though he wasn't physically with me, that was the best memory I have ever had of Ernest and me. **W**

HAVING THE GUTS

by ANONYMOUS

*No, I'm not going
to ask you,* he said.

*It's not
fair,* he said.

*Everyone just
lies anyway,* he said.

The truth is

Yes, I'd still
love you
if you were fat.

I think you look
handsome
on your
bad hair days.

Sometimes, I giggle
at your embarrassing
outfit choices

I still like to kiss you
with your
morning breath

Every so often
I think you look
bad
in pictures.
But I always love
the way you look.

The truth is

I would have told you
that I daydream
once in a while
of a time when you'll have
a beer gut
for me to cuddle with
after we've put
the kids to sleep.

But when I asked you,
out of silliness
on my eighteenth birthday,
*What if I
were old
and wrinkly?*

You didn't answer.

NEXT

ON A
MORNING
FROM A
BOGART
MOVIE
by REBECCA
MATTESON
('12)



LIGHT PLAY

photos by Frances
Ikwuazom ('11)



ON A MORNING FROM A BOGART MOVIE

by REBECCA MATTESON ('12)

Actually, I can't really imagine Bogart coming anywhere near this crummy place. A train station is a dreadful place to wait. The only thing you can ever really do there is eat or read, since everyone thinks that anyone who wants to have an intelligent conversation is an ax-murderer. At least in this particular train station, someone seems to have realized how terrible the wait is and put up a whole load of restaurants. There are Greek, Italian, Japanese, and Chinese places. The amazing thing is that they all seemed to have at least a few people on staff who had been to the countries their eatery represented. It's kind of stupid, but I sometimes think you really have to know a place to get the food right. Even if that isn't true, you can normally have an interesting conversation with folks who travel. Restaurant employees are so desperate for a conversation, you'd think they hadn't seen a breathing person in years. Of course, there's a burger joint too, but at least they aren't pretending to be much else. The eating is pretty good, and hanging out in that crummy station wouldn't be half so bad if I was hungry.

My companion is a very worn and dog-eared anthology of Isaac Asimov stories which I am skimming over for the umpteenth time. I know every story in that entire book, but I am still enjoying myself significantly more than the other people waiting. The thing that always disturbs me is that sometimes you find people who do nothing but wait while waiting for trains. They stare forward at the place where their train is going to be until it shows up. You kind of have to wonder what their problem

is. Waiting is really horrible. At least, just waiting is. If you have a good book, or some food, or if maybe you're lucky enough to actually meet someone or to be with someone that doesn't make you feel awkward, it can be okay. But sitting there, thinking about what you're waiting for can be really depressing. I don't know why they even make these stupid train stations, because they're the most awful place to wait for anything.

I'm not waiting for a train but for my friend. I know she was heading out of town, but I forgot where. She told me something like five times, but I retain information with the prowess of a slotted spoon. If I didn't send her letters while she was away, she'd probably throttle me. I really don't see what's so great about some crummy post card. Girls are weird like that sometimes.

I used to spend time with her like nobody's business. Friday was movie night. She'd come to my house with me after we hit this little café—I can't recall the name. It was pretty decent, but the tables were a little small. Once we got to my house, we'd pick out a movie, strictly black and white and mostly Bogart. We watched *Casablanca* more than anything else, probably; it was a favorite. We'd mute it and fill in for the actors whenever Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman had a scene alone together. God, was I a lousy actor! Valerie was brilliant by comparison. Then again, she was brilliant anyway. She'd start crying just when Bergman did. Friday was movie night; the other days were the echoes of movie night. I must have said "Here's looking at you, kid," every time we said goodbye.

I see Valerie approaching from a ways off, so I get off my tiptoes. I have pret-

ty lousy ankles, but I play soccer, so I have to stand like that in lines and on platforms so they'll get stronger. I get a few stares.

"Hey!" I yelp.

She comes over, her dark brown hair cropped to mid-neck, motionless. She pulls a burgundy roller suitcase with her gloved hand. Her beige, double-breasted jacket is looser than I remembered. She's paler than when I saw her last, but I don't mention it. I think she probably knows. We talk for a while, which is okay. It might be pleasant, if she wasn't looking down the tunnel every five seconds. There is a thunderous sound coming from the tunnel. Valerie steps to the edge of the platform.

"Wait," I say, more desperately than I'd like to admit. "How 'bout you stay a little longer. There's a good Chinese place. Are you hungry?" I grab at her hand.

She jerks it away. "Jackson, my train is leaving now. You're such a kid sometimes." She steps briskly onto the train as though she thinks I might follow and not look back. I hate to say it, but it makes me think of old movies. Don't get me wrong. Everything is just that much classier in black and white, but I shouldn't think of it that way. Stuff like that's too sad to be classy.

The train speeds off into the dark passage. I don't know where she went, and I never find out. Valerie told me I was a kid, and that's all I can remember her saying. I'm not at all like a kid, but I sure wish I were. **W**

NEXT

**DREAM-
BOOK
by SINAI
CRUZ ('14)**

DREAMBOOK

by SINAI CRUZ ('14)

It was a cold shower of whiteness and emptiness. Everywhere she looked, she saw the snow accumulating. It seeped through her canvas sneakers and into her thick white ankle socks. The winter dust blew suddenly into her pale face, turning her exposed forehead and round cheeks numb and pink.

Her lips cracked, and blood flowed through the lines on her plump mouth. She bit her lips, tasting the sweet blood on her tongue and letting the coldness from the outside leak into her warm mouth. Her bottom lip burned as she bit it, licking it often with her now-dry tongue.

Her feet slapped softly at the concrete. She almost slipped on a sheet of ice as she ran the few blocks to her house. Then she collided with her apartment door as someone was coming through it from the opposite direction. The person's face was hidden underneath a thick brown scarf,

and his or her body was covered by a gender-concealing coat.

The teenage girl mumbled a *thank you* as best she could through those lips, then slipped gratefully underneath the person's arm holding the door open. Her dark brown hair had turned almost completely white.

She ran up two flights of stairs, reached her apartment and fumbled with the keys in her pink, shaking hands. Unlocking the door, she stumbled through into the empty hallway. She groped her way to her room and collapsed on her unmade bed. She kicked off her shoes and peeled the socks off her damp feet, noting how her toes were completely pink and stiff. She buried her head under the bright purple quilt she decorated her bed with, shaking violently.

After a few minutes of warming up, once she felt that she could flex her toes, she slipped from the bed and buried her feet in the warm lavender floor rug.

She looked around her quiet room. Her parents wouldn't be home for a few hours, and her little brother must have been out somewhere with his friends. She

was bored. It was Friday; there would be no one online. She slid her phone open to text her boyfriend. Pressing send, she switched the phone to vibrate mode before throwing it on the bed.

She changed from her soggy jeans and iced jacket into a dry sweater and baggy gray sweatpants. On her messy bed, her phone still laid motionless. He hadn't responded yet.

Her eyes looked around the room and rested on her small book case. It contained more than just the fairytale-free textbooks and deeper fantasy novels which had replaced her old childhood books. She knelt down and grabbed a thin book from the top shelf. It had been one of her favorites—*Beauty and the Beast*.

She opened it in her lap and leafed through the simple sentences and detailed illustrations portraying a beautiful blonde-haired girl with bright eyes. A dark monster towered over her, draped in expensive velvet capes and wearing bright ruby rings on his thick, clawed fingers.

She smiled as she traced the beautiful figures and the brightly

BEFORE
ON A MORNING FROM A BOGART MOVIE by REBECCA MATTESON

colored backgrounds, reading all the way through to the last picture, where the Beauty was dressed in a princess wedding gown and her raven-haired prince held her to him with a smile.

She crawled to the bed and checked her phone again, sliding it open to see whether her own prince had managed to send her a text. Her phone lit up to show only her home screen, a picture of her and her friends. She sighed in frustration and brought the phone back with her to the book case, then set it down on the floor next to her.

She flipped through her other books and sighed at all the beautiful princesses, each surrounded by her family and friends and lover, who looked at her as if she was the best jewel in the world. She ignored her growling stomach and looked at the pile of books around her, all opened to lavish pictures.

Pressed in the far corner of the bookcase was one last book, which she pulled out. It was covered in dust. Its faux snakeskin cover was purple and very smooth. She opened to the front cover. The “DreamBook” was inscribed to a recipient: *ME*, scrawled in six-year-old writing.

She didn’t recall ever owning this book. She flipped through it. Everything was blank, the pages creamy and smooth, perfect for black ink pens. She went back to the second page. The words *Make a Wish* were drawn in beautiful golden letters in the center of the page.

She ruffled through her drawers and pulled out a blue pen, which she held steadily underneath the large letters. She looked back at her books and started to copy out the ballgowns Sleeping Beauty

had worn as she danced with her handsome prince. The prince now looked mysteriously like her boyfriend, and the princess’s straight hair had turned into shaded curls.

She drew faster, smiling even wider as the blue flounces seemed to bounce up and down and her prince seemed to smile dashingly. She finished her doodle and held it up to the light from her window.

It was beautiful.

She turned to the next page to draw another scene. This time she and her prince, seated in grand chairs, were laughing. Drawing consumed the rest of her day and most of her night. The scenes in her fairy tale books were captivating.

She progress through pictures of happy families eating dinner, friends clutching each other as they cried, and little sisters sharing coats and scarves. Every time she turned a page, there was another blank one to draw on. She drew even when the light to see by had vanished. The lines took over; even though everything was dark, she knew the pictures were there, in strong blue ink: beautiful, dancing, shining. She didn’t hear her parents returning home or feel the vibrating phone beside her. She had eyes and ears for only the book.

Abruptly, she felt a sharp prick on her finger. The paper cut was spewing blood from her thumb, and with horror she saw that it was blue. Through her tears, she watched her images. They were fading and turning into demons; the book itself stained her hands. She started screaming.

Her whole arms were turning smooth purple. She tore open her sweater and saw the purple creeping up her veins in

her underarms. She felt it in her mouth, in her mind, on her tongue. She screamed even louder when all she could see was a mixture of purple and blue lines.

◇

“She’s coming out of it! She’s going to be okay!” Around her, everyone was yelling. Her mother, in her dull coat, was at the foot of the bed. Her father hovered over her mother, and her little brother knelt in the doorway. Even her boyfriend, who’d heard of her illness from her parents, had rushed over to stay at her side.

She stumbled out of the bed, gasping for air, and tumbled past him. She crawled to the bookcase and ripped every book from the shelves. She tore the pictures with her nails and threw the books all over the room.

Her parents stood, too stunned to try to stop her. She pounced at last on the book in the corner of the shelf. It was a fuzzy purple journal she’d gotten when she was six or seven. She threw its cover open to reveal scrawls and meaningless doodles from her childhood. She sighed in relief.

Turning page after page quickly, she felt another prick in her finger and saw the crisp red blood bead on her shaking hand. She looked at it in relief.

She put the fuzzy journal back into her bookcase, propping it up against the corner.

As she adjusted the book, the blood from her paper cut smeared against the fuzzy cover. It left a blue stain. **W**

NEXT

**A PAIR OF
POEMS by
MIRANDA
JACOBY**

SEASON'S BATTLE

by MIRANDA JACOBY ('13)

Bathed in the light of the setting sun
I knew that my season was almost done
My sword was poised to strike at my foe
But of my weakness, she did know.

I am Summer of the burning plain,
Sunlight and sand are of my domain.
I face Autumn, known as Fall
The grace of her season I shall try to forestall.

I slash at her laurels of auburn leaves,
She stabs at my shining, gold-plated greaves.
I know she will win; it's her season's right,
But I am proud, and so I will fight.

BEFORE

**DREAM-
BOOK by
SINAI CRUZ
('14)**

Through my chest, she drives the
fatal blow,
And I know that at last, it is my time
to go.
I cede the season's throne to Autumn,
she takes the place she sought,
But in three months time, with Winter,
this battle will once again be fought.

PEBBLE PAINTER

Painted piles of precariously-placed pebbles
Line the lavish lavender lane
I've spent so many sweltering summers stacking
these showy stones.
Children clamor to clutch my colorful creations
In their hairless, happy hands.

The sea sometimes surges
And washes away with the waves
The radiant rocks I rigorously made.

On the shady shore by the seaside street I sit,
Brushing my beauties with brilliant blazes
Of amber, aqua, amethyst, apricot
Cobalt, cinnabar, carrot, and coral.

But I must leave this lovely land of luster
For the urban, urbane university
To studiously study my selected subject,
I'll attempt the arduous task of becoming an
astrophysicist.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

by MATTHEW FONDACARO ('12)

My adventure began at the base of the Carfax Tower. I stood there with my feet planted on the concrete sidewalk of Queen Street. My mind was drifting with the leaves, dragged about by the wind like a restless flag and yet still aware of the vociferous traffic behind me. I glanced at a small sign on the wall alongside the staircase that read *99 Steps* and imagined the winding passage upward, where I would step in the footfalls of bell ringers from many years ago who had slowly made their way up the tower.

The low archway swallowed me whole as I entered the body of the path; large pebbles settled on the lining of my stomach. The light was gradually sucked in by the shadows stretching themselves along the masonry of the walls. Then I entered the poorly lit spiral staircase. Ascending, I clutched the central pole supporting the stairs as the tower began to rotate like a corkscrew uncorking a 1986 Pinot Grigio. My body grazed against the rugged brick wall while I desperately counted the steps.

Dust shook off the cold surface of the brick as I stormed

up the rotating structure. Years of history thundered about me, and I thought briefly of the monks who had climbed to the top to ring the morning bell. As I stepped higher, the walls of the passageway seemed to be trying to lock arms in prayer, their fingertips nearly touching. When I finally reached the platform at the top, the heavy pebbles lifted from my stomach, and the boiling dizziness dissolved.

When I escaped at last from the horrifying journey upward, I nearly tripped on the over-sized threshold as I took in the sight in front of me. My attention was already consumed by the amazing view coupled with my own shocking elevation.

From the tall tower, I could see a panoramic 360-degree view of Oxford. I spun in a tight circle, admiring the magnificent steeples. After looking down toward the roadways that converged at the base of the tower, I closed my eyes, and it sounded as if the cars were driving toward me and vanishing. I registered the roaring engines of anxious drivers, the tranquility of the sidewalks below, and the serenity of the gentle breeze as it stroked my skin. Soon, all I could hear was the sound of a peaceful sleep. **W**

NEXT

**BOOK
CLUB by
REBECCA
MATTESON
('12)**

BOOK CLUB

by REBECCA MATTESON ('12)

Every weekday at seven o'clock, a sweet-looking girl wearing an indigo beret rides the cross-town bus through Central Park. Most days she has a book with her. Some Austen or Shelley. I know this because I've watched her ascend the bus steps, sit down, then sink into her literary meditations until the bus winds its way out of the trees and she gets off.

I should probably explain myself.

I don't really need to take that bus.

Not to get anywhere, anyway. I'm sort of a writer so most days I don't have much reason to go out. But every so often, I climb out of my below-street level apartment, ride across Central Park, and get myself an honest-to-gosh

breakfast before zipping back to my burrow of disheveled papers and instant ramen. On the way there and back, I take the time to write. The people who ride the buses are actually a sort of inspiration for me. You can pick a face out of the crowd, give it a personality and start writing. This little trick has kept me from actually walking through Central Park for almost two years. This, of course, is how I first saw the girl. I guess what made her stand out was how I wasn't satisfied with making up her life. I wanted to know.

Not that I haven't made a lot of things up. It's hard *not* to try seeing past her face and carving out an image of her psyche. I imagine she reads the books with a great deal of understanding and cries bitterly when she gets to the sad parts. Maybe she even cries where most people wouldn't find a reason. People probably don't understand her very well because of this sensitivity; maybe she has a brother who calls her a 'wuss' and never lets her know how much he really cares.

Of course, by thinking this, I realize I'm taking some leaps. But that doesn't matter much.

I get off a few stops after her and sit whatever place nearby. And while I examine the menu, I tried to imagine what the girl would like. I supposed she looks like a vegetarian.

I am what you—if you're anything like my editor—would call completely pathetic. I have sat across from this girl for several months now, struggling to say *hello*. My eyes have traced the arching path of her hand as it turns the pages, but she has never so much as looked up at me. The fare for all the extra bus trips is collectively more than I've ever spent on any one girl. Forget the breakfasts I have to buy myself afterwards in order to not feel ridiculous. This, I think, is what my editor would call *Author Logic*.

You must think I'm being very silly.

I don't really know what it is. It might be the reading choices. The apparent lack of make-up. Or maybe her almost

preternatural resemblance to the sister whom I haven't been able to so much as write about since she was killed. Hit by a bus, oddly enough. But whatever it is, I'm sitting across from this total stranger three or four times a week, kicking myself.

Then, one crowded day, that changes. I usually sit directly across from her or at a slight angle. That morning, the only empty seat is the one directly to her left. I didn't sleep well the previous night, so I'm sure not going to stand. My family has weak knees, too. I've never shown any signs of it, but I decide you really shouldn't test that kind of thing. So what can I do? I have to sit next to her. Amazingly, she still doesn't see me. I twiddle my thumbs and read over her shoulder. I take a deep breath.

My editor has a way of telling people that when you need to figure something out, the Universe will scream it louder and louder until you wake up. I don't normally go for those sorts of ideas; I don't think the Universe has any particular interest in me. But I'm tired, and when I'm tired, I get impressionable. *What the hell*, I think. I clear my throat.

She turns a page. "Um," I manage, "hello?"

She looks at me hard. Her eyes are dark blue; I didn't notice that before.

"Hello," I start again. "I couldn't help noticing you've got *Great Expectations*. It's a favorite of mine."

"Oh," she replies unsmilingly. She looks about to go back to her book.

"I was just wondering," I say

BEFORE

VIEW FROM
THE TOP by
MATTHEW
FONDACARO ('12)

quickly, not wanting to lose her again, “what your thoughts were on it.”

She looks at me again. It is that distinctly un-timid New York look that asks if there’s any reason why you can’t mind your business. I am terrified that I might have scared her. She shifts casually, turning her head away before removing her eyes. She shrugs. “It’s a book,” she says, looking back at it.

It’s at this point that I would normally fold, but I get the impression that the Universe would be in a pretty foul mood over the whole thing. People who don’t like Dickens are pretty common; she seems to me really more of a Hemingway sort anyway.

“If you don’t like it, why are you reading it?” I ask. I never pictured her as the sort to finish a book just for the principle of the thing, but it wouldn’t disappoint me. She is looking at me again, deciding whether to answer. She sighs and folds a corner all the way down before snapping the volume shut. I try not to wince, because I think maybe she doesn’t know that she was hurting the book.

“I have to read it for a survey course on the ‘great masters.’ Shelley, Austen, Dickens, some Russian guy...”

“Ambitious.”

“Yeah,” she says. “There’s so much reading. It’s the only English course that doesn’t have a final.”

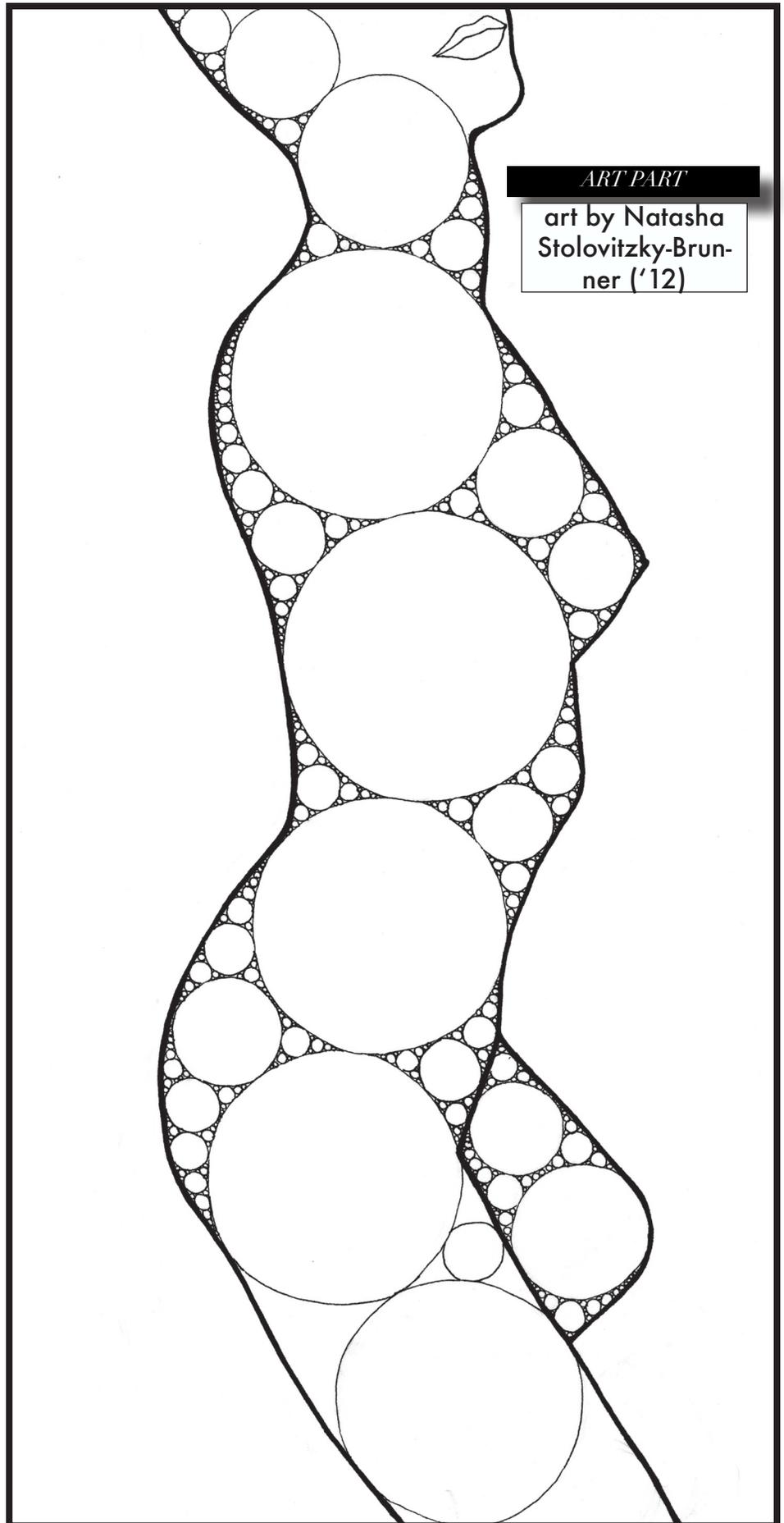
“Nice,” I say. I never really liked tests myself.

“It’s such a pain; I could have written something better than this!”

I nod slowly. I notice that her eyelashes had a sharp curl to them that can’t be achieved without determined doctoring.

“But at least after this I don’t have to read another book for the rest of college.” The bus lurched to a stop. She gets up and is out of the bus before I realize what has just happened. I don’t even bother to get myself breakfast.

I don’t take that bus for a long time. For a while I think walking through might be even better for my writing, but I scrap it after it occurs to me how still the park will be early in the morning. I find myself wanting to go sometimes, but I get over it pretty quickly. “Forget that dumb French hat; forget that stupid writing exercise. Forget that a bus can’t hit you so long as you’re inside it. There’s plenty of good breakfast on my side of the city.” **W**



ART PART

art by Natasha
Stolovitzky-Brun-
ner ('12)

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